



# CHAPTER SAMPLE: GENDERED ISLAM IN DIASPORA LITERATURE

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# LEILA ABOULELA

## BIOGRAPHY

- She was born in 1964 in Sudan.
- She Graduated from the University of Khartoum in 1985 with a degree in statistics.
- She earned MSc and MPhil degrees at London School of Economics.
- Works: *Coloured Lights* (2001)  
*Minaret* (2005), *The Translator* (1999), *Lyrics Alley* (2010), and *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015).



# Leila Aboulela:

## *The Translator* (1999)

- *The Translator* tells the story of Sammar, the eponymous heroine, a young Sudanese widow, living in Aberdeen. Sammar loses her husband, Tariq, also a childhood friend, in a car accident in Aberdeen. She sends the child back to Khartoum to live with the mother-in-law. Deciding to remain in Aberdeen, Sammar now works as a translator of Arabic and Islamic texts for Rae Isles, a Scottish professor and scholar of Islamic studies. Sammar and Rae fall in love. However, due to religious and cultural differences, the lovers are unable to profess their feelings openly, leading to misunderstanding and heartache. Sammar believes that Rae's conversion from Christianity to Islam can resolve their problems by unifying them. However, Rae is reluctant to convert, So Sammar decides to move back to Khartoum for good. Rae, as Sammar, is unable to carry on without her and follows her to Khartoum, having decided to genuinely convert to Islam. Sammar and Rae reconcile their difference and misunderstandings. . Rae and Sammar's relationship have emotional, psychological, and political dimensions.

# PASSAGES

- This is the enemy, what is irreversible, what has already reached the farthest of places. There is no going back. They can bomb bus-loads of tourists, burn the American flag, but they are not shooting the enemy. It is already with them, inside them, what makes them resentful, defensive, what makes them no longer confident of their vision of the world.”

— Leila Aboulela, *The Translator*



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# Leila Aboulela

## *Minaret* (2005)

- The daughter of a wealthy government official, Najwa, grows up pampered and carefree in Western Sudan during the 1980s. Because of a coup, there was the overthrow of the president and arrest of her father by the new government. Najwa, her twin brother Omar, and their mother flee to London. Within a few years, she is completely alone: her father has been executed, her mother succumbs to a fatal illness, and her brother Omar is in prison for an assault conviction stemming his drug abuse. The young woman makes ends meet as a nanny to a wealthy Arab family. Clothed in traditional Muslim hijab, she has suddenly become invisible within the city. A spark develops between her and the brother of her employer, and she is forced to confront the chasm between servant and master. Aboulela offers a captivating

# Passages

- “All through life there were distinctions - toilets for men, toilets for women; clothes for men, clothes for women - then, at the end, the graves are identical.”

— Leila Aboulela, *Minaret*



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- “He disliked English, not because they had invaded his country, but because of the effort required to understand their different languages and customs. At the same time, he was in no hurry for them to leave, for he admired them, most of the time, not for the modernity they were establishing but for the business opportunities they brought with them.”

— [Leila Aboulela](#), [Minaret](#)



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- “I've come down in the world. I've slid to a place where the ceiling is low and there isn't much room for me to move. Most of the time I'm good. I accepted my sentence and do not brood or look back. But sometimes a shift makes me remember. Routine is ruffled and a new start makes me suddenly conscious of what I've become -”  
— [Leila Aboulela](#), [Minaret](#)



- Yes, you can. Of course you can. And you can give charity in their name and you can recite the Qur'an for their sake. All these things will reach them, your prayers will ease the hardship and loneliness of their grave or it will reach them in bright, beautiful gifts. Gifts to unwrap and enjoy and they will know that this gift is from you.”  
— [Leila Aboulela](#), [Minaret](#)



- “Can I ask forgiveness for someone else, someone whose already dead?”

Yes, you can. Of course you can. And you can give charity in their name and you can recite the Qur'an for their sake. All these things will reach them, your prayers will ease the hardship and loneliness of their grave or it will reach them in bright, beautiful gifts. Gifts to unwrap and enjoy and they will know that this gift is from you.”

