

## FEMALE SELF-DETERMINATION IN CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S *JANE EYRE* AND LAILA ABOULELA'S *THE TRANSLATOR*

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### Abstract

In most cultures, if not all, women have suffered a lot from subjugation for centuries. It is rare to find a society that confesses that a woman is strong and she can live independently. That is because the woman has always been marked as “other” or something complementary to the man. However, this article is an attempt to contradict this negative image of the woman and proves that she has enough self-determination to stand against traditions and rules that are prescribed by society, and choose the best for herself without any outside interference. To accomplish this attempt, the researcher has selected two female characters from two different English novels and analysed them from a feminist point of view. They are Jane Eyre, the main character of *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, and Sammar, the main character of *The Translator* by Leila Aboulela. The study depends on a close reading to trace the lives of the characters throughout the novels to extract the situations that reflect female determination. As it is shown at the end of the study, both female characters present a good example of female self-determination. They can face society's dictations that obliged them to go against their needs and wishes. On one side, Jane Eyre refuses to get married to a rich and married man because she believes that a man must have only one wife in his life, otherwise he would be disloyal. Sammar, on the other hand, remains conservative to her beliefs and religion. She does not get rid of her conventions at any cost, though she lives abroad alone and far from her own home. She also refuses to get married to a non-Muslim until he converts his religion to Islam.

**Key words:** feminism, female self-determination, *Jane Eyre*, *The Translator*, *female determination*

## 1. Introduction

The unjust status that women have undergone for hundreds of years cannot be denied. English literature is rich with examples that reveal how much women have been subjected to oppression and subjection in all aspects of life; social, political, educational, etc. Since the Victorian age, English women have suffered from men's and society's dominance. Perhaps, that age was the worst in the history of English women when patriarchal moral values and culture favoured visibly gender segregation in a way that it would satisfy men worldwide, Joan (1995). Though the 19<sup>th</sup> century has witnessed the greatest scientific advancement in the world and the name of England was used as an example of modernity and advancement, women's status painfully deteriorated. Women were deprived from basic rights and wives became property to their husbands, giving them rights to what their bodies produced: children, sex, and domestic labour, Buckner and Francis (2005). Nevertheless, the situation did not last long, women realized that it was time to say "No" to such hegemony. Of course, that awareness was not sudden or born within minutes, but it took years of struggle and the pressure of cumulative hatred hidden behind a wall of patience. When it found the way, it exploded. The explosion of women's voices against inequality among sexes is given a specific term in literary studies. That is *feminism*.

The term 'feminism' is derived from the Latin word 'femina' which means 'woman'. Then its meaning differed from one feminist to another. For example, Moi (1999) defines *feminism* as "a concept we use to criticize the oppression of women." (p.47). Hannam (2007), defines *feminism* as "a recognition of an imbalance of power between the sexes, with a woman in a subordinate role to men, a belief that woman's condition is socially constructed and therefore can be changed, and an emphasis on female autonomy" (p.2). And according to Saudi and Rusfandi (2016), *feminism* is "a collection of movements and ideologies that share a common goal to define, establish, and achieve equal political, economic, cultural, personal, and social rights for women" (p.8). However, this diversity in defining the term *feminism* does not go far from its core meaning, which is a state of awakening that struck the minds of women in the previous century as a response to patriarchal hegemony.

The feminist movement is not as recent as some researchers might think. Perhaps it flourished in the 1960s, but its roots go back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century when Mary Wollstonecraft published her work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792. Monroe (1989) argued that this work was the first truly feminist treatise that was admitted by the English public. It is always taken as the first seed in the field of feminist work as it opened the door to the following feminist advocates like Virginia Woolf and Elaine Showalter who continued the same path and helped the voice of women reach broad parts of the world. Though the movement was divided into waves, and each one focused on a specific aspect of women's rights, their demands were the same. All the waves aimed at getting the recognition of the inequality among sexes and the question of justice. The exact number of these waves is still negotiable because some historians argue that there are three and others argue there are four. However, those waves, in one way or another, had an effective role in shaping the current western *feminism*, whose impact can be noticed in many literary works, politics, and other fields of study.

