

The Egyptian Jewish-Muslim woman as seen in Ihsan Abdel-Quddous's *Don't Leave Me Here Alone*

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Abstract: Research on Jewish women converting to Islam, especially within the Egyptian context, remains a nascent field of study. This article aims to contribute to this under-explored area by examining the portrayal of Lucy/Zainab in Ihsan Abdel-Quddous's *Don't Leave Me Here Alone*. Unlike the often-stereotypical representations found in European literature, Lucy/Zainab's characterization offers a nuanced exploration of the complexities surrounding religious conversion for Jewish women. In contrast to stereotypical portrayals in European literature, Lucy/Zainab embodies the concept of liminality faced by Jewish converts to Islam. This article argues that such converts often occupy a transitional space, unable to fully relinquish their Jewish heritage while simultaneously struggling to embrace a fully realized Muslim identity. Furthermore, the analysis delves into the possibility of a non-binary Jewish-Muslim identity, one that transcends the limitations of these singular classifications. Lucy/Zainab's characterization exemplifies this concept, existing between these religious identities and belonging fully to neither. Lucy/Zainab's dedication to Zionism underscores a unique interpretation of Jewish identity that extends beyond religious practice alone. This close reading investigates how her portrayal challenges or reinforces preconceived notions about Jewish identity and religious conversion. By analyzing the experiences of Egyptian Jewish-Muslim women like Lucy/Zainab, this essay contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between gender, identity, and religion within Egyptian society. Drawing on postcolonial feminist theory, the analysis explores Lucy/Zainab's relationship with her Jewish heritage and how her identity develops within a global context. The analysis also explores how Lucy/Zainab negotiates a patriarchal society, wielding calculated strategies to subvert traditional expectations.

Keywords: Egyptian Jewish-Muslim woman, identity, Ihsan Abdel-Quddous, religion

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Introduction

While scholarship on the multifaceted history of Egyptian Jews continues to flourish, a gap remains in our understanding of how individual Jewish experiences, particularly those of women, have shaped and enriched the broader Egyptian narrative. Fictional texts, although not strictly historical documents, offer a valuable window into the social and political climate of the era they depict. For centuries, Egypt boasted a thriving Jewish community, leading scholars to posit a high degree of integration between Egyptian Jews and the broader society. This integration is often evidenced by shared customs and daily life experiences. This dynamic underscores how Jewish experiences and narratives have frequently served as a wellspring of inspiration for Egyptian literature. Novels, encompassing both depictions of everyday life and explorations of historical and cultural complexities, demonstrate the multifaceted presence of Jews within the Egyptian literary landscape. Abdel-Quddous (1919-1990) stands out as the most prominent writer who had a strong interest in Jews in his literary works during the 20th century. He is the only Arab author—not simply an Egyptian—to specifically address Egyptian Jewish society in his creative works (Al-Shami 1992, 7). The representation of the Jewish character in Ihsan Abdel-Quddous's novels reflects several dynamics and issues about social desire, identity, and the quest for material prosperity. Abdel-Quddous's works revolve around exploring the role and impact of Jews in Egyptian society from the 1930s to the 1980s in the twentieth century. During this period, Egypt experienced significant social, political, and cultural changes, and the Jewish community played a notable part in shaping the country's history. Abdel-Quddous likely dedicated his efforts to studying and documenting this aspect of Egyptian-Jewish relations. By delving into the subject matter, Abdel-Quddous aims to shed light on the contributions, experiences, and challenges faced by Jews in Egypt during those decades. This could involve exploring their cultural, economic, and intellectual contributions, as well as examining the challenges and changes they encountered within Egyptian society. The focus on the Jewish community showcases a dedication to understanding and preserving the historical narrative of Jews in Egypt. Overall, Abdel-Quddous's emphasis on Jews and their significance in Egypt suggests a commitment to uncovering lesser-known aspects of

Egyptian history and ensuring that the contributions and experiences of the Jewish community are not forgotten.

It is worth mentioning that Abdel-Quddous's work on Egyptian Jewry is the result of his first-hand experience and was influenced by the neighbourhood where he resided. He was raised among Jews, spent his formative years playing with them, spent his adolescent years studying with them, and spent his professional life working with them (Abdel-Quddous 2021, 7). He seeks in his works to explore the Egyptian Jewish community and to document moments he experienced. He aims to vividly capture these moments through characters that are not products of his imagination but rather real-life individuals who lived within the Egyptian Jewish society. During this period (the first half of the 20th century), the Egyptian Jewish community was one of the strongest communities in Egypt.

In Egypt, there were 26 Jewish synagogues or temples, and more than ten newspapers dedicated to the Jewish community were published, including the explicit newspaper "Al-Rasoul Al-Sahyouni" (The Zionist Messenger). Additionally, numerous fundraising associations appeared to be charitable organizations, such as the "Niqtat Al-Laban" Society and others, all working in service of the Zionist movement. (Abdel-Quddous 2021, 16)

From this, it becomes clear that the human experience in the works of Abdel-Quddous is characterized by artistic sincerity based on careful observation, exploration, study, and authentic depiction. There are two main reasons for Abdel-Quddous's interest in addressing the Jewish persona: his close interaction with them and his early concern with the Palestinian issue and the Arab Israeli conflict in its various aspects and stages from the 1948 war until the peace treaty in 1979 (Al-Shami 1992, 112). His close interaction with Jews taught him that the factor of religious difference between him and them was never a criterion for his perception of them, or even for the residents of the Abbasia neighborhood's view of them. This was not just a personal viewpoint of Abdel-Quddous but rather a predominant characteristic of Egyptian society, which is known throughout its long history for its tolerance towards people of different faiths. In his interactions with the Jewish community in Egypt, Abdel-Quddous, like many Egyptians, displayed this tolerance. One of the positive outcomes of this coexistence is that any sensitivity towards Jews dissipated within him. Therefore, dealing with them does not evoke any emotional reaction or aversion in him.

Thus, Abdel-Quddous, as it will be elaborated, does not present Jewish characters by that missing stereotype that prevailed in most European literature, as well as in many works of Jewish literature written by Jews in various languages. He does not depict the Jew in the way that English literature does, which relies on portraying the Jewish character as a greedy usurer. The Jew is not at all emitting filthy scents from his body, contrary to the stereotype that has made him an embodiment of the devil in the minds of Europeans. "The Europeans believed that Jewish men experienced menstruation just like women and that they lost a certain amount of blood during this process, which explained their need to shed the blood of Christian children and drink their blood to compensate for what they had lost" (Awad 1999, 35). The novelist does not present Jewish characters as devoid of human emotions, replaced by inhumane cruelty akin to Shakespeare's Shylock. Rather, he "presents a Jew motivated by the desire to benefit from the prevailing circumstances in which he lives and adapt to social, economic, historical, and psychological pressures. He tries to escape or alleviate traditional animosity towards Jews in Islamic societies through assimilation, even if that means converting from Judaism to Islam (Al-Shami 1992, 9). He presented Jewish patterns that blend with pure and completely non-prejudiced human treatment, far removed from any spirit of bigotry or hostility based on any heritage that Jews face animosity from. The society portrayed by Abdel-Quddous in many of his stories is class-based, and this class distinction was not unfamiliar among the Jewish communities in Egypt in the past.

The cause of women's rights and emancipation is strongly supported by Abdel-Quddous due to the profound influence of his liberal mother. He believes that women are one of the symbols of sacrifice in Egyptian society, and this is the reason why women are the main subject in his works. To him, a woman is "a symbol of self-denial and sacrifice" (Marie 2019). In addition to being thought-provoking and providing an accurate representation of women's emotions, his writings significantly contributed to a shift in attitudes toward women in Egypt and the Arab world at large. His courageous tales gained him the moniker of "an adept interpreter of modern-day Arab women's aspirations and feelings" (Shakir, 2018). Despite his great contribution to the literary field (Abdul Razaq 2020, 133), critics have ignored him throughout his life. The journalistic style and the frequent usage of sex have been blamed by some authors for this neglect (Ezzat 2018, 55).

Political reasons also play a role, as most of his detractors rejected his liberal principles and instead placed greater emphasis on the ideology of the extreme socialists who disregarded or ignored his political writing (Ezzat 2019). Muhammad Alam expresses his belief that the literature of Ihsan Abdel-Quddous is constantly ignored and marginalized by researchers and critics, and that the number of times Ihsan Abdel-Quddous' works have been subjected to academic criticism does not equal one-tenth of what he has contributed in terms of books and writings. Therefore, there is a need to reconsider his works and evaluate them based on their deserving value.

This article delves into multifaceted experiences leading to religious conversion, drawing on insights from psychology and postcolonial theory. It examines the profound psychological shifts associated with conversion, particularly the "deconstruction" and subsequent "reconstruction" of identity. Moving beyond the concept of liminality, the article explores the motivations that compel individuals to abandon their established faith, traditions, and social networks to embrace a new belief system and social structure. Furthermore, it investigates the very essence of religious conversion – its meaning, historical and contemporary practices, and the ensuing consequences and ramifications. A central focus of the analysis is the "in-between" or "liminal" state experienced by converts. This liminal space transcends binary religious categories and challenges traditional dichotomous thinking. The article poses a significant question: why can't convert fully shed their past and seamlessly transition between these seemingly incompatible states? Instead, why do these two states often merge, creating a unique "in-between" or "liminal" space? To explore this phenomenon, the article draws upon Homi K. Bhabha's notion of the "in-between" (1994) and Victor Turner's concept of "liminality" (1969, 1974).

Theoretical framework

Providing a brief overview of the theoretical framework on which the study will be based seems essential. Since the background of this paper will be formed by the terms' postcolonial feminism, conversion, identity, and liminality, it is crucial to define them and their usage in this study. We can investigate how Lucy/Zainab's experience is influenced by the intersection of her religious conversion and sense of national belonging via the perspective of postcolonial feminist theory. We can look at the constraints and expectations that the Jewish and

Muslim communities impose on women, as well as how Lucy/Zainab overcomes these obstacles to pursue her agency and identity. In addition, theories such as “liminality” and “hybridity” will be used to examine how Lucy/Zainab’s distinct position challenges conventional categorization and establishes a new arena within Egyptian society.

Postcolonial feminism

Ashcroft (1995, 249) says, “Until recently, feminist and post-colonial discourses have followed a path of convergent evolution”. This means the dismantling of colonial structures in the postcolonial