



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***REFRAMING THE VEIL AND LIMINAL HYBRID IDENTITIES IN
SELECTED CONTEMPORARY IMMIGRANT MUSLIM WOMEN'S
NOVELS***

SUSAN TAHA AHMED AL-KARAWI

FBMK 2014 67



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**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

August 2014

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DEDICATION

TO MY FATHER, MY MOTHER, AND MY HUSBAND:
YOUR PASSION AND LOVE KEEPS ME GOING ALWAYS



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Abstract of thesis submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia, in
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2014

Chair: Ida Baizura Bahar, PhD

Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication

This thesis explores the rapidly growing body of fiction in English by and about practising Muslim women living in Western societies. This exploration is made through the lives and works of three contemporary immigrant Muslim women writers: Randa Abdel-Fattah's *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2005), Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005), and Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006). I argue that the in-between space characteristic of liminality and hybridity is a meaningful interpretive lens to understand the struggles resulting from the sacred space of being betwixt and between of wearing the veil by female protagonists. The three research objectives to make this argument are: To examine how the fictional characters challenge the stereotyped images of Muslim women in the West as depicted in the selected novels, to explore how the veil in the selected novels of Abdel-Fattah, Aboulela, and Kahf is used to signify the struggle of being betwixt and between and having a hybrid identity, and to discover how the authors' personal experiences of immigration are significant in relation to their selected novels. The theoretical approaches used to understand the in-between space and struggle over identity is Victor Turner's concept of liminality as it is theorised in his book *The Ritual Process* (1969) and Homi Bhabha's hybridity and third space as conceptualised in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994). Methodologically, my study uses a close reading of the text, where passages are extracted from the novels and serve as evidence in my analysis. This approach allows for a textual analysis that explores changes in character identity over time. Liminality is conceptually framed to describe a ritual space and phase of transition in which a person experiences struggles, ambivalence, and alienation as a result of no longer being what they were, and do not have the comfort of being what they are yet to be. Hybridity is framed to mean a unique combination of identities that the protagonists develop as a result of their experiences with rejection, ambivalence, prejudice, and struggle related to how they frame wearing the Muslim veil. My study finds that the use of liminality, hybridity and third space as an analytical frame enables understanding of the in-between space which female protagonists experience as they negotiate an identity

that is both modern yet traditional, rather than an identity that is one or the other. I discovered that examining at what characters say and describe is necessary in order to discover the diversity and detail of their lives as Arab Muslim women living in the West and provides evidence to counter the overriding hegemonic narrative that they are all the same: oppressed. Future research should focus on a comparative examination of fiction that portrays the diversity of Muslim women in the Middle East in order to know if the experience of those women in the West are unique to the immigrant experience or something more general to Muslim women wherever they may live.



Abstrak tesis dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia Sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PENERIMAAN PEMAKAIAN HIJAB DAN IDENTITI HIBRID LIMINAL
DALAM BEBERAPA NOVEL OLEH PENDATANG KONTEMPORARI
WANITA ISLAM**

Oleh

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Tesis ini cuba melihat perkembangan pesat novel fiksyen dalam bahasa Inggeris berkenaan wanita Islam yang tinggal dikalangan masyarakat Barat. Kajian ini dibuat berdasarkan kehidupan dan penulisan oleh tiga orang penulis kontemporari wanita Islam immigran: Randa Abdel- Fattah dalam *Does My Head Look Big in This* (2005), Minaret Leila Aboulela dalam *Minaret* (2005), dan Mohja Kahf dalam *The Girl in Tangerine Scarf* (2006). Saya berpendapat bahawa ciri di antara ruang liminal dan Hibrid merupakan lensa tafsiran yang sangat berguna untuk memahami perjuangan yang dilalui berdasarkan pengalaman wanita protagonis, akibat keputusan samada untuk memakai atau tidak memakai *hijab*. Tiga objektif utama kajian bagi hujah ini ialah: untuk mengkaji bagaimana watak-watak fiksyen mencabar imej stereotaip wanita Islam di Barat seperti yang digambarkan di dalam novel, untuk melihat sejauh mana pemakaian *hijab* dalam novel yang ditulis oleh Abdel - Fattah , Aboulela dan Kahf sebagai simbol identiti perjuangan dan bagaimana ia diatasi melalui liminaliti, untuk mencapai identiti hibrid dan untuk mengkaji signifikasi pengalaman peribadi penulis imigran terhadap penulisan novel mereka. Metodologi kajian ini menggunakan analisis kandungan, wacana dan juga tafsiran melalui pembacaan teks, dimana petikan ayat-ayat daripada novel digunakan sebagai bukti dalam analisis kajian ini. Analisis teks digunakan untuk menentukan *hijab* adalah simbolik yang diwakili oleh watak-watak dan tema. Pendekatan yang digunakan untuk memahami di antara ruang dan perjuangan terhadap identiti ini adalah berdasarkan konsep liminaliti Victor Turner, sebagaimana yang dicadangkannya di dalam bukunya, bertajuk *The Ritual Process* (1969) dan juga teori *hybridity and third space* Homi Bhabha seperti yang tercatat di dalam bukunya, *The Location of Culture* (1994). Pendekatan ini dapat menganalisis teks yang meneroka perubahan identiti watak dari masa ke masa . Kajian ini mendapati bahawa penggunaan liminaliti, hibrid dan ruang ketiga sebagai kerangka analisis yang membolehkan pemahaman di antara ruang pengalaman wanita protagonis, kerana mereka merupakan satu identiti yang mewakili bukan sahaja karekter moden, tetapi di dalam masa yang sama, juga tradisional. Setelah kajian

yang mendalam dilakukan, saya juga mendapati bahawa watak-watak di dalam novel-novel terpilih menunjukkan bahawa, terdapat keperluan untuk mendalami dengan terperinci kehidupan wanita Islam Arab yang tinggal di Barat, untuk mengemukakan bukti, demi menjelaskan kenyataan hegemoni yang menyatakan bahawa mereka semuanya sama: ditindas. Penyelidikan seterusnya harus difokuskan pula kepada perbandingan fiksi yang dapat menggambarkan kepelbagaian wanita Islam di Timur Tengah untuk mengenalpasti, jika pengalaman wanita-wanita di Barat unik kepada pengalaman imigran atau sesuatu yang lebih umum terhadap wanita Islam di mana sahaja mereka berada.



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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 20 August 2014 to conduct the final examination of Susan Taha Ahmed Al-Karawi on her thesis entitled "Reframing the Veil and Liminal Hybrid Identities in Selected Contemporary Immigrant Muslim Women's Novels" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In this study, I focus on a rapidly growing body of fiction in English by and about practising Muslim women living in Western societies. I do this primarily through the selected novels of the female Arab Muslim writers, Randa Abdel-Fattah (b.1979), Leila Aboulela (b. 1964), and Mohja Kahf (b. 1967). Their selected novels and experiences provide examples of how Arab Muslim women live in Australia, Britain, and the United States of America where they are normally perceived as culturally inferior and backward. These authors explore the tension between tradition and modernity in which the Muslim code of dress for women goes against being modern and stylish according to Western attitudes. These representations place the Muslim woman in constant conflict as she seemingly cannot both be practising her faith and still be regarded as enlightened, outspoken, and in control of her life. My study provides another way to contest the dominant Western representation that a Muslim woman either has to remain covered, passive, or oppressed if she chooses to comply with what the religion requires of her or she becomes liberated and humanized at the expense of her religion.

Throughout my thesis, I explore the ways in which this emergent body of Muslim immigrant literature in English deals with the image of the veil. In my study, the veil means a piece of clothing worn over the head and shoulders, known in Arabic as *hijab*, since that is the way scholarship tends to use the term. I further define the veil later in this chapter since this definition differs from the common English definition. Representations of the veil often focus on a bifurcated conception of oppression and victimization of women by the patriarchal doctrines of Islam and/or the redemption from such bonds upon moving to the West and adopting Western values and lifestyles. These simplistic renditions become more significant when considered in the context of post-September 11 terrorist attacks and continuing concerns about the rise of Islamic extremism.

My use of the term “Muslim Fiction” in this study regards Islam as a worldview and as a faith that goes beyond the inspirational force Malak speaks about in his book *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* (2005). Malak places particular emphasis on the inspirational aspects of the religion in the creation of literary productions within the world of Islam (145). Three criteria function as the “common denominator” for Islam addressed in the essays in his book: the writers’ firsthand experience of Islam, the inspirational role Islam plays in their artistic creations, and the use of English as the medium of communication. In a similar vein, I chose the term “Muslim” for its greater accuracy. While these selected novels try to make sense of religious commitments in a complex and changing situation, they are far from having a prescriptive approach to Islam. The selected novels thereby attend to resilient ties with Islam that keep a low profile in the theoretical corpus on the issues of hybridity and transcultural experiences.

The body of literature that is the focus of this study is in fact part of a larger field. I situate this literature within a larger context: the field of immigration and diasporic writing and/or minority and ethnic literatures produced in English. These literatures try to make sense of the dual or multiple cultural and ethnic heritages of the authors' home and host countries. This body of literature is also related to places where the literary, social, cultural and political traditions have been influenced by Islam whether as a mainstream religion or a minor one. For more than half a century, these literatures have been exploring an array of issues and themes such as, the search for identity in the context of postcolonial times, the revolt against patriarchal customs and traditions, and colonial, racist, civilizational, and nationalist ideologies, that bring about women's subordination and oppression at various levels. The challenges of Arab Muslim women in the West also appear mostly when they encounter conflict about what to adopt from their cultural traditions and what to escape from. In my study, this conflict is most clearly observable in terms of how characters deal with their feelings of whether or not to wear a veil and the liminality that results from their choices as they struggle to construct a hybrid identity.