The first wave of *feminism* emerged when women fought for an equal right to vote and equal access to the parliament. Mary Wollstonecraft was announced as the leader of this wave because she was the first to introduce the idea of rational equality among sexes. In her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), she calls for the rational freedom of women, and she believes that a woman is not born for home and domestic work only, but the woman is part of a country's advancement, and the mother at home is like a teacher to the nation's sons. The second wave emerged with Simone de Beauvoir's work *The Second Sex* (1949), in which she criticizes male dominance, and encourages the need of women to get rid of weakness and feeling inferior, and to have the right to access the resources of society and decision-making. So, this wave is more social and legal than political. The third wave is a continuation of the previous wave. It began in the 1990s to call for social justice for women. It extended into postcolonial *feminism*, ecofeminism, and gender studies. The fourth wave started in 2012. It is different from the others as it concerns technology and concepts such as body positivity, women's representation in the media, and sexist advertisements. Feminist waves, with their different approaches to women's freedoms, have affected the theory of literary criticism in the 20th century, and they became source of female issues that the current century considers them fundamental.

The recognition of inequality among sexes has been accepted by journalists, writers, and much more by literary critics. This recognition is a step toward change. Hunnam, in her work *The Book of Feminism* (2007), confirms that imbalance among sexes is socially constructed, and it takes place because of social conceptions, not because it is biological. So, changing it is not impossible. Females can reject any conventions that deprive them of enjoying their rights. The belief that women are the "others" and men are the "default" and that "humanity is male, and man defines woman not herself, but as relative to him" (Beauvoir, 2007, p. 11) must vanish. The matter needs only a little bit of determination and strength from the women's side. That was exactly what happened; English female fiction writers encouraged women's outbreak of consciousness and used their skill of writing to express their point of view in this regard. They played a vital role in depicting female self-determination in their fiction.

The portrayal of female self-determination in literature has occupied a wide space of discussion in many academic conferences, published articles, and social and educational research, largely after the recognition of women's rights in the late 1960s onwards. Among these studies, is Mir's study in 2014 which examined the state of women's oppression, suppression, and self-determination in three novels written by Anita Desai, namely, *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), *Clear Light of Day* (1980) and *Fasting, Feasting* (1999). After executing a close reading of the selected novels, Mar finds that Desai's women are subjected to varying degrees of oppression, but they do not stand paralyzed and silently accept that oppression. Instead, they experienced various degrees of self-determination to achieve freedom from patriarchal control. Perhaps, at the end of their struggle, they cannot achieve full liberation, not because of their weakness but because of their isolation from the community.

In 2017, another similar study was conducted by Budi and Widyastuti. This study explores female determination in Alice Walker's novel, entitled *The Color Purple*. It tries to identify how the characteristics of the female character, Celie, are used to point out the oppressions that she experiences and how her self-determination helps her to fight the oppressions she faces. Though Celie is introduced as an uneducated and unattractive woman in the story, she proves her ability to manage her life as she wants. She leaves her husband, who is a source of problems for her, and

goes with Memphis who helps her run her own business, and she lives a life without any kind of oppression.

Yeseibo in 2018 also conducted a study to explore female determination in the play *She No Longer Weeps* (1987) by Tsitsi Dangarembga. Yeseibo found that this play has gained worldwide fame because of its focus on the woman's struggle for self-definition and determination against patriarchal power. The protagonist, Martha, is introduced with incomparable self-assertiveness. Her resistance to refuse man's control and go against the culture is the dominant feature of her from the beginning of the play till the end. She, in the end, can secure herself and prove her ability to empower herself educationally and economically. She can also contribute meaningfully to economic growth and make informed decisions about her personal life. Through Martha, the playwright conveys that culture should not be a tool of oppression and marginalization at the hands of men.

