

COMMUNAL BONDS IN BIRD SUMMONS**Leila Aboulela****Article Received:** 01/03/2025**Article Accepted:** 02/04/2025**Published Online:** 03/04/2025**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.04.84**Abstract:**

The novel *Bird Summons* by Leila Aboulela explores the various intricacies of female friendship, migration, faith, and self-discovery. It is a story about three Muslim women, Salma, Moni, and Iman, who take a road trip to the Scottish Highlands, yearning to visit the grave of a historical woman, Lady Evelyn Cobbold, known as the first British woman to perform Hajj. Additionally, their journey is not just a journey of pilgrimage but rather a transformative experience wherein they face different challenges. These challenges helped them to grow independently and become a new community with their own set of rules and principles. Leila Aboulela explores the themes of communal displacement, religious faith, and female solidarity throughout the book. All these are interwoven to illustrate how communal bonds enable the protagonists to meet the challenges regarding their issues of identity, belonging, and personal development. Although each of the women is on her own journey, the story suggests that their shared experiences steer their quests for self-discovery in similar directions. This paper looks into how their sisterhood develops in the book and how female solidarity serves as a source of strength, healing as well as self-realization. This paper examines how *Bird Summons* illustrates the significance of communal bonds through feminist, postcolonial, and Islamic literary frameworks, emphasizing their role in fostering intersubjective connections that contribute to the development of individual identity and the challenge of social and personal dilemmas.

Keywords - Female solidarity, cultural identity, communal bonds.

Introduction:

In *Bird Summons*, Leila Aboulela portrays friendships between women torn by personal and religious expectations, all of which are being reviewed by individual desires and past traumas. When Salma, Moni, and Iman embark on their journey, they speak to each other about their shared culture; they discuss their separate views on the issues of identity, belonging, and womanhood. This paper discusses how women's communal bonds contribute to their self-perception as well as their ability to reconcile conflict and make their way to self-discovery and acceptance.

The struggle of cultural displacement and personal regret is a peculiar topic embodied by Salma, a successful Egyptian doctor living in Britain. She confidently presents

herself as an integral part of the Western way of living, but in her mind, she struggles with an unsettled guilt from her past love affair. Through her attempts to rationalize and control her emotions, we see how she grows as an individual person during her Scottish Highlands journey. This journey helped her to forget her past, which she was unable to tame. Within her connections with Moni and Iman, she revealed her conflicting views on religion; she respects it yet approaches it with a rational mindset, frequently dismissing Moni's fervent devotion and Iman's rebellious stance towards faith. But her mystical encounter with the hoopoe bird is a turning point as she realizes that one does not achieve redemption by remembering one's past but by embracing and accepting the incidents of life. It is a journey of forgiveness for herself, realizing that the only way to control her emotions is to surrender to uncertainty rather than resist it.

Moni represents the selfless, quiet woman who prioritizes family interests over her own desires. She left a promising career in Sudan to accompany her husband to Scotland, believing that her true value lies in her role as a mother and wife. However, she remains determined and resilient, as there is a deep-seated resentment and loneliness that she struggles to acknowledge for herself. Among the three women, her religious faith is the most pronounced. She uses religion to keep herself together and tries to avoid confronting opinions about her personal life. Her journey is moving from her past way of life to self-fulfillment. In the rugged landscapes of Scotland, far from the constraints of her life, she contemplates the cost of her own choices. By the conclusion of the novel, Moni starts to question if genuine devotion requires complete selflessness or if she is permitted to pursue her own dreams while still being accountable.

In many ways, the most restless and uncertain, Iman is the youngest of the three. She is the product of her refusal to live up to her conservative upbringing, her expulsion from an Islamic boarding school, and her subsequent involvement in relationships that go against her upbringing. Unlike Salma, who feeds doubt with every religious doctrine, or Moni, who has deep faith in her religious belief, Iman lacks a firm belief in her religion. She complains of being burdened by the restrictive way that is expected from her as a Muslim woman; she also wants the spiritual freedom that can offer independence to her. Her conversations with Salma and Moni reveal her great insecurity regarding her relationships, which failed to provide her with a stable life, which she had been craving for a long time. The mystical part of the journey, and specifically the encounter with the hoopoe bird, urges her to widen the view beyond what is external rebellion to what is internal clarity. The ending of the novel is about Iman, who was earlier confused between faith and freedom, and learns that they can be met within her. She realized that she could choose both of them in her journey of selfhood.