— [Leila Aboulela](#), [Minaret](#)



- “Who would care if I became pregnant, who would be scandalized? Aunty Eva, Anwar's flatmates. Omar would never know unless I wrote to him. Uncle Saleh was across the world. A few years back, getting pregnant would have shocked Khartoum society, given my father a heart attack, dealt a blow to my mother's marriage, and mild, modern Omar, instead of beating me, would have called me a slut. And now nothing, no one. This empty space was called freedom.”  
— [Leila Aboulela](#), [\*Minaret\*](#)



- “I must settle for freedom in this modern time”  
— Leila Aboulela, *Minaret*



# Interviews:



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Monica Ali



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# MONICA ALI BIOGRAPHY

- She was born in Bangladesh in 1967.
- Ali earned her degree in philosophy, politics, and economics at Oxford University.
- After college, she worked as part of the marketing staff of small publishing houses; then she worked at a design and branding agency.
- Some of her works: *Brick Lane* (2003), *Alentejo Blue* (2006), and *Untold Story* (2011).
- She was named as one of the twenty “Best Young British Novelists” by Granta magazine





# Monica Ali

## *Brick Lane* (2003)

- At the center of the story is Nazneen, born into a wealthy village family, who in her teens is married by her father to a forty-year-old Bangladeshi living in London. The husband, who wanted an unspoiled village girl, is a lack-of-success story without the ability to get ahead in life. He claims his failures are the result of British racism, and he wants to return to Bangladesh, which has become a paradise in his mind. Time has passed and his wife is now a mother of two teenage daughters who have assimilated to England. She has seen her husband with a critical eye and taken a lover. She also knows from her sister's letters that Bangladesh is a violent, corrupt society that misuses women, and there is no place for her, her children, or, probably, her husband. In separating from her husband and refusing to return to Bangladesh, she makes a major decision. *Brick Lane* is an impressive first novel, although the ending, her husband, and letters from her sister should have been treated with more subtlety.

- Interview



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# Passages

- “She touched his hand for the last time. "Oh, Karim, that we have already done. But always there was a problem between us. How can I explain? I wasn't me, and you weren't you. From the very beginning to the very end, we didn't see things. What we did--we made each other up." p. 382”  
— [Monica Ali](#), [Brick Lane](#)



- “If God wanted us to ask questions, he would have made us men.”  
— Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*



- “It's a success story,” said Chanu, exercising his shoulders. “But behind every story of immigration success there lies a deeper tragedy.” Kindly explain this tragedy.” I'm talking about the clash between Western values and our own. I'm talking about the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one's identity and heritage. I'm talking about children who don't know what their identity is. I'm talking about the feelings of alienation engendered by a society where racism is prevalent. I'm talking about the terrific struggle to preserve one's own sanity while striving to achieve the best for one's family. I'm talking »

— **Monica Ali**, **Brick Lane**



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- “while she wanted to look neither to her past nor her future, she lived exclusively in both. They had took different paths, but they had journeyed, so she realized, together.”  
— Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*



- “what I did not know - I was a young man - is that there are two kinds of love. The kind that starts off big and slowly wears away, that seems you can never use it up and then one day is finished. And the kind that you don't notice at first, but which adds a little bit to itself every day, like an oyster makes a pearl, grain by grain, a jewel from the sand.”

— [Monica Ali](#), [Brick Lane](#)



- “Tevis being childless meant you felt a little sorry for her, and a bit jealous. Probably the same way she felt about you.”  
— [Monica Ali](#), [Untold Story](#)





- **Debate and activity**



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Laila Lalami



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# MONICA ALI

## BIOGRAPHY

- She was born in Rabat, Morocco in 1968.
- She got a master's degree from University College.
- She got her Ph.D. in linguistics from the University of Southern California.
- She contributes articles to periodicals such as the Nation, Washington Post, Boston Globe , and Los Angeles Times .
- Some of her works: *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005), *Secret Son* (2009), and *The Moor's Account* (2014).
- Prizes: she won the American Book Award, the Arab American Book Award, and the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award



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# Laila Lalami

## *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*

- In 2005, Lalami published her first novel, *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*. Its plot centers around a relatively brief but perilous sea crossing that several Moroccans undertake in an attempt to reach Spain, cramped together on an inflatable raft rigged with an outboard motor. For the journey across the 8.7-mile Strait of Gibraltar, each has paid the smuggler who captains the craft an enormous sum, and the novel is actually a series of stories about four of the passengers that recount, in flashback, each of their decisions to attempt the dangerous crossing. There is Murad, a young man from Tangier with a college degree who scrapes by with tour-guide work. Also unemployed is middle-aged Aziz, who has long been shamed by the fact that his wife must be the family breadwinner. He hopes to earn enough in Spain to send for his family. The reverse of that story is Halima, a cleaning woman in Casablanca who has fled an abusive marriage and brought along her three young children. Finally, there is Faten, a young, devout Muslim woman who wears the hijab, or traditional head. Faten's tale is recounted through the voice of two middle-class Moroccans, the parents of her friend, Noura. They were alarmed when Noura began to wear the hijab as well, and manage to use their connections to have Faten expelled from the university. Less a novel than a set of finely detailed portraits, this book gives outsiders a glimpse of some of Moroccan society's strata and the desperation that underlies many ordinary lives.



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- **Interview**



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# Passages

- “Larbi himself had occasionally felt guilty that his own daughter was not part of the school system he helped to administer.”

*HOPE AND OTHER DANGEROUS PURSUITS*

- “Murad never tired hearing stories like that. He’d heard the horror stories, too — about the drowning, the arrests, the deportations-but the only ones were told over and over in the neighborhood were the good stories, about the people who’d made it. Last year Rashid’s brother had been just another unemployed youth, a kid, who liked to smoke hashish and build weird-looking sculptures with discarded matchboxes, which he then tried to sell off as art. Look at him now.”

## **HOPE AND OTHER DANGEROUS PURSUITS**



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- “He avoided family gatherings, refused to run errands, turned down offers to play soccer with the neighbors. Everyone knew he’d tried to go to Spain, and now they all knew he’d been caught and deported, so he took to staying home with his mother, forsaking even a glass of tea at the Café La Liberté with other unemployed young men from the neighborhood.”

***HOPE AND OTHER DANGEROUS***



- “He couldn’t imagine her with him in Madrid. She was used to the neighbor’s kid pushing the door open and coming in. She was used to the outdoor market where she could haggle over everything. She was used to having her relatives drop in without notice. He couldn’t think of her alone in an apartment, with no one to talk to, while he was at work. And he, too had his own habits now. He closed his suitcase and lifted it off the bed. It felt lighter than when he arrived.”

## ***HOPE AND OTHER DANGEROUS PURSUITS***



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- “Why the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative province of my analysis here, alas, despite its frequently noted appearance. Nevertheless one must acknowledge its importance as something eliciting complex responses, sometimes even a frightening self-discovery, in the Orientalists”

## *HOPE AND OTHER DANGEROUS PURSUITS*

- “A name is precious; it carries inside it a language, a history, a set of traditions, a particular way of looking at the world. Losing it meant losing my ties to all those things too.”  
— Laila Lalami, *The Moor's Account*



- “His anger took many shapes: sometimes soft and familiar, like a round stone he had caressed for so long that it was perfectly smooth and polished; sometimes it was thin and sharp like a blade that could slice through anything; sometimes it had the form of a star, radiating his hatred in all directions, leaving him numb and empty inside.”  
— Laila Lalami, *Secret Son*



- “As the days passed, I began to look upon my fate with new eyes. I often lamented the wicked turns my life had taken, but I rarely considered how much I had to be thankful for, how I had survived so long where so many others had perished, how I had seen wonders that no other Zamori had... I had been so intent on counting all the miseries and humiliations I had endured that I neglected to thank the Almighty for the blessings he had bestowed upon me.”  
— [Laila Lalami](#), [The Moor's Account](#)



- **Discussion and activity**



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