Fauzia and Rahayu (2019) attempted to explore Afghan women's determination to gain opportunities to move forward in their society. The analysis of this study focuses on the female characters in Nadia Hashimi's *A House Without Windows* (2016). They are Zeba, Gulnaz, Latifa, Mezghan, Bibi Shireen, the wife of judge Najeeb, Sitara, Meena, and Aneesa. All of them were able to build a kind of self-consciousness to make the decision and declare their resistance against men and society. They struggled to get their basic rights, such as the right to speak, to get an education, and to work and earn money identically like men. They succeeded in that, as it is seen in the end when researchers verified that the strong self-awareness and determination that were reflected through the female characters of this novel, were the primary steps to getting rid of male dominance and proceeding further in life as well as in society.

Like those studies, there are loads of articles that are presented to mainly portray females' determination in their journey of passing over all obstacles in life. As it can be noticed from the previous studies, women throughout the world are subjected to the same oppression and subjection, but their determination to reject that oppression is clear. Regardless of the nationality of the novelists or the methods of analysis used by the researchers, the aim and result are the same. The current study, however, is different. It is meant to make a comparison between female

determination in the past and present. The time gap between the two novels of this study is 150 years, a century and a half. The first novel is *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë. The second novel is *The Translator* (1990) by Laila Aboulela. The goal behind this choice for the sample is to prove that neither time nor place can change a woman if she has rigid faith and determination in herself.

## **Female self-determination in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre***

Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) was born to Patrick and Maria Brontë in Thornton near Bradford. Her father typically practiced patriarchal dominance over his daughters. He was socially very conservative. He moved to live with his family in a very rural and far place just to keep his daughters from indulging in the new trends that invaded English society at that time such as the quest for women's equality with men in work and education. Perhaps this was the reason why Brontë and her other two sisters sought freedom in reading and writing. All three sisters were novelists and their works gained worldwide fame in English literature. Brontë was influenced greatly by Mary Shelley, Jane Austen, Byron, and others. She read lots of Blackwood's Magazine and German-translated stories. This obsession with reading developed in her the skill of writing. She started her career in writing at a young age. She dreamed of being a famous novelist, which she accomplished, but the cost was high. Brontë struggled a lot before fulfilling her dream. She first tried to run a private school, but she failed. Then, she published a book of poems under the masculine names of Acton, Ellis, and Currer Bell at her own expense but the book also did not receive many positive reviews, only two copies were sold in a few months. After that, she decided to pursue a career in writing novels, but her effort was neither easy nor rewarded with immediate appreciation. She continued in her way of determination till she could finance herself, and her efforts were finally crowned by one outstanding work. That is *Jane Eyre*. So, it can be said that the life of Charlotte Brontë herself is a good example of female determinations. She did not surrender to the obstacles that she faced but showed a strong determination instead.

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) is Brontë's masterpiece that was produced in the 19th century. It is written to portray women in their brightest positive image. It is a biographical work

through which the writer shows her personal life to rebel against the traditions of society at that time and to call women to uncover the veil of bondage. At first glance, the reader can understand that Jane Eyre is a typical copy of Brontë herself but in the form of words. Like Brontë, Eyre has undergone difficult circumstances in her life because of social traditions that tied the hands of women to performing any social activities such as education, working, and even writing. Eyre's struggle in life is shown from her childhood till she becomes a lady. Throughout her life, she shows an incredible sample of a strong woman who has one target in life. That is to live for herself and for the moralities that she prefers to follow, not what society dictates.

*Jane Eyre* is a bildungsroman novel written to explore a woman's determination in all her stages of age in many contexts; education, financial independence, and building self-identity. Starting from the protagonist's childhood, Eyre is introduced as an orphan, and her aunt, Reed, takes care of her after the death of Jane's parents. Eyre is not happy with her stay in her aunt's house because her aunt and her sons are good examples of rudeness and nonhumanity. They are shown without empathy toward Eyre. They are meant to represent the negative side of the society that hates women because they are women. Reed and her sons hate Eyre because she is a girl. Girls in Eyre's time are treated as useless objects. They are considered sources of shame and burdens. They burdened their families with food and drink and are consumers more than producers. So, Reeds and her sons practice different kinds of torture on Eyre. They hurt and beat her a lot. Eyre's torture becomes a habit and the Red Room, the darkest room in the house, becomes Eyre's place. Though she is kept there to receive the hardest kinds of punishments, she can change that room to a place of inspiration. It becomes her safest place where she discovers that she is a different girl, and she deserves a better life. Here, the Red Room can be taken as a sample of Eyre's designated life because the only strong people are those who can transform bad situations into a means of success. So, Eyre's story of determination can be traced from that dark point, Dark Red Room.

The interesting point in Eyre's turning point in her life from a weak girl to a strong is when she has been sent to the Red Room. The reason is that she shouts at her aunt's son, John. This John is the real source of Eyre's disturbance. His character is created to represent men's dominance over women at that time. He loves to abuse and bothers Jane all the time and because she is a girl, she

is expected to show no resistance to anything. Roles are divided in these ways. Men talk and women obey. Finally, when John wants to practice his hegemony on Jane and tries to physically harm her, she hides her fear and anger stands strongly against him, and shouts at him. She calls him “a murderer” and “a slavedriver” and she compares him to “the Roman emperors” (Brontë, 1847, p.6). As a man, John goes crazy about how a girl dares to stand and raise her voice on him like that. Yes, women are expected to say ok to everything even if they are raped. For men’s physical and sexual needs, women are created. Here John cannot accept this humiliation and he poisons his mom’s head against Eyre until finally, the aunt sends the girl to an internal school, Lowood Institution for Girls funded by donations.

Eyre’s move to the internal school lines her independence through education. The horrible life that she spends with her aunt opens her eyes to the fact that only through education she can free herself from society and its constraints. She works hard to improve her intellectual skills. She becomes one of the good students in the school. She can form good relationships with her teachers, and she learns a lot from them. She also becomes one of the good teachers. Even in her journey of education, Eyre shows enough determination to achieve her goal. The source of disturbance in her education way is also a man. She is obliged to stand against male hegemony, but here not against her cousin but against Mr. Brocklehurst, the manager of the school who appears to her as a black pillar. The manager is introduced as an atypical Victorian man who tries to utilize his power in the school to subjugate girls and teachers as well. He uses religion to threaten the naughty girls by sending the disobeyed ones to hell after death. As Jane is regarded as one of the naughty girls, she is promised to be sent to hell. Nevertheless, Jane appears not to care about what the man says. She tells him openly that she will not die. She will take care of her health and be strong. “I must keep in good health and not die” (Brontë, 1847, p.26). These words superficially make no sense. They are only uttered by a young girl who does not know what even death does mean. The underlying meaning however is different. It means that Eyre is different. She does not receive that threat easily like other girls, but she rejects the idea of death and promises to avoid it by eating and drinking well. So, she is determined to face death by life and then she will not need to face the horrible punishments of the manager. Jane’s determination to keep herself strong and not follow society’s rules to finding herself weak in the end and then



dying, as happens to many girls who are shown as weak and sick, and they eventually die. Like this, Jane continues her life in school till she turns 18. The death of her closest friend in school affects her so much. She then decides to find a job and leave the school.

By leaving the school, Eyre's determination transfers from having a good education to having a good job. These two things were not easy to gain in Eyre's area. Women of the middle class were only capable of approaching schools and jobs. The good jobs at that time were teachers or babysitters, but Eyre can obtain both though she is an orphan and poor. She does not belong to the middle class, and she does not have a family. She has only her determination plus her strong intention to become a special woman. Despite all the bad circumstances that Jane has undergone, she has been a special and independent girl since her childhood, neither the humiliation of her cousin, John, nor the oppression of Mr. Brocklehurst makes her give up or try not to take life easily. She instead starts a new life with a strong will. She moves to Thornfield Hall where she works as a governess to earn some money and go on with her life.

Moving to Thornfield Hall draws a new beginning on Eyre's journey of self-building and determination. She is an educated lady now and she must find a job to support her life independently. On her way to financial independence, she meets Mr. Rochester, the owner of Thornfield Hall. Though she has never planned to find a man to help her or to fall in love with him because she has never thought to allow a man to direct her life, her fate is not as she planned. The presence of a man in her life seems inevitable. In each stage of her age, she faces a man to contribute to Eyre's personality shaping. The difference with Mr. Rochester is that Eyre admires him from the first scene when she sees him riding his horse going back home. "Mr. Rochester rides into Jane's life as a fairy tale dark prince resembling a Byronic hero" (Andersson, 2011, p.10). Eyre cannot hide her admiration for Mr. Rochester who is "as exactly one form of Bessie's Gytrash – a lion-like creature with long hair and a huge head" (Bronte, 1847, p. 97). Mr. Rochester also admires Jane's determined personality and strong identity. However, this mutual admiration does not change Eyre's point of view that life is not real without oneself asserting worth. Her insistence on being treated equally with Mr. Rochester is remarkable in her conversations with him. Once she openly tells him that not because he is her master and the source of her money that means he has the right to dictate his orders on her what

to do and what not to do. She says, "I don't think, sir, that you have a right to command me" (Brontë, 1847, p. 117). All the time, she proves that she is a different girl. Girls of her time were digging with teeth and hands to find a husband or a rich man to rescue them from society and its ties. They were kept at homes like imprisoned birds under the title of 'angel house'. Homes were like jells but to soften the word jell they were replaced by angels of houses. The idea is that women were imprisoned birds in boxes. This is exactly what Eye rejects and always she repeats that she is no bird, and no net ensnares her. She is a free human being with an independent will (p. 258).

Throughout the novel, Eyre resists the gender roles that society puts on women's shoulders. Her refusal to marry Mr. Rochester is the best example of such resistance. She is shown not to be willing to play the role of a wife and run her domestic work that is assigned by society like bearing and raising children. She does not spend her life struggling for education and money to live in the end under a man's grace. She might accept these kinds of roles if she does not discover that Mr. Rochester is not loyal. But after her discovery that he cannot legally marry her because he already has another wife, she turns the table on his face and leaves him. She prefers to maintain her moral integrity rather than lose dignity. She keeps telling herself that she cares for herself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unstained she is, the more she will respect herself (p. 365). In those words, Eyre assures her strong sense of moral integrity over and against her intense immediate feelings. Despite Rochester's trials to convince her to stay with him, he fails. He has shown his readiness to make her a queen and keeps reminding her of a "sultan" who "bestowed on a slave his gold and gems to accept his proposal but she has insisted on her situation. She believes that the man should not have more than one woman in his life otherwise she will be like his mistress, not wife. The word mistress suggests a very negative connotation when it is used with a woman who has an illegal relationship with a man. It means that woman does not have moral and self-esteem. Therefore, Eyre does not accept Rochester's proposal because she does not want to lose her self-respect. She leaves him and by this leave, she asserts her worth and her ability to love herself regardless of how others treat her.

Eyre lives with a motto in life that is "Do as I do: trust in God and yourself" (p. 364). This quotation uncovers Eyre's hidden strong weapon that she uses in her war of self-identification.

Despite her objections to lots of traditional gender discrimination that spread in English society during the Victorian period that put women in a narrow corner, Eyre represents the ideal religious English woman who has deep faith in God and his plans. In addition to her self-respect, Eyre also trusts in her God. Probably the unexpected heritage that she gets after her uncle's death is a sign of her strong trust in God. This inheritance strengthens her more than before. It helps her to make suitable choices for herself. Even when she decides to go back to Rochester, she does it out of her free will not because she needs his money. On the contrary, she goes back to him after his loss of everything. His mad wife burns herself and the house. He also loses his sight and one of his legs. Eyre's decision to reunite with him regardless of his loss suggests her ability to make a balance between her mind and heart and suggests her faith in herself that she can manage her new life with half-man. Rochester at the end of the novel can be considered as a half man as he loses his money and health. If this end is taken from a feminist point of view, the only interpretation of such an end is that man's power can fade at any time, but female love and sincerity are immortal.

## **Female self-determination in Laila Aboulela's *The Translator***

Aboulela (1964 -) is a Sudanese novelist. She was born and raised in Sudan. After finishing her university studies in Sudan, she moved to Scotland where her skill of writing fiction has flourished, and she has achieved a good reputation as a diaspora novelist. Her novels have gained worldwide recognition as they bring East and West together. Some of her famous novels are as follows: *The Translator* (1990), *Minaret* (2005), *Lyrics Alley* (2011), *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015), and others. *The Translator* (1990) is Aboulela's first novel. It has been translated into nine languages. It was shortlisted for the Orange Prize 2000, and it was also long listed for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Awards 2001. Aboulela' wrote this novel after her husband's death. The loss of her husband has affected her life radically. She has found herself divided into two streams of cultures. The first is her own culture, the Eastern culture, which put her in the position of a single woman according to which she was not supposed to live alone and far from her family. The second is the Western culture which allows her to do what she prefers without any kind of external interference. However, Aboulela was attentive enough in her choices and actions. She could balance the two cultures well. She remained in Scotland where

she was financially settled, but at the same time, she preserved her traditions and culture. She did not change her religion. She remained Muslim, and in many situations, she showed her pride in being Muslim. She has never changed her original identity to satisfy any other culture.

Like other writers, Aboulela uses her fiction to depict experiences from real life. *The Translator* is a real manifestation of her story as an immigrant woman. Aboulela finds it necessary to let her audience know what a woman might face alone outside of her country, especially if that woman is a widow and her culture is different from the culture of host country. If a woman is strong, then nothing can affect her. Aboulela believes that since a woman is agreed with her culture and thoughts, neither the place nor the time can change her, much like her personally has not changed. Moreover, she intends to break the stereotypical image that is in the minds of millions of people that an Eastern Muslim woman is weak and might die if she crosses the borders of her home. Aboulela excels at portraying a woman in her best image of determination. She creates Sammar, the protagonist of *The Translator*, powerful enough to face the clash between Western and Eastern cultures and prove that a woman is not a subaltern who listens only to men and society, but she also proves that she is an entity for herself, and she can choose what is good for her. In brief, Sammar appears to be a copy of Jane Eyre. In one of her interviews, Aboulela declares that she has been influenced by Jane Eyre "I was aware when I was writing *The Translator* that I was writing a Muslim Jane Eyre" (Chambers, 2009, p.98).

Sammar's self-determination can be found in more than one place in the novel. The first place is when Sammar decides to leave her home country, Sudan, to a foreign country after her husband's death to search for self-independence. Such a decision might be normal if it is taken by a non-Arabic and Muslim woman, but when it comes from a woman who lives in a very conservative society like the Sudanese society, it is not normal and it is unacceptable. It is unacceptable according to the norms and traditions of that country. In Arabic societies, widows are not expected to leave their homes after their husband's loss unless they get married to another man. Sudan is one of the Arabic countries that still practice such traditions on women. To find an Arabic widow searching for a chance to leave her home without caring about the customs of her society is a brave action. It suggests how much that woman is determined and powerful.

Power here does not mean that Sammar is not affected by her husband's death, but the idea is that she can turn the negative results of this loss into a means for success.

The loss of Sammar's husband has affected her life in many ways; Socially, psychologically, and financially. In social terms, Sammar's life becomes under the control of her family and society. She receives orders and dictations from those two. This is the case with most Arabic women in general. When they lose their men, dictation transfers from husbands to family and society. If family and society pity that woman, then their life will go on, but if they do not show that pity, women must suffer for the whole of their lives. It is rare to find that Arabic society has mercy on widows. In terms of conventions, widows are always under suspicion and society accounts for even their steps. This is the nature of patriarchal societies. Women must be all the time conscious of their moves and deeds otherwise they might be accused and condemned for silly behaviours. Sammar, however, cannot cope with this kind of treatment when she becomes a widow. As an Arabic and Muslim woman, she is expected to be familiarized with such issues and she will accept her new circumstances and go on. But Sammar shows the opposite. She cannot go along with her new life, the life of a widow in practical society. She cannot absorb the fact that she is now a widow, and she must change her way of living and thinking to satisfy her society or her family. She sees in her subjection to this is her real death. Therefore, she decides to neglect what she is supposed to do and does what she wants to do. She gives her wants priority in everything. She leaves everything behind, and she travels to Scotland where she starts her free life. Sammar's rebellion against patriarchal and social norms puts her on front line of strong and independent women.

With strong will, Sammar also can go over the psychological state that she has undergone after her husband's death. She suddenly finds herself alone and isolated at her house which she and her husband have made together. She, without any introduction, finds herself imprisoned between four walls in a room, as she describes, "with nothing on the wall, nothing personal, no photographs, no books: just like a hospital room" (Aboulela, 1999, p.15). Sammar has spent four years living in such deep grief until she realizes that life is bigger than pain and that what she does is wrong. Life needs a little bit of strength and determination. In addition to the psychological state, Sammar is also affected financially. Patriarchy society prevents women from

having jobs. They depend on what their husbands give to them. So, when a woman loses her husband, she also loses her source of life expenses. Therefore, Sammar finds that the best solution for herself and her life is to turn the table on all the conventions and customs that cripple the women as an expired file in an old drawer and closed. Regardless of what she faces after her transfer to another country, it is very natural that when one moves to a new place, he or she will face some difficulties and problems. Real bravery is how to counter these difficulties. Sammar shows enough strength to prove her bravery and she does not surrender to any obstacles.

One of the biggest obstacles that face Sammar in Scotland is her color. Perhaps this is the strongest point that reflects Sammar's strength and determination. As a brown woman, Sammar lives the sense of 'otherness' for a long time. It is not only her colour that looks different but everything around her looks different; cultures, weather, modernity, language, and even the colours of the mud, sky, and leaves, look different to her. She finds that this feeling of otherness can be ended in several ways. One of them is adaptation. Sammar tries a lot to adapt herself to everything around her. This adaptation is symbolized by her ability to live in the cold, rain, fog, and snow. Though she has never witnessed these changes of weather in her home country, in Scotland she lives them all. Here the use of words such as foggy and snowy in this context refers to the state of Sammar at the beginning of her life in Scotland. It is foggy and not clear. Fog and snow, reality, make the vision blurred, and like that Sammar's vision of things is. However, the weather does remain the same all the time. After the snow, the sun shines. The sun shines in Sammar's life when she passes the changes of the weather.

Adaptation to nature's changes does not need more efforts like adaptation to social norms especially when these norms are radically different. In addition to Sammar's brown colour, her way of clothing and religion are also different. Here is the real struggle. How can she go along with a society that looks at the valid Muslim woman as weak and ignorant with the opposite? Sammar is neither weak nor ignorant. The point is that she is still in the first stage of self-building. This stage is very difficult because it forms the base stone of any construction. If Sammar succeeds in this stage, she will succeed in the rest. She initiates her way of self-identification by working as a translator at a university with a Scottish professor and Middle East scholar called Rae Isles. This job opens her eyes to new attitudes in life. She smartly uses this job

to contradict the negative idea that the West has towards the Eastern woman. She finds herself playing the role of the mediator between the East and West. It seems that Aboulela purposely gives her protagonist the job of translator because only those who have experience with two cultures and speak two languages can play the role of a mediator. She can transfer thoughts from her own culture into the target one.

Sammar's job as translator does not only support her financially, but it is also an escape and a liberation Sammar has come to Aberdeen with the need for independence, and this is the only way she can find it for that. The job allows her to meet Mr. Rae who by the time finds himself admired by Sammar's way of thinking and behaving. Sammar's determined personality influences Mr. Rae so much. Her insistence on preserving her religion and tradition in eating and drinking makes Rae approach her and offer his love to her. The relationship between Rae and Sammar exceeds the normal relationship standard. In one of their conversations, Rae admits that he feels safe with her. "You make me feel safe. I feel safe with you" (Aboulela, 1999, p. 64). What draws Rae's attention to Sammar is what he perceives to be her invisible rootedness (in faith). He loves Sammar's strong relationship with God and her contact with Him five times a day. Sammar believes that the prayers save her from the burdens of life. She becomes aware enough of the fact that nothing can release her from the new circumstances she lives in, except her faith in God. That is why she appears at the job with her original character. She does intend to change either her outer look or her inner beliefs. She does not get off her veil or religion. Despite her knowledge that head-covered women are more subjected to bullying, she does not consider that. What she cares about is how she can utilize her work at the university to reach her fully recognized self. Her determination to maintain her faith and cultural values constitutes a key aspect of her determination because it becomes rare to find a woman of Sammar's age to give norms and conventions concerns particularly when they move to an open society like the Scottish society. If Sammar removes her cover or changes her religion, no one will blame her. She can easily justify her situation by saying that she tries to socialize herself in the new environment. So, her refusal to compromise her practices demonstrates her strength of character.

Another obvious aspect of Sammar's self-determination is her exploration of love. It seems like a challenge for an Eastern and Muslim widow to develop a romantic relationship with a man

outside her community, but Sammar does it. She loves Mr. Rea but in her own way. She asserts herself and makes choices that align with her values (p. 78). Even in love, she refuses to be passive in this relationship. It is known that women are more emotional than men. When they fall in love, they turn into cute lambs and accept whatever their beloveds say. Except for Sammar, she refuses Rae's marriage proposal until he converts to Islam. To convince someone to change his religion he spends his whole life believing in it is not easy. No one can do it except those who have strong determination and strong effect. Sammar is determined to succeed in all aspects of life, not only in love. Perhaps Rae's love for her becomes a push to proceed further, but with him or without, she shows energy to strength her shield against the challenges she faces.

## Conclusion

As it is shown in the two novels, a woman is a woman, and neither the time nor the place can affect her behaviour if she has a rigid faith in her beliefs, regardless of whether those beliefs are Islamic or Christian. Jane Eyre represents the Christian woman and Sammar represents the Muslim woman. Both characters proved that being a woman is not a source of weakness at all. Womanhood is not a cause to compel females to surrender to the social norms even if those norms are unjustifiable. In the contrary, women can choose what it is good for them and their future. Jane Eyre and Sammar prove that the right to self-determination is not confined to men, and perhaps women, in some situations, make more serious and wiser decisions than men. Furthermore, they can also influence men and change their lives just as Jane Eyre and Sammar do with their men. Their strong personalities make their men accept their conditions to fulfil their marriage proposal. Eyre, at first prefers rejecting money and wealth to getting married to a rich married man. Though this man might save her from the poverty that she lives in, she does not accept it. Her morality does not allow her to be a mistress and steal a man from his wife and home. To her, a man should have only one wife otherwise this man is considered as unfaithful. She does marry Rochester until she knows that his wife has died. Sammar appears to be a copy of Jane Eyre. Like Eyre, Sammar refuses to marry Mr. Rae until he changes his religion and converts to Islam because Sammar cannot be with a non-Muslim man. Therefore, Jane Eyre and Sammar are the best examples of female self-determination in two different eras.



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