Although the motivations behind each woman's journey are different, their challenges come together in amazing ways. Women's struggles are reflected in Bird Summons' interwoven depiction of their experiences with faith, displacement, and identity. Even though they argue and fight occasionally, their shared relationship serves as the catalyst for each person's self-discovery. Sometimes, it takes a group adventure to even comprehend

oneself.

Salma is a woman who is attempting to separate herself from her past, as she is not able to make a balance between her past and present. She feels that there is no love in her marriage, and because of this conflict, she is not able to concentrate on the religious aspect of her life. She is bold and confident, but when it comes to her personal life, she is often confused. Of the three, Moni is the most devout and takes solace in faith, but also feels trapped in the role of wife and mother. She believes that her only role is to take care of her disabled child. She almost forgets about her dreams and desires. With time, she distances herself from her husband. In this way, her life becomes more complicated, and she starts struggling with her real identity. The youngest and most rebellious Iman starts out disliking the traditions of religion and society but then looks for a deeper connection to her roots. She was involved in three serious relationships, but nothing worked out for her. The failure of her relationships frustrated her, so she decided to join Salma and Moni. Although their paths are different, they rely on each other for direction and help each other in times of doubt and self-reflection.

The novel shows how a communal bond works as a powerful agent to make a strong connection among all three protagonists. It helps them to understand each other's problems in a better way. Growing up in a Western society and following the traditional rules of their culture, all of these characters feel completely isolated, and when they feel that they are going through the same emotional state, they start enjoying each other's company. It is their shared cultural background that permits them to unveil vulnerabilities they cannot disclose to outsiders and thereby reinforce the necessity of communal solidarity in maintaining the feeling of belonging. The mystical image of the hoopoe is a central motif in Bird Summons that appears to the women along their journey. Farid ud-Din Attar's *The Conference of the Birds* describes the hoopoe as one that leads the other birds to enlightenment. Likewise, Attar's birds pass through different valleys in pursuit of the Simorgh, a symbol for the attainment of self-realization and divine truth, as does Salma, Moni, and Iman.

The hoopoe represents that the fates of protagonists are connected. This further supports the notion that their journeys are not solo but should be approached collectively by learning from each other rather than preparing to isolate themselves. The bird serves as a bridge and reminds them that their struggles are not individual but universal, like everyone across the world in search of meaning. In the end, Bird Summons illustrates that we discover ourselves not alone but through relationships. It contradicts the Western individualistic view of selfhood by emphasizing that identity is created by shared experiences. The three intertwined women's stories show that healing and transformation do not come through fleeing but by engaging with each other, with God, and even with their own past. Salma, Moni, and Iman learn to accept their differences as well as the common threads they share. Their strength is rediscovered through moments of vulnerability, anger, and reconciliation where they realize that their struggles are not burdens on their shoulders alone, but they are their joined struggles that can be overcome together. Indeed, Leila Aboulela's *Bird Summons*

offers a certain deep reflection regarding the connections of women in a society where, at least during migration and or in the name of faith, a bond is felt. Through Salma, Moni, and Iman, the book portrays the tension and comfort that characterize female friendships, shaping the women's understanding of themselves and the world around them. This reaffirms that identity is a living verb that evolves via interactions and shared experiences throughout their journey rather than being fixed. In the end, their sisterhood serves as evidence of the enduring strength of social ties and the fact that group activities are the most effective for fostering self-discovery.

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Citation:

Leila Aboulela” COMMUNAL BONDS IN BIRD SUMMONS”*International Journal of English and Studies (IJOES)*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2025, pp. 81-84. DOI: 10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.04.84.