Muslim immigrant women writers in the West, particularly those who are Arab-American, as Abdulrazek states in her book, *Contemporary Arab American Women Writers: Hyphenated Identities and Border Crossings* (2007), are torn between their ambitions as modern and empowered women and their desire to maintain traditional cultural affiliations that they respect. This split identity is an in-between space that fluctuates between both the Middle Eastern and Western worlds but is part of neither (4). In the example of Arab-American women, Abdulrazek adds that contemporary Arab immigrant women writers struggle with a choice between home and host countries and cultures. Should they emphasize their Arab traditions and values or should they emphasize Western cultures in their writing? Although writers may value their ethnic and even national heritage, many are unable to tolerate the patriarchal authority found within their cultural heritage and religious upbringing. At the same time, these writers seemingly do not feel they are a natural part of Western culture. This is due to experiences with discrimination and prejudice from members of society who exclude Arabs because of racial and ethnic differences (Abdulrazek 45). The pressure some Arab Muslim women feel to assimilate into mainstream Western culture and to ignore or cover up their "Arabness" has created a tension between these two aspects of their identities. In literature, this problem often arises as a need to choose between two identities that, when made, will lead to new balanced identities if the balancing process is successful by the characters. Lisa Suhair Majaj, an Arab-Anglo writer and feminist, comments on this experience:

Although I spent years struggling to define my personal politics of location, I remained situated somewhere between Arab and American cultures- never quite rooted in either, always constrained by both. My sense of liminality grew as I became more aware of the rigid nature of definitions; Arab culture simultaneously claimed and excluded me, while the American identity I longed for retreated inexorably from my grasp (Boundaries 79).

As a result of this tension, writers who represent the latest generation from around the world but especially in the English speaking Western countries of Britain, North America, and Australia are defining important features of their Muslim identities through literature. The emerging literature they are developing is partially a response to their generation's need to not only be faithful to the pillars of Islamic faith but also to remain rooted in the Western societies to which they belong. For example, in an interview of Leila Aboulela (who is of Egyptian-Sudanese origin), describes her fiction as an instance of:

'Muslim Immigrant writing' and explains that her writing career came into being not only as a reaction to negative representations of Muslims in the mainstream Western media during the Gulf War in 1992, but also as an attempt to redress what she regards as the unrealistic absence of religion in some writings by Arab and Muslim writers. Aboulela started creative writing in an attempt to answer the need for self-representations on the part of the younger generation of Muslims. Islam is the epistemological force in these people's lives and the West is their home and yet they do not see an adequate representation of themselves in contemporary fiction and daily television programs and radio (Eissa).

While my focus is on the work as a literary production, I have deliberately selected novels in which religious sensibilities occupy a *positive* focal point in the lives of the protagonists. This study is more concerned with the thematic issues of this literature, and without claiming to be the only study of its kind, does claim to shed light on a less attended area in how Muslim women are represented in literature, namely the process of how characters overcome struggles and conflicts to form a hybrid identity that is of their own choosing and construction. This enables me to demonstrate how the female protagonists exemplify the diversity, richness of lived experience, and complexity of Muslim immigrant women living in the West.

1.2 Problem Statement of the Study

As a result of the 9/11 attack, Arab women gradually became more visible and the veil became a symbolically charged piece of clothing that fell into the dichotomy of "us" and "them" (Leonard 2294). In this process, media coverage has relied on symbols that communicate negative images about Islam to their audience to the extent that "even when Americans did not consciously associate Middle Eastern political activity with Islam," symbols such as the scimitar, the mosque, the crescent, men wearing "physically indistinguishable turban, black shirts, and pants" (Gottschalk and Greenberg 53), and particularly women in the veil, help connect "all Muslims with the Middle East" and Islam (Gottschalk and Greenberg 46). As Gottschalk and Greenberg argue "Europeans came to negatively portray Muslims so effectively and so universally that the terms 'Islam' and 'Muslim' have come to inherently evoke suspicion and fear on the part of many" (4).

This study explores Muslim women's immigrant experiences and identity conflicts metaphorically symbolized by the veil in the life in selected literary novels of contemporary Arab immigrant women writers, namely Randa Abdel-Fattah, Leila Aboulela, and Mohja Kahf. In order to capture the diversity of Muslim women's

lives and the uniqueness of each one's struggles, I use the concept of liminality found in the ritual process and rites of passage by Victor Turner along with the concepts of hybridity and the third space by Homi Bhabha. This combination provides an ability to discover how Muslim women construct their identities as well as a means of describing the end result. Liminality in the ritual process provides the ritual space that the female protagonists undergo in their spiritual journey with the act of veiling that resulted in a different kind of spirituality. Hybridity along with the third space allows describing identities in other than the binary constructs of modern versus traditional or the West versus the East. This approach to understanding the issue of veiling fills a gap in the literature because previous studies tend not to incorporate the concept of time in identity construction nor resulting identities occurring along a dialectical continuum of their choice. As such, liminality, hybridity, and the third space are the most applicable conceptual frameworks for examining how the veil is a trope for the struggles experienced by immigrant Arab Muslim female protagonists in the selected novels.

The perceived invisibility of veiled Muslim women has been the focus of many Muslim immigrant women writers who respond to the narrow meaning of the veil, the one dimensional connotation of the term "Muslim Woman" as well as representations of Muslim women in Western culture today. Analyzing western narratives since medieval literature, the Arab-American writer, Mohja Kahf argues that one particular sentence, "the Muslim woman is being victimized," is the common axis undergirding a wide variety of Western representations" (1). This victimization is attributed to the image of the veil that "exercise[s] discursive power over perceptions of Islam and Muslim women" that "Islamic veiling is intrinsically incompatible with women's agency in the construction of their identities" (Macdonald 19). Arguing "against a one-dimensional treatment of veiling as an unchanging practice symbolizing oppressive patriarchy in Muslim societies," Muslim feminist scholars suggest that the veil must be considered in a "broader framework [...] within the history of clothing as a vehicle for political and social expression and action" (Hoodfar 37).

Clearly, veiling means different things in different social contexts. While the veil was invented and perpetuated within a patriarchal framework as a means of controlling women, more often than not women have appropriated this same artifact to loosen the bonds of patriarchy. It is the lack of recognition of women's agency and the tendency to view women as passive victims that has flawed the current debate, distorted the image of veiled women and promoted the divide between those who do and those who do not wear the *hijab* (Hoodfar 39).

This study shows that Muslim women authors such as Abdel-Fattah, Aboulela, and Mohja Kahf agree about the narrow connotation of the term "Muslim Woman" and that it is time that the West recognizes the variety among real Muslim women. By creating non-stereotypical Muslim women characters and by asserting these characters' agency in their spiritualities, these authors show that there is multiplicity in the ways Muslim women experience their spiritualities and veils. These authors also go beyond the conversation about veils to address the stereotyped images of

Muslims and Islam in non-Muslim parts of the world, especially in Australia, Britain, and the United States of America.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The conceptual theory for this study lies in the concept of liminality as outlined in Victor Turner's theory of rites of passage and Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and the third space. My study analyzes selected Arab immigrant Muslim women's novels and explores reframing the image of the veil as a metaphor and reveals how the fictional characters overcome their conflicts in the ritual space over time to create a new identity which Bhabha describes as the third space with a hybrid identity.

The concept of liminality as developed by Turner is included in the analysis to capture the element of time. Meanwhile, the concepts of hybridity and third space as developed by Bhabha are used to frame identities of Muslim Arab immigrant fictional characters and indirectly their authors. This is important because character identity is constructed and negotiated through social processes such as Victor Turner's theory of rites of passage and unfolds over time. My use of Turner's ideas to understand Arab and diasporic literatures has not been found in other studies, so far, and, when coupled with the more commonly found use of Bhabha's hybridity and third space, is also an attempt to fill this gap.

Victor Turner (1919-1983) was a British anthropologist who studied literature and theater as an undergraduate. In graduate school, he was originally schooled in the dominant theoretical fashion of his time, structural functionalism. This theory focused on understanding the structures of a particular society and how its parts worked together. In the 1960s however, he took a less static, more flexible and process-oriented approach to the study of culture and society. This was done particularly through its stories, myths, and daily-life dramas (Barrie 12). Turner's post-graduate research focused entirely on the study of ritual, particularly rites of passage and social drama as sites of social transformation (Ibid). Turner continued to study rituals of transition, both in traditional tribal societies and in more open and industrialized ones throughout his life. He refined and brought widespread attention to the quality of liminality characteristic of the central stage of rites of passage. Since Turner's death in 1983, the rites of passage model has continued to be subject to criticism and refinement as theorists have pointed out the breadth of detail and circumstance exemplified by these societal practises, and the complex ways in which they both serve, and interact with, the goals of the society and its individuals.

Following French anthropologist Van Gennep who first published his theory *rites de passage* (1960), Turner stresses that the most significant social function of rites of passage is that they affect and mark a change in the social identity and status of the person, the initiate, undergoing the ritual rite of passage (Turner, *The Ritual Process* 25). Gennep's rites of passage is outlined by three stages: separation, margin (or limon), and re-aggregation (Gennep 15-18). He asserts that such rites of passage "function to reduce the harmful effects to the individual and to society of such changes which must inevitably take place in human lives" (Ibid. 11). However, Turner, whose works focus on the middle or "liminal phase", considers it a significant means of change and innovation in culture (Turner, *The Ritual Process* 34). He calls these phases pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal. Turner believes that

liminal beings can pass through two stages: crisis and separation. It is the change in social standing, generally an enhanced status, that “life crisis” rituals produce that makes them significant for Turner (Ibid. 24). Also, for Turner, the liminal stage in rites of passage is a space of negation in so far as that while the subject is liminal; he or she is outside of the prescribed social structures of the society. Significant for my study is not only the stress that Turner places on the rite of passage as a marker for change of social status but also his notion that during these liminal periods, the subjects are both free and bound by their absence of social status. Thus, what is crucial about applying Turner’s framework to the selected works of Abdel-Fattah, Aboulela, and Kahf is the understanding that liminality as a ritual space where the female protagonists find themselves because their choice of wearing the veil creates new social status and is also the space of possibility.

In the stage of crisis, Turner argues that the features of liminal beings “are ambiguous...they are outside of all society’s standard classification” (Turner, *Forest of Symbols* 94). Liminal beings have nothing--“no status, property, insignia, rank, kinship position, nothing to demonstrate them structurally from their fellows” (Ibid., 237). During the liminal movement between social identities or situations, the person discovers herself “betwixt and between” social identities and their rules and responsibilities normally dictated by society. The individual also experiences “a suspension or reversal of the normal rules of living” (Turner, *The Ritual Process* 94-95). For Turner, this comes to represent the essence of liminality, making possible “the deconstruction of the uninteresting constructions of common sense. . .into culture units which may then be reconstructed in novel ways” (Ibid., 68).

Frequently the disconnect between the way life used to be and the way it may become is characterized by physical separation from familiar places and people and may include a feeling of being on a different timeline as well (Turner, “Passage, Margins and Poverty” 399). The “spatial separation from the familiar and habitual may,” he states “have punitive, purificatory, expiatory, cognitive, instructional, therapeutic, transformative, and many other facets, aspects, and functions” (Ibid., 128). This liminal time of threat and promise is also generally considered to be sacred and is protected from secularity, as secularity itself is protected from liminality by taboos (Ibid., 64). Turner argues that liminal characters are ambiguous during this experience of temporary separation. This ambiguity is communicated through symbols, such as the veil, which are therefore important in my study:

symbols and social action, and praxis symbols, where their multi-vocal reference can feed back into the central economic and political-legal domains and arenas, supplying them with goals, aspirations, incentives, structural models and *raison d entrée* (Ibid).

Turner’s work on liminality is filled with insights valuable to keep in mind as one examines the ritual accounts of contemporary authors. The recognition of an ambiguous “betwixt and between” period where the ritual subject stands apart from the identifiers of the attributes and symbols of the phase of liminality are ones that show up repeatedly in ancient texts and rituals and are worthy of consideration as how they may participate in the event of ritual transformation.

This conflict with liminality may or may not help the characters with hybrid identity to live successfully in life. In fact, it may threaten their identity. In order to understand how the characters overcome this conflict, I have decided to use Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and the third space as analytical tools in my discussion of cultural hybridity as conceptualised in his book *Location of Culture* (1994). This cultural hybridity is explained in this study, however, as a mixture of traditional Arab homeland culture and the new culture of the adopted Western homeland.

Hybridity, according to Bhabha, provides an alternative kind of identity that is neither completely defined by the authority of the colonizer nor fully under the control of the colonized (Bhabha 174). Taken from cultural and literary theories, Bhabha formed his idea of hybridity which accounts for the identity and cultural forms found within colonialism, namely hostility and lack of acceptance along with inequality between colonized and colonizer. Hybridity, Bhabha states, is the result of the colonizer failing to exert authority over defining the identity of the colonized. This failure creates a kind of identity that is familiar yet new and unique. The familiarity yet something new is essentially the product of the colonizer and colonized interacting, each having incomplete power to determine the outcome. As such, hybridity is an alternative to essentialism, or "the belief in invariable and fixed properties which define the 'whatness' of a given entity" (Fuss xi).

Aware of the dangers of binary thinking when it comes to Eastern and Western identities, the ideas that each is somehow fixed and without blending, Bhabha accepts that "all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity" (Rutherford 211). Moreover, Bhabha emphasizes that the colonizer and the colonized react to each other in terms of hybridity and do not construct or define identities in isolation from each other. For him, the rhetoric of hybridity is best aimed at fighting essentialist thinking and so can be found in sociological theories of identity, multiculturalism, and racism. What we are left with is an understanding that purity and originality, when applied to cultures, cannot be logically supported. This opens the possibility, if not likelihood, of a space characterized by international cultures "not based on exoticism or multi-culturalism of the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity" (Bhabha 109). In this space, he argues "that we will find those words with which we can speak of ourselves and others. And by exploring this 'Third Space', we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves" (Bhabha 78).

The concept of hybridity in this study presents another way to resist Western negative stereotyping and Arab patriarchy. This entails a rejection of the argument that there is only one side to an argument or narrative. This way of looking at things takes apart the center/margin dichotomy and a space between the center and margin. Hybridity rejects the notion of pure, original, authoritative identities, and gives value to the importance of limited categories and binaries. Bhabha defines hybridity as a form of liminal or in-between space:

For me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'Third Space', which enables other positions to emerge (Rutherford 211).

Described in this way, the third space is a place where difference interacts and therefore is a site of cultural production, not reflection or mimicry, from which new identity possibilities are enabled. Hybridity found in the third space is a “lubricant” (Papastergiadis 56) that fosters the interaction between cultures. The third space, Bhabha says, provides a “spatial politics of inclusion rather than exclusion that initiates new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation” (Bhabha 1). When the colonizer tries to normalize and define the colonized, the act of hybridity by the colonized creates this third space through which identity and meaning may be negotiated.

Even though Bhabha’s conceptualization of the third space and his advocacy of cultural difference are valuable in the discursive problematization of “politics of polarity” (Bhabha 56), his concerns with the concept’s disruptions and displacements leave the issue of continuities of religious affiliations in need of further attention. In other words, the persistence of religion as an important and regenerative mode of knowledge production and the complicated relations between converts and society problematize the assumptions involved in confrontation of religion and modernity.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

Given the arguments presented earlier on my research problem and the theoretical frameworks I have decided to address them, the objective of my study is to examine how collectively the concepts of liminality, hybridity, and the third space as reflected in Abdel-Fattah, Aboulela, and Kahf’s selected novels enable a greater understanding of how Muslim women in Australia, England, and the United States of America struggle with constructing identity. In more detail I intend:

1. To examine how the fictional characters challenge the stereotyped images of Muslim women in the West as depicted in the selected novels.
2. To explore how the veil in the selected novels of Abdel-Fattah, Aboulela, and Kahf is used to signify the struggle of being betwixt and between and having a hybrid identity.
3. To discover how the authors’ personal experiences of immigration are significant in relation to their selected novels.

1.5 Questions of the Study

Given the research objectives stated, the following research questions allow me to directly analyse the texts:

1. What are the stereotyped images of Muslim women in the West that the authors challenge through their fictional characters?
2. How is the veil in the selected novels of Abdel-Fattah, Aboulela, and Kahf used to signify the struggle of being betwixt and between and having a hybrid identity?
3. How does the authors’ experience with immigration lead them to express themselves in similar ways to the characters they depict in their selected novels?

1.6 Methodology

The study employs a literary textual analysis involving a close reading of Randa Abdel-Fattah's *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2005), Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005), and Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006). Examples are extracted from the novels and serve as evidence in my analysis. The close textual analysis is used to determine the ways in which the veil is symbolically represented by characters. A close reading, really looking carefully at what characters say and describe, is necessary in order to discover the diversity and detail of their lives as Arab Muslim women living in the West and in order to provide evidence to counter the hegemonic narrative that they are all the same: oppressed, submissive, and voiceless.

The pattern of symbolism revealed in the novels deals with the literary representations of religion as faith and its role in the experiences of transculturation and interfaith relations of Muslim women in the West. As such, the study focuses on the experiences of the marginal, and is allied with including those scholars engaged in postcolonial studies, and diaspora and cultural studies. Authorship and meaning in their novels are especially also stressed upon in my analysis because who the authors are and what they have experienced as Arab Muslim women have a significant relationships textually with the stories they have created and the meanings they have assigned to their prose.

1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to Randa Abdel-Fattah's *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2005), Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005), and Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) as literary examples for examining an in-between space that is neither modern nor traditional but a negotiated middle ground for the characters. My study does not explore the political aspects of women's equality rights with men because this issue is already well-analyzed and advocacy of emancipation is not the purpose of my study. Neither does my study address political Islam or attempt to interpret any aspect of the *Qur'an*. Therefore, I believe that engaging in further such analysis or advocacy will not be able to contribute significantly to an insight of how Arab immigrant characters achieve a sense of Muslim identity through successfully passing through their liminality and achieving a hybrid identity that rests in the third space.

1.8 Justification of Texts Selected

This study analyses selected contemporary Arab women's novels written in English: Abdel-Fattah's *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2005), Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005), and Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006). These novels and their authors are particularly appropriate to what I am trying to argue regarding the diversity of Muslim immigrant women living in the West and their struggles over identity and belonging. I have chosen the selected novels because each novel represents an important country in the English-speaking West: Australia, the United Kingdom (henceforth referred to as Britain), and the United States of America (henceforth referred to as U.S.A and the United States). Choosing novels that focus on one or two of these countries would have produced an incomplete and lopsided study. In addition, each author, like the protagonists they have created, come from different

parts of the Arab world. Western discourse about Arabs characterizes them as being all the same when in fact they are not. The novelists I have chosen therefore have national heritages that are very important in contemporary international relations: Sudan, Egypt, Palestine, and Syria. Choosing from the many Egyptian or Palestinian novelists commonly chosen in other studies such as *Voices of New American women: Visions of home in the Middle Eastern diasporic imagination* (2008) by Bahareh H Lampert, and Eid Ahmed's *Who Defines Me: Orientalism Revisited and Occidentalism Redefined in Post 9/11Era* (2011), would have to follow what it has preached: that Arab Muslim immigrant women are diverse. Including the oft-overlooked Sudanese Arabs through *Minaret* is deliberate as it would lead to bridging this gap.

Through my choice of texts and authors, I hope to contribute to a recent growing debate on literary works by Arab women writers in the West, especially the writings of Arab women novelists who use English as their means of expression. While a number of Arab women writers live in Australia, Britain, and America, some, such as Hanan Al-Shaykh (b.1945), and Hoda Barakat (b.1952), have opted to write in Arabic though most of their works have been simultaneously translated to English. This sets my study apart from other studies that have examined the literary works of Arab women writers regardless of the language in which their works were originally written. The texts that I examine are all written originally in English and some are even informed by debates emerging from postcolonial theory. As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin argue:

Strategies of appropriation are numerous and vary widely in postcolonial literatures, but they are the most powerful and ubiquitous way in which English is transformed by formerly colonized writers. Such strategies enable the writer to gain world audience and yet produce a culturally distinct, culturally appropriate idiom that announces itself as different even though it is 'English' (76).

The fledging body of narratives with which this study is concerned belongs to a larger field of Muslim writings: Arab-Australian, Arab-British, and Arab-American. These fields comprises a diverse range of writers including, but not limited to, Fadia Faqir (b.1956) (Britain), Diana Abu-Jaber (b.1960) (U.S.A), Leila Aboulela (b. 1964) (Britain), Mohja Kahf (b.1967) (U.S.A), Monica Ali (Britain) (b. 1967), Leila Halaby (b.1978) (U.S.A), and Randa Abdel-Fattah (1979) (Australia). This generation of writers shows the necessity of "rational justification in order to feel confident about their practising religion and explaining it to non-Muslims, and particularly, the mainstream" society (Abdo 19).

In my opinion, the symbol of the veil and identity has not been the focus in most of Muslim narratives in English by Arab women writers. However, Abdel-Fattah, Aboulela, and Kahf have displayed an acute sense of the importance of representing the experience of Muslim women in their literary narrative. They engage themes particularly about the Muslim woman experience with the veil after the events of 9/11. In her Book, *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature*, Layla Al Maleh asserts:

Even though Anglophone Arab literature dates back to the turn of the twentieth century, it did not gain attention or attain recognition until the world woke up one day to the horror of the infamous 9/11 and asked itself who those Arabs really were (1).

These political conditions made the literary narratives of Anglo-Arab women writers, such as Abdel-Fattah, Aboulela, and Kahf, gain the attention of many readers and literary critics. Indeed, such texts are capable of reaching out directly to many people and establishing dialogue that affects people's knowledge about "the Other", for example, Abdelrazek, *Contemporary Arab American Women Writers: Hyphenated Identities and Border Crossings*; Cooper, *A new Generation of African Writers: Migration, Material Culture and Language*. Thus, the texts I examine in this study push against conventional boundaries by discussing topics that have been taboo or silenced in public and even in the cultural memory of families.

Abdel-Fattah, Aboulela, and Kahf are first and second generation Arab immigrants women who have published numerous works and won awards for different literary forms, thus creating a fertile ground for promising scholarship. They are not fledgling or unknown writers whose lack of popularity could reduce the impact of my study. What ties Abdel-Fattah, Aboulela, and Kahf's selected writings together into a coherent whole beyond publication success is their resistance to various forms of oppression and female entrapment caused by the various interrelated factors of society, patriarchy, and ideological influences. They contribute significantly to Arab Muslim women's visibility by employing young female protagonists and narrators, where, through the characters' eyes, readers in the West explore and experience their multiple worlds of hope and despair. They are among the first Arab writers to explore fictively the practitioners of Islam in the West. For example, Wail S. Hassan, in his article "Leila Aboulela and the Ideology of Muslim Immigrant Fiction" (2008), argues that her fiction is part a new trend he calls "Muslim immigrant literature [which] seeks to articulate an alternative episteme derived from Islam but shaped specifically by immigrant perspectives" (299).

Like Aboulela, Abdel-Fattah has significant personal experience about the veil with Australians viewing her and other Muslims as a problem and this resonates in her writing (Abdel-Fattah, "Biography"). On the other hand, as a Muslim writer, activist, and feminist, Kahf's main project in her literary works "is to unsettle the rigid stereotypes that so often imprison Muslim Woman behind walls of misperception" (Majaj1-2). Collectively, these female writers draw on their personal experience as women of Arab descent with affiliations to Arab, Muslim, and Western communities. They are concerned with stereotypes that affect intercultural relations among these communities in local and global contexts. In the selected novels, the female writers negotiate the clash between tradition and encroaching Western culture. In both cultures, women are suffering and striving to resist their positions as submissive and subordinate as well as resisting the negative Western images due to wearing the veil.

I argue that Abdel-Fattah, Aboulela, and Kahf have carefully crafted works which do not speak only to important issues of ethnicity, gender, and religious diversity in the West, but also to universal human themes of family, kinship, and friendship. I

suggest that they have chronicled the specific sorrows and pleasures of the immigrant and write in a way that encourages resilience in women despite the trials and tribulations they face. This in turn provides rich narratives to draw from in my analysis and makes choosing their novels much more relevant and appropriate. Without such narrative richness, my study that aims to reveal diversity and the construction of hybrid identities could not be possible.

1.8.1 Categories of Texts Selected

My study demonstrates how the Arab Muslim female writers Randa Abdel-Fattah, Leila Aboulela and Mohja Kahf have engaged in creative reflections on the veil and identity in the context of immigration and, thereby, re-imagine new ways of being Muslim, Arab, and Australian, English, and American. In focusing on three different genres of the literary works, rather than limiting my study to a single genre, I can state that the selected novels by these female writers complicate literary representations of Muslim female subjectivity through de-constructing meanings associated with the veil as a major signifier for Islam. The three authors show the visibility of their protagonist by mocking them. Abdel-Fattah's *Does My Head Look Big in This?*, as a young adult fiction, enables the reader to experience the emotions and dilemmas of a 16-years-old young Muslim woman as well as the discrimination she endures when she decides to wear the veil. Examining young adult fiction is generally overlooked in the existing studies pertaining to the veil and my examination shows that young adult fiction reveals complicated and relevant experiences. Another genre I have chosen to address is the coming-of-age genre through Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*. In this coming-of-age novel, the protagonist's path from childhood to adulthood and her maturation from an ill-defined identity into a Syrian-American Muslim woman puts its mark on her veil, its color, fabric, and style of wearing and even not wearing it. While Abdel-Fattah's novel focuses on young adulthood, Kahf's novel allows me to examine and compare the important stages of being betwixt and between from childhood through adulthood, making the analysis more significant to the issue of the veil than if stuck on a single age. That said, the third genre is the more commonly studied adult woman's novel and this provides a solid backdrop to the other two genres and the protagonists. Aboulela's *Minaret* richly describes an adult woman's dilemmas and provides a diversity of material to analyze.

What is of particular significance in the selected novels also is capturing what and how the current generation of writers address the issue of the veil through parody and mockery. The three authors show the visibility of their protagonist by mocking them. In *Does My Head Look Big in This?*, the title itself sets the tone of mockery. Instead of being embarrassment, rooted in a desire to be viewed as modern, or confrontational, rooted in women's empowerment, Abdel-Fattah draws exaggerated attention to the veil. By exaggerating it and drawing attention to the veil, she disempowers others by denying them the initiative in pointing out its problems. In Aboulela's *Minaret*, quite different in approach but with the same purpose, the novel locates religious commitment in the space of the mosque. The novel underscores the relationships between individuals that are formed in that space, especially for women, and the role that they play in configuring narratives of the Muslim self within the mosque and outside as members of British society. Aboulela's generation contests current and recent media focus on the mosque as a place that breeds

radicalized young people bent on destroying Western society. Like Abdel-Fattah, Aboulela signifies this directly from the title of her novel and depicts it on its cover.

Kahf reflects something similar in her novel and undermines the subversive depiction of Muslim women common in America where it is essentially about Muslims and women's identity in particular. The novel's cover photo of a woman wearing a tangerine scarf bolsters her theme regarding the veil; to Westerners, it is a symbol of oppression. The cover image of a bright orange *hijab* and the many colorful and unique styles found within the novel put Muslim women's diversity/individuality in exaggerated positions. At the same time, the Muslim woman on Kahf's cover also wears a black T-shirt and blue jeans which means that Kahf is transmitting many implicit messages about Muslim women regarding Islam and the West. These messages speak of multiple social identities, not a singular and stereotyped identity, for Muslim Arab-American women in the U.S.A. Previous generations of writers who have dealt with the image of the veil, did not use mockery and parody to disempower the Western gaze upon them.

1.9 Significance of the Study

A primary objective of my study is to build and contribute toward new theoretical approaches to using literary analyses in cultural and post-colonial studies. Because Turner's concept of liminality emphasizes social and personal struggle and confusion *over time* as a kind of social process, I hypothesise that it is able to complement Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and the third space. Both the theoretical framework and subject of study are my attempt to shed light on examining the literary discourses of Arab immigrants in the West.

My study, so far, has also shown that scholarship on the experiences of immigrant Muslim women in the West is still undermined in terms of scholarly value and overlooked in terms of the Islamic discourses. Another goal, therefore, of this study is to respond to this problem by examining the literature by and about Arab Muslim women who migrated from the Middle East to the West. In my opinion, the literary continuation of this group of minority women have been overlooked for a long time and has not appeared in anthologies or class syllabi until after the tragic event of 9/11. Al Malah in her book, *Arab Voices in Diaspora*, comments on Arab-Anglo writers male and female:

[They] project the Arab by way of themes and types that negotiate between different cultures...Anglophone Arab writers have the capacity to play a crucial role in disseminating through the wider world their images of hyphenated Arabs of the Arab people as a whole, thereby fostering acceptance through understanding...It simply so happened in recent years, as they seemed to meet the needs of a readership eager to learn about Arab culture and intellectual make-up in a language that was the lingua franca of the modern age (Al Maleh X).

As I see it, not only were Arab immigrant women's issues overlooked in discussions of women minority literature, but not enough connections have been made about them within cultural and post-colonial theories. Not until 9/11 did they have a

significant presence in the scholarship of immigrant literature although, more frequently than not, it has been a negative presence due to continuous misrepresentations of them and misreadings of their lives and faith. Thus exploring the concepts of the liminal and the hybrid space in the lives and selected novels of Arab women writers, namely Randa Abdel-Fattah, Leila Aboulela, and Mohja Kahf, is useful to my argument since it reflects the nature of an Arab woman's life and her complicated situation given discrimination based on the veil and religion. My contribution to research on contemporary Arab immigrant women's fiction of the above mentioned authors is exploration of the liminal and hybrid condition in the literature of Arab immigrant women's identities in order to discover how the Arab immigrant Muslim characters construct their Muslim identities through their conflicts of veiling and be accepted in society.

1.10 Literary Backgrounds of Abdel-Fattah, Aboulela, and Kahf

Understanding the personal lives of the authors is important for several reasons. First, the authors' narratives are essentially about their native cultural traditions and the Islamic religion. These traditions, like Islam, are rooted in the Arabic language. Yet these writers, as native speakers of Arabic, write in English. Their experiences play a part in the way each author accurately translates a culture rooted in Arabic idioms, and the way they accurately translate Islamic principles that are also rooted in Arabic idioms and symbolism.

Another reason, the personal lives of the authors is important because they write in an important historical time period. In the past twenty years, the West has become very interested in Arab culture, Islam, and Muslims around the world, as a result of attacks from extremists on Western interests, bloody peace-keeping missions in places like Somalia, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Western representations of Muslims and Islam are said to be inaccurate and rooted in Orientalism. The writings by authors such as Abdel-Fattah, Aboulela, and Kahf provide, presumably, a more accurate and alternative depiction of Muslims and Islam. Knowing about the authors' personal experiences provides insight to the authenticity of their fictional representations and therefore the authority of their textual voice.

As immigrant writers, knowing their personal experience is helpful in appreciating the significance of my theoretical framework which I have used to analyze the selected novels. Did the authors experience liminality in their journey from the Middle East to the West and were they caught betwixt and between during the time period of adjusting to life in the West? As practising Muslims, did they find themselves separated from the dominant non-Muslim populations in Australia, Britain, and the United States? Knowing how they may have experienced the struggles and transitions associated with liminality to create a hybrid identity of their own construction provides insight and power when analyzing their fictional characters. My theoretical framework applies not only to the fictional characters but to the authors that created them, then the significance of my framework has greater explanatory force. A brief biographic sketch of each author provides necessary context for appreciating their novels.

1.10.1 Randa Abdel-Fattah (b.1979)

Randa Abdel-Fattah was born in Australia of Palestinian and Egyptian parents. She was raised in Melbourne, attended Catholic and Islamic schools. At Melbourne University, she studied Art and Law and entered the field of human rights advocacy. In an interview, Abdel-Fattah comments:

In terms of my human rights activism, I've very much used my writing to express my views about Australian Muslims, feminism and Islam, and Palestine. I've been very strong on that, having grown up as the daughter of a dispossessed Palestinian and visited [Palestine] in 2000 with my father, which was life-changing (Andronik 23).

What she experienced through growing up in Australia provides her with the chance to write about subjects that matter personally: Palestine, Australia, and Islam. Abdel-Fattah frequently provides her views on these subjects for the media and she is a frequent guest speaker at schools all over Australia regarding the subject matter of her novels and how it matters to students grappling with issues of cultural and religious diversity. She says about herself:

I was born in Australia, my mother is Egyptian, my father is Palestinian. I grew up in what I would say was a household that was fairly confident in its identity as Australian Muslims of Arab background. So I've grown up with a strong sense of positive identity. But in the context of the first Gulf War I felt very strongly that the saturation of negative images of Muslims in the media, especially Muslim women or Muslims in connection with violence and terrorism, had a direct impact on the way that people perceived or treated me, and that was almost always within a negative discourse. And that impacted on me as a teenager. In a way, it pushed me closer to my faith and my identity and as a teenager, at the age of 13, I started to wear the veil, I became quite passionate about my identity and my faith and it was a mixture of spiritual sort of enlightenment and identity politics all rolled into one (Andronik 22).

She is a successful writer of fiction primarily for young adults and her novels include: *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2005), *Ten Things I Hate about Me* (2006), *Where the Streets Had a Name* (2008), *Noah's Law* (2010), *Buzz Off* (2011), *The Friendship Matchmaker* (2011), and its sequel, *The Friendship Matchmaker Goes Undercover* (2012). In addition to being an accomplished author of young adult fiction, she works as a litigation lawyer and is married with two children (Abdel-Fattah, "Biography"). She lives in Australia and works professionally as an author and lawyer. In almost all of her novels, Abdel-Fattah discusses the way in which Muslims are considered a problem in Australia, because for some Australians, Muslims to them are "troubling strangers." As shown above, including being unable to find employment due to wearing the veil, Abdel Fattah has significant personal experience with Australians viewing her and other Muslims as a problem and this resonates in her writing. The following section will present an overview of firstly *Does My Head Look Big in This?*, *Minerat*, and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*.

1.10.1.1 *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2005)

Abdel-Fattah's *Does My Head Look Big in This?* was the Australian Book of the Year for Older Children in 2006. The book was positively reviewed and promoted not only in Australia but the United States as well by its publisher, Scholastic Books. The book was featured in the British newspapers, *The Times*, *the Courier-Mail* (30 August 2005, 1), and *The Independent* (8 May 2006). In an interview in *The Weekend Australian* (September 2006), Abdel-Fattah states that the book's popularity can be attributed to "an overwhelming thirst for alternative narratives" (24). She says:

I think most intelligent people can see past the demonic and one-dimensional images of Muslims and are thirsting for an insight into the Muslim community". *Does My Head Look Big In This* was the first book and it's been the most successful. There's a lot in it that I've taken from my own life, particularly the experiences I had just walking down the street or trying to find part-time casual jobs wearing *hijab*, or observations about friends and family. It's not an autobiography - none of my books are - but they do very much draw on my own experiences or those of those around me (Rochman 54).

Abdel-Fattah's experience as a native-born Australian significantly influences her writings, and her experiences in Middle School and High School are the bases of *Does My Head Look Big in This?* Abdel-Fattah, like her protagonist Amal, started to wear the veil as a teenager. In an interview, she states:

I wrote *Does My Head Look Big in This?* because I wanted to allow readers to step into the world of an average Muslim teenage girl born in the West. I wanted to allow readers to identify with her experiences and journey, and realize she is not a walking headline or stereotype (2).

The story begins with sixteen-year-old-Amal who decides to begin wearing the veil full-time. The plot is based on Amal's efforts to deal with everyone's reaction (her family, her teachers, her friends and other classmates, as well as strangers she encounters) and to grow into a confident young woman as a result of her struggles to assert her Muslim identity in a social environment not very welcoming of difference, especially Muslims post-9/11. Amal is not accepted by a number of people in her community when she starts wearing the veil whenever outside the house. She is not easily accepted in public as just another Australian as before she chose to wear the veil. Most of these encounters with people in the community, at school, and even among extended family members are unpleasant for Amal. Her parents are concerned that she will not be able to handle the ostracism at school or the glares and comments of adult strangers in public. Her private school principal is reluctant out of concern that she is no longer conforming to the uniform dress code and somehow will bring controversy and embarrassment to the school. Some female classmates ridicule her for not being fashionable and for not trying to fit in more. Amal remains firm in her decision to practise her religion and develop a stronger

faith despite making her more noticeable than the average Australian on the street or at school. The story ends when she is more accepting of some people's inability to see her as equally Australian and more accepting of herself having decided to pursue a degree in law when she finishes high school.

1.10.2 Leila Aboulela (b. 1964)

Leila Aboulela, the Egyptian Sudanese writer, was born in 1964 in Egypt from a Sudanese father and Egyptian mother. She was raised in a very progressive environment, where she learned English while going to an American primary school in Khartoum. Aboulela also later attended a private Catholic school before pursuing an undergraduate degree in Statistics at the University of Khartoum and attended the London School of Economics after finishing her undergraduate education in Sudan. In 1990, she moved to Scotland, the setting of most of her writing, with her husband and their three children. In an interview with *The Guardian* in 2005, she discussed the years she spent abroad after completing her undergraduate education, and how these years made it possible for her to "reconcile Islam, modernity, education, and women's empowerment" (Eissa). She states: "My idea of religion wasn't about a woman not working or having to dress in a certain way. It was more to do with the faith" (Ibid). During those years in London as a graduate student and mother, she turned to a deeper engagement with Islam, started attending mosque regularly, and wearing the veil. Despite existing discrimination, these religious practises and beliefs did not keep her from eventually becoming one of the most prominent Arab writers in English today. Aboulela now lives and travels between Abu Dhabi and Aberdeen, continuing to live a life blending East and West (Eissa).

Rooted in her successful adaptation of East and Western lifestyles, Leila Aboulela became an acclaimed Arab novelist and a short-story writer. Her initial breakthrough and recognition came from winning the 2000 Caine Prize for African Writing. Her award-winning short story *The Museum*, focuses on the way in which the colonialist legacy continues today such that African artifacts are still curated in Scottish museums (Chambers 98). She included the story in her first anthology of short stories entitled, *Coloured Lights* (2001), where this series of stories "examines cultural hybridity and the question of whether to assimilate in a new culture or maintain cultural distinction" (Ibid). *Coloured Lights* is also a short story within the series and features the tragic main character of her two novels *The Translator* and *Minaret* (Ibid).

The Translator was Aboulela's first novel in English and was nominated for the Orange Prize in 2000. She was also nominated for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Awards in 2001. The novel addresses issues related to the translation of one's culture, place, and religion upon encountering a foreign land. Aboulela's second novel in English, *Minaret*, which came out in 2005 is a story about dislocation and migration. It encompasses Islamic religious and spiritual struggle, and exile in Britain. Like her first novel, *Minaret* was also nominated in 2006 for the Orange Prize and the IMPAC Literary Award. Her most recent novel is *Lyrics Alleys*, published in 2010, which follows the life of a family relocating to Cairo after the stirring up of tension in Sudan before the country's independence from British rule. In all of her writings, Aboulela engages Islamic and, Western discourses, and stereotypes that misrepresent and dictate Muslim female identity. Her female

protagonists challenge essentialist and reductionist labeling of their characters even when assuming an Islamic-based identity. They are dynamic characters whose cross-cultural experiences inform the nuanced details of their acquired identity. Aboulela dwells in her writing on the perspective of Muslim women who make religion a central focus of their lives. Her main characters are practising Muslim women who have a clear sense of Islam-centered personal identity. Aboulela points out in an interview in 2005 that “I am interested in writing about Islam not as an identity but going deeper and showing the state of mind and feelings of a Muslim who has faith” (Eissa). Thus, speaking in terms of religious consciousness may be more accurate than religious identity especially because Aboulela’s characters struggle more with their own relationship with Islam than with how the wider society views them. Aboulela comments:

I want to pass knowledge (I am wary of using the word teach) about Islam. The knowledge would not only be facts but also the psychology, the state of mind, and the emotions of a person who has faith. I am interested in going deep, not just looking at 'Muslim' as a culture or political identity but something close to the center, something that transcends but doesn't deny gender, nationality, class, and race (Larsen 250).

In fact, Aboulela’s contribution to Arab-Anglo literature is her ability to imagine the Muslim community (*ummah*) from a woman’s perspective and voice. Aboulela enables the reader to hear voices normally condemned to silence. Not many writers have accomplished this. She explains that her writing career came into being not only as a reaction to negative representations of Muslims in the mainstream Western media during the Gulf War in 1992, but also as an attempt to redress what she regards as the unrealistic absence of religion in some writings by Arab and Muslim writers (Eissa).

Aboulela started creative writing in an attempt to answer the need for representation for the younger generation of Muslims. Islam is the foundation and guiding model for behavior in these people’s lives and the West is their home. However, they do not see an adequate representation of themselves in contemporary fiction and daily television programs and radio (Ibid.). For this reason, Al Ghazouli in his article “Halal fiction” (2001) calls her works “Halal Literature.” He also explains how Aboulela’s writings fit in the international literary community:

What makes her writing ‘Islamic’ is not religious correctness or didacticism. Rather, it is a certain narrative logic where faith and rituals become moving modes of living. In fact, Islam re-shapes lives and behavior of the characters of the book. Religion gives a new paradigm of existence. However Aboulela’s characters are not abstract models of pious Muslims, people who always act well (12).

Aboulela’s writing is deeply rooted in her religious sensibilities and personal practise and experience. In “And My Fate was Scotland,” Aboulela recalls having to

live outside her familiar religious atmosphere as the most difficult challenge in adjusting to her new home. She explains:

I moved from heat to cold, from the Third World to the First – I adjusted, got used to the change over time. But in coming to Scotland, I also moved from a religious Muslim culture to a secular one and that move was the most disturbing of all, the trauma that no amount of time could cure, an eternal culture shock (189).

Her writings show these cultural encounters and the ensuing complications, particularly in terms of remaining a practising Muslim woman. This struggle functions as an important thematic powerhouse for many of Aboulela's stories. Examining these challenges is pivotal for the purpose of this thesis because Aboulela's works are part of a small but growing body of literature that deals with the ambitious and difficult task of portraying the world through the eyes of a believing immigrant and refugee Muslim woman.

1.10.2.1 *Minaret* (2005)

The novel consists of five chapters that shift systematically between Najwa's past in Sudan and her present exile in London. This temporal and geographic discontinuity and shifting is significant as Aboulela allows the reader to actively participate in not only the physical journey Najwa takes but also her fall from one social status to another. The reader experiences Najwa adapting a Western lifestyle, then an Islamic one, as well as an attachment to the material life, then the spiritual. The story is narrated by Najwa.

The novel depicts Najwa's internal and external struggles, and the extent to which religion is a focus of daily life as represented frequently through the image of the veil. Najwa, the protagonist, is a Sudanese Muslim woman forced into exile in Britain. She negotiates her past as an aristocratic, secular-Westernized woman living in Sudan and her present as a practising Muslim wearing the veil, living in London. We learn from the prologue that Najwa has undergone an Islamic and spiritual awakening that separates her from her previous life in Sudan as well as from her previous identity as the daughter of a corrupt politician-businessman. In chapter one, and as the narrative progresses, we journey with her back and forth between her past and present. We learn about her life in Sudan prior to the 1985 coup that led to her father's execution and her, her mother, and twin brother's exile in London. Prior to this, Najwa's family lived a life of leisure as defined by Western standards of secular materialism. Included in this Western lifestyle is the acceptance of Najwa falling in love with Anwar, a student activist of humble origins. He is involved with the communist political party that would overthrow the corrupt government, including Najwa's father. Najwa's girlfriends at the university were from her same social class, their sole interest being to live a materialistic lifestyle, as shown by the clothes they purchase, the private parties they throw, and their vacations in Europe. As Najwa's circle of friends at the university had belonged to the secular, upper-class, urban strata of Sudanese society, she is intrigued by the more traditional female students who donned traditional headscarves and *thawbs* (traditional Sudanese women's dresses).

While growing up in Khartoum, Najwa lived a secular life. After she flees to London, she similarly lives as a typical Londoner and is not particularly religious. Nonetheless, she becomes increasingly attracted to Islam in London and eventually begins life as a practising Muslim woman and starts wearing the veil. She ends her relationship with Anwar, her boyfriend, who rejects her scarf. Several years later, Najwa finds a soul-mate in the younger brother of her employer. Tamer, 20 years her junior is observant of his faith and, like her, is searching for meaning through faith and practice. Although Najwa is originally of a high level family, higher even than Tamer's family, she is now their maid and this, along with their age difference is an obstacle to their marriage. The story ends with Tamer and Najwa going their separate ways at the insistence of his mother. Najwa is not devastated, however. The struggles she endures successfully and her faith give her strength to overcome the disappointment of not getting married. Instead of marrying, she plans to go to Mecca with money that she received from Tamer's mother to start a new life. Therefore, her journey is full of liminality, detachment, alienation, and loss until she connects herself to a place that grounds her subjectivity in a sense of belonging, which is her religious identity.

In *Minaret*, correcting false representations of Muslim women is achieved by developing characters, such as Najwa, who counter Western stereotyped images. Aboulela says:

In my personal experience I have found religious people to be very interesting and positive, yet they are often depicted in novels as dull and harsh. I wanted to put my own experience in my fiction and pay tribute to the religious people who have enhanced my life (Eissa).

Aboulela provides her novel with the dichotomy of religious versus non-religious characters. Most, if not all, Muslim characters in *Minaret* are constructed with positive traits, where they are generous, kind, helpful, and seemingly sincere. Non-religious characters are portrayed in just the opposite where they tend to be shallow, mean-spirited, self-interested, and false. Najwa's twin brother, Omar, and her boyfriend, Anwar, are two such insincere and selfish characters who are devoid of religious grounding. In fact, they actively reject Islam and mock it as something backward and not compatible or desirable in a modern life. Characters who actively embrace Islam, such as Wafaa and Ali or even Tamer, are "kind and protective to others" (Aboulela 242).

1.10.3 Mohja Kahf (b. 1967)

Mohja Kahf was born in 1967 in Damascus, Syria. In 1971 she and her family migrated to the United States when she was just four-years-old so that her father could pursue a graduate degree and her mother could complete a Bachelor of Science degree in pharmacy. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree at Rutgers University, where she studied Comparative Literature and political science. She then went on to complete her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Rutgers in 1988. Kahf, who is currently an Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Arkansas, is actively engaged in both academic and creative writing, and has three children with her husband of twenty years, Najib Ghabian.

Kahf continues to make attempts to bridge the gap between the West and the Middle East through engaging in dialogues and intellectual discussions in public forums. As she grew up, she became aware of the Syrian struggle against the authoritarian rule of her government and equally aware of anti-Muslim sentiments and ignorance in America, where her family's Islamic center faced regular vandalism by the Ku Klux Klan (the "KKK"), a White supremacist and racist organization once common in the American South (Abdul Ghafur). After the family moved to Plainville, Indiana, Kahf experienced a great deal of bigotry and oppression, which left an indelible mark on her, but also helped to shape her poetic vision. She notes:

I remember the actual moment and day when I knew how to not take it anymore . . . to whirl around and say something back, and to have that shock of, oh, what I say can actually be effective in some way. That voice is still in me" (Davis; et al. 385).

Many of the scenes of racism and violence in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) seem to be drawn from Kahf's own childhood experiences in Indiana. These biographical details combined inform Kahf's deep sense of empathy for those whose home spaces are inhospitable or those whose homes have been destroyed, as is evident in her poems for Iraqi and Palestinian refugees in *E-mails from Scheherazad* (2003).

Her works resist hegemonized images of Arab-Anglos and Muslim women in America critiquing the mainstream and its representations of them. Kahf writes of cultural disparities encountered by Muslims in America, focusing on Muslim to non-Muslim conflict as well as Muslim to Muslim associations and the contentions amongst them. Her viewpoint disputes hegemonic imagery of Arab-Anglos, and Muslim women in particular, and reviews mainstream representations of the culture.

Kahf has published poetry for over ten years in literary journals such as *Arab Studies Quarterly*, *Exit 9*, *Cyphers Literary Journal*, and *World Literature Today*, among others. She has also contributed to a number of edited collections, namely, *The Space between Our Footsteps: Poems and Painting from the Middle East* (1998), *The Poetry of Arab Women: An Anthology* (2000), *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers* (2000), *Scheherazade's Legacy* (2004) and *Dinarzad's Children: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Fiction* (2009). She also writes a regular sex advice column called "Sex and the Umma" for the progressive Islamic website *Muslim Wakeup*. Her writings include "Huda Sha'rawi's Mudhakkirati: The Memoirs of the First Lady of Arab Modernity" (In *World Literature Today* 1998), "Politics and Erotics in Nizar Kabbani's Poetry: From the Sultan's Wife to the Lady Friend" (In *World Literature Today*, 2000), "Braiding the Stories: Women's Eloquence in the Early Islamic Era" in *Windows of Faith: Muslim Women's Scholarship and Activism*, edited by Gisela Webb (Syracuse UP, 2000) "Wild Thorns" (In *World Literature Today* 2000) and "Dunyazad" (In *World Literature Today* 2002). She has also published poetry in literary journals for many years with her poems being in popular magazines such as *The Paris Review* (#164) and *The Atlanta Review* (Fall/Winter 2001). Her three major works represent the most sustained exploration of her writing: *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque* (University of Texas, 1999) and her

collection of poetry *E-mails from Scheherazad* (University Press of Florida, 2003), which was a finalist for the Paterson Literary Prize in 2004. Her next major work, a novel, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, in 2006 was particularly embraced by the Arab-Anglo community. She is currently influenced by the demonstrations in the Arab world especially in her country, Syria. She comments:

When I saw videos showing tens of thousands of Syrians pouring into the street... A dam broke inside me. Like many Syrians abroad, I had long ago come to terms with my despair that Syria and its people would not emerge from under this dictatorship during my lifetime (Kahf 3).

All of Kahf's writing in some way delves into the struggle of the experiences of immigrants, particularly Arabs, and Muslims in the context of an American or Western society that generally misreads such identities. In "Supplies of Grace: The Poetry of Mohja Kahf," Lisa Suhair Majaj comments that Kahf is:

A literary virtuoso, shaking the staid ground of predictability and launching her readers into new literary vistas. Whatever her genre, Kahf offers articulate, passionate challenges to commonplace perceptions of the Middle East, Muslim women and Arab-Anglos (1).

However, Kahf has written more than poetry and novels and therefore a brief survey of her non-fiction work *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman*, is necessary to generate a more informed reading of *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, which is covered in detail in the following chapter. The critical reception of her work has been generally quite positive. *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman*, which was based on her dissertation on the changing images of Muslim women in literature, was praised for adding "an important dimension to the study of Western attitudes towards the Muslim world" (Hale 674). Laurence Michalak argues that Kahf is:

An enthusiastic reteller and analyst of tales" who effectively debunks "the enduring tropes in the Western imagination" of the Muslim woman as "secluded, oppressed, and either longing for liberation or ignorant in her false consciousness (438-640).

The general consensus on this text is that it "offers a painstaking analysis" by "drawing from a vast body of literature" (479). In this non-fiction book, Kahf charts the production of the Muslim woman in Medieval, Renaissance, and Enlightenment literature. Examining Medieval and Renaissance works of 11th through 18th centuries, Kahf writes that the Muslim women of pre-colonial Western literary works were multivalent and diverse: they were cast as blond and dark-haired, light and dark-skinned; their roles ranged from giantesses to termagants, from matrons to princess brides (167). By the 18th century, however, Kahf observes a calcification in the character of the Muslim woman in Western literature. Rather than a multiplicity of roles, the Muslim woman is fixed into a single typology: she appears most often

as a passive, sexual degenerate victim. Kahf's genealogy fills a vacuum in scholarship about representation of Muslim women; namely, the Muslim woman produced by Westerners in the pre-colonial period. It also richly captures the "transformation" of the Muslim woman authored between the pre-colonial and colonial eras. In contrasting pre-colonial "variation" with colonial "uniformity," Kahf demonstrates the linkages between colonial power and the production of knowledge about the "Muslim woman." As Leti Volpp argues in her essay "The Citizen and the Terrorist," in a post-9/11 America:

those who inhabit the vulnerable category of appearing Middle Easterners, Arab, or Muslim have had to . . . as a matter of personal safety, drape their dwellings, workplaces, and bodies with flags in an often futile attempt at demonstrating their loyalty" (1584).

Despite these efforts, government officials and civilians regularly engage in the practice of racial profiling, and incidents of hate crimes against Arabs and Arab-Anglos have skyrocketed.

Western Representation of the Muslim Woman is a useful starting point for better understanding the challenges that Arab and Muslim women have faced historically, and consequently helps to point toward ways of generating "creative collectivities" by revising the deep-rooted narratives that continue to foster patterns of exclusion and division (Davis et al., 378). Kahf recognizes that America has such a diverse population of peoples, who all migrated to America either willingly or by force (as in African slaves). These immigrants arrived in a land already populated by a diverse native population, which they proceeded to eradicate. For this reason, Kahf is very aware that America is embattled in bitter racial issues, and does not have a good track record in this regard. After 9/11, Kahf is very aware that an already ethnically and religiously divisive nation became more so. Skin color, ethnicity, manner of dress, and religion contributed to the 'Arab' becoming a focus of the country's existing racism.

1.10.3.1 The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf (2006)

Through this novel, Kahf contextualizes the Arab-Anglo experience and culture, and historicizes the Muslim woman's practice of veiling. She situates it within cultural, social and religious contexts so as to counter distorted narratives of Arab-Americans and the Middle East. Kahf undermines the depiction of Muslim women common in America where it is essentially about Muslims and women's identity in particular. The novel's cover photo of a woman wearing jeans and an orange colored scarf over her head while gazing toward the camera challenges Western expectations that Muslim Arab women are restricted from wearing brightly colored clothing. At the same time, the statements of critical acclaim found on the novel's back cover clearly indicate that challenging the stereotypes of Muslims in Western media was a significant goal in writing her novel. This means also that Kahf transmits many implicit messages about Muslim women regarding Islam and the West. These messages speak of multiple Muslim identities, not a singular and stereotyped identity, for Muslim Arab-American women in America.

The author uses the narrative technique of starting near the story's end then flashing back to the main character's childhood and chronologically progressing through to adulthood and then integrating with the novel's beginning to create a conclusion. Great emphasis, through the character of Khadra, is placed on the formation of the Muslim American woman's identity and finding a space for her individual voice among the many conflicting voices of the East and the West, Muslim and secular in America.

In *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, Kahf chronicles important events that occurred after the 9/11 attacks in America as these events have been proven to have affected the lives of Arab-Anglos profoundly. The novel is about an Arab-Anglo female's journey in search of identity where, through the protagonist's journey into herself and the Middle East, Khadra attempts coming to terms with her Arab and Islam identities as well as her American identity.

Khadra, the protagonist in the novel, is a Syrian immigrant Muslim woman residing in the United States. She grew up in Indiana within a religiously observant and close-knit family and Muslim community. In that community, her parents were founders of a religious outreach center for the growing Muslim population in the American Midwest. In Khadra's teenage years, she develops a greater awareness of her religion and begins to question apparent hypocrisies and contradictions in the community center her parents helped to establish. She begins a religious journey that brings her to a deeper understanding of her faith. After two years at the local university, she marries an engineering student from Kuwait thinking that is the dutiful thing to do as a young woman. Khadra is unable to suppress her taken-for-granted freedoms found within American culture nor is she able to compromise. As a result, her marriage ends in divorce. Khadra then travels to Syria in search of her familial and cultural roots. While in Syria she finds an ability to be less dogmatic in her religious and secular views and this flexibility results in her ability to return to her faith. Upon her return to the United States, Khadra starts a new life with new beginnings. Rather than return to her former university and live with her parents again, she moves to another state and enrolls on a degree in fine arts as a photographer and becomes a photojournalist. After a time of working, she even starts to think of marriage to a childhood friend whose first marriage also ended in divorce.

Throughout her journey in search for a coherent identity, Kahf exposes Khadra to a wide range of options, lifestyles and Muslim individuals that help her develop her identity. Khadra meets a variety of practising and secular Muslims, as well as empowered and traditional Muslim men and women, who all add to her experience and knowledge of what Islam is all about. Khadra struggles throughout the narrative, trying to understand what it means to be a Muslim, an American, an Arab and a woman simultaneously. Part of Khadra's journey is to find a way to connect the varying characters she encounters and their treatment of the veil.

1.11 Definitions of Key Terms and Concepts

1.11.1 The Veil

In my study, the veil, also known as the *hijab*, occupies a central space symbolically for Islam. Conversations about Islam almost invariably seem to address the debate about the veil because it stands visually and symbolically as a reminder of

conservative religion and identity (El Guindi 3). The dictionary meaning assigned to the word “veil” is “a covering” and includes the concepts of to conceal or disguise. In my study, the veil may mean a piece of cloth worn over the head and shoulders by women. In this study, the word ‘veil’ is used interchangeably with headscarf and *hijab* because that is the way it is used in the selected novels. Throughout the selected novels, Abdel-Fattah, Aboulela, and Kahf focus on varying aspects of the veil whose role is underlined in the *Qur’an* in the twenty-fourth chapter, *Surah An-Nur*:

And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment save to their own husbands or fathers or husbands’ fathers, or their sons or their husbands’ sons, or their brothers or their brothers’ sons or sisters’ sons, or their women, or their slaves, or male attendants who lack vigor, or children who know naught of women’s nakedness. And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment. And turn unto Allah together, O believers, in order that ye may succeed (Abdel Haleem 31).

I also use the words interchangeably to show the difficulty of not falling into the trap of conflating them in the public imagination whenever the issues of Islam and women come up.

I.11.2 Identity

Identity, like the veil, is a key term in my study and refers to the ways in which one demarcates and makes sense of oneself. It generally entails locating oneself within a range of categories or formulating a description and account of who and what one is. There are a number of ways that scholars have defined identity, all with similar core sociological and psychological features. Khan, in his book *Religion and Immigration: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Experiences in the United States* (2003), describes identity formation as:

A complex process that allows for the intervention of both historical and material forces and human agency. In the specific case of the Muslim community in North America, one can clearly see that both historical forces and political agencies are shaping the emerging identity of American Muslims, the political forces both local and global in nature (175).

Understanding identities is critical and Khan states the reason as being that they determine the course of utilizing agency (Ibid). This process has been ongoing for immigrant Muslims but seems to have accelerated after 9/11, when the Muslim community seemed to rise in search of its identity. This rising has been an opportunity for looking at the ways in which race, class, and gender affect immigrant Muslim women.

My hypothesis of the various constructions of Arab immigrant women's identity and the crises that occur in its development through struggles and conflicts of loyalty, proceeds from the assumption that Abdel-Fattah, Aboulela, and Kahf write from the stance of a minority woman because of the veil. I suggest that the identity that Arab female writers relates to in their selected novels affirms that Muslim-Australian, Muslim-English, or Muslim-Americans are entitled to belong in the West, with their multiple identifications (as Muslims, Western, Arabs) complementing rather than contradicting each other.

1.11.3 Liminality

Liminality is a ritual apace or phase of transition in which a person is no longer what they were, but is not yet what they will be. The liminal is the in-between, the neither one thing nor the other. The concept was used by anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep (*Rites de Passage*, 1908) and then developed further by Victor Turner in his book, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969). Turner describes the variety of rituals performed by primitive tribes that facilitate the passage of children to adulthood. He distinguishes "two phases of liminality in his theory: crisis, separation" (Turner 25). For the transition stage (liminality), Turner chose the word "liminal"; the Latin for "threshold" (Ibid.).

In my study, I use this anxiety of transition/threshold experience to examine the literary works of Arab immigrant Muslim women writers. One of the key conflicts I explore in my examination of the selected novels of Arab immigrant Muslim woman writers is the ritual associated with liminality and the conflicts of veiling the female protagonists experiences over identifying with Western or Eastern communities. The story plots in the novels follow phases of crisis, separation, and transition. With their phases of crisis, separation, and transition Abdel-Fattah, Aboulela, and Kahf plots read like Turners own description of the rituals:

Rites of passage...involve temporal processes and agonistic relations-novices or initiands are separated...from a previous social state or status, compelled to remain in seclusion during the liminal space, submitted to ordeal by initiated seniors or elders (*The Ritual Process* 78).

It is in this way that Turner theorizes about the ways in which the details of everyday life (quotidian) are interconnected, learned and shared. Further discussions of the concept of liminality in the literature of Arab immigrant Muslim women writers will be presented in the next chapters.

1.11.4 Hybridity

Hybridity is a concept used in contemporary postcolonial studies (Ashcroft et al 1989; 1990; Mishra 1991; Sholat 1992; Ashcroft 1995; Rajan 1995) and the broader discourse of cultural studies (Grossberg 1992) to theorize and encourage a state of "mixedness-a mixedness of culture, races, ethnicities, nations, and so on" (Baldick 344). This concept carried negative connotations in colonial and imperial discourse of the 19th century as it was used to signify what 'white' races had to fear if

miscegenation was left unchecked. Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) pioneered exploring the implication of hybridity in *Rabelais and his World* (1965). In his book he discussed “the capacity of the chaotic pleasures of the medieval carnival to challenge the authority of the church” (344). For Bakhtin, the hybridity of celebrations such as the medieval carnival is rooted in their diversity expressed through narrative. Similarly, he contends, “polyphonic narratives have the potential to call into question authoritative discourse” (Ibid).

Hybridity that Bakhtin examined is a concept frequently associated with Homi Bhabha. He developed a theoretical framework for addressing cultural difference and a conceptual vocabulary for talking about hybridity, particularly in terms of what he calls the “third space” (Bhabha 1994; Bhabha 1996; Rutherford 1990). The various ways hybridity has been used analytically is considered problematic by some scholars (Mitchell 1997; Werbner 1997). In colonial discourse, people who are of mixed ancestries may consider hybridity a derogatory concept due to nineteenth-century beliefs in the superiority of racial purity and the racist impact on scientific racist thought at the time (Young 1995). Despite this unpleasant past, Papastergiadis suggests that negative terms may have potential to free people from stigma. He poses the question “should we use only words with a pure and inoffensive history, or should we challenge essentialist models of identity by taking on and then subverting their own vocabulary” (Papastergiadis 258).

In my study, I use Bhabha’s discussions of national minorities and global migrants, using the concepts of hybridity and the third space that he developed in *The Location of Culture* (1994), in order to examine the tension between identities that creates a space for a new identity, which embraces aspects of each affiliation. Bhabha’s concepts of hybridity and the third space have been major concepts used by the Arab immigrant Muslim women writers. In the selected novels I analyze, boundaries of the East and the West meet and blur at times. The spiritual journeys the authors and their female protagonists take between those two worlds defy any fixed notion of experience and subjectivity. According to Bhabha, the colonial authority tries to render the identity of the colonized within a fixed framework but fails, producing the “otherness of the self” (44). In the following chapters, more discussions about the use of this concept in the literary works of Arab immigrant Muslim women writers will be presented

1.11.5 Globalization

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, globalization became a process that affects migrants, exile, their diasporic communities, and how their identities are rapidly affected by enormous transnational flows of people, commodities and ideas. Globalization is “the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice-versa” (Giddens, 1990, 64). Featherstone (1995, 72) believes that globalization “entails the sense that the world is one place, that the globe has been compressed into a locality, that others are neighbours with whom we must necessarily interact, relate and listen”. Transnational flows of capital, globalization of culture and politics, and advanced transportation have made travelling, migration, exile, refugees and other forms of displacement common experiences of different groups of people worldwide (Anzaldúa, 1999; Gupta and Ferguson, 1992, 18). These subjects, in the course of their travel, experience the intersection of multiple,

sometimes conflicting, cultural associations. As a result, these identities undergo constant transformation and “multiply, constructed across different, often antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions” (Hall, 1996, 4). This is especially true for Arab Muslim women who migrate, in exile or not, to the West and mark their Islamic identity through wearing the veil.

1.11.6 Ritual in Turner’s Theory

Turner is the first writer to give real substance to the term of *ritual*. By the end of the 19th and the early 20th century, there was not a clear theory of *ritual* so much as a field of associations gravitating around a series of related words: ritual, rite, magic, sacrifice, feast, ceremony and religious practice. I believe that it is Turner who has given this term substance. His contribution is to associate ritual with a vocabulary distanced from social order, using concepts like *liminality*, *communitas*, *drama*, *performance*, and *experience*. These concepts lay the groundwork for an imaginary of the social not as a fixed structure but as a relatively unstable field that, while punctuated by regularities, is not necessarily defined by them. In initiating this transformation, Turner gives birth to the term of ritual as a type of *critical object* and as a *creative process* through which to understand human social (*Dramas, Fields and Metaphors* 273). Thus, the term *ritual* mediates a series of tensions: between action and meaning, between representation and power, between the social understood as a structure and the social understood as the emotive force of collectivity.

In my study, I use the term *ritual* in order to create the context for understanding the role of particular types of social action, supplying the vocabulary to examine many of the key issues scholars encounter in exploring at religious and even secular life. The term *ritual* itself is a response to a set of questions about the relationship between sacred action and social life.

1.12 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The Introduction sets the stage for the reader by presenting the thesis statement and topic of the present study, explaining the scope, significance, and purpose. In Chapter Two, I present the various common representations of Arabs in general and the Muslim women specifically in media and literary scholarship. This chapter also provides accounts of Arab immigrant women writers’ cultural responses to 9/11 upon their shift from invisibility to visibility. The chapter will also focus on the semiotic complexities involved in the Muslim veil as an object that has almost invariably become a defining feature of Muslim female subjectivity despite the fact that it is not the only distinctive emblem of Muslim identity. It finally includes a review of past studies on Abdel-Fattah, Aboulela, and Kahf’s selected novels related to the image of the veil and identity issue.

Chapter Three explains the method by which I conduct my analysis of the three novels and their authors. In this chapter, I explain the close reading and textual analysis used and how key terms, such as the veil and identity, need to be defined in order to assist the analysis of my research objectives. The technique of showing how specific sections of dialogue, narration, or description act as the evidence of the

liminal journey or hybrid identity is explained. Unlike so many other analyses found in the literature search, my analysis will show the reader how the fictive characters go through liminal experiences and actively construct hybrid identities rather than simply say that they do. Instead of *saying*, the fiction is an example of Arab immigrant Muslim women having a voice and not being simple objects of patriarchy authority for wearing the veil, my approach *shows* where exactly this is the case with evidence quoted from the novels.

I have divided my textual analyses into two separate chapters: Chapter Four primarily focuses on the artistic ways the selected novels reframe the veil and the protagonists' experiences of veiling and unveiling through applying Turner's concept of liminality to *Does My Head Look Big In This?*, *Minaret*, and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*. The chapter will also examine how the protagonist negotiates her position within the Muslim community as well as her Western surroundings and explores the nature of the protagonist's relation to religion, Islam, the veil, and the Arab culture along with her Western identity. The path the protagonist decides to take is shown and the space she has created for herself, in which she strives to find peace with herself and her heritage, is discussed. Boundaries of private and public are further examined in a reinvented space where she is liberated and her Arab and Muslim heritage no longer conflict with her allegiance to the West.

Chapter Five will emphasize the issue of hybridity and how Abdel-Fattah, Aboulela, and Kahf's protagonists have sought to create a third space for themselves in between the two cultures they belong to and have adopted certain values taken from each culture. This hybridity model also reflects the struggle of Arab immigrant Muslim woman writers as well.

Chapter Six, the conclusion, provides a summary of the entire study followed by discussion on whether my research objectives have been achieved and research questions have been addressed. I then end with recommendations for further research. Findings from the analysis using liminality and hybridity are reiterated and how the insight gained about Arab Muslim immigrant women writers in the West may suggest new studies of Muslim women elsewhere are warranted.

1.13 Conclusion

This study stresses the need to conduct a careful analysis of Arab immigrant Muslim female writers in the West where after 9/11, Muslim immigrant women in the West in fiction, as a reflection of real-life, have been experiencing a struggle over their identities as either women who are mindful of their religion and respectful of their cultural traditions or women who are liberated by Western values and modernity from their religion and heritage. This struggle takes its shape through the act of wearing the Muslim veil/scarf/*hijab* or taking it off. Whether the woman wears the veil or takes it off, she still struggles with acceptance and rejection by the West or her religion and Muslim community.

Female protagonists created by immigrant Muslim women writers living in the West are caught between a rock and a hard place but nonetheless must create their own identity or live with identities imposed upon them by those in patriarchal authority or hegemonic control. This study uses a unique theoretical approach to understand protagonists in English literature by and about immigrant Muslim women in the West. Victor Turner's concept of liminality in his theory rites of passage, and Homi

Bhabha's theory of hybridity and the third space are used to examine how fictional characters experience their dilemmas and find themselves enough to create their own identities that is neither traditionalist or liberal. This framework results in showing the process and outcome of struggle, symbolized by the veil, such that each immigrant woman is unique and the diversity of immigrant Muslim women is brought to light. My study results in seeing immigrant Muslim women, fictional or otherwise, in her diverse beauty and personal agency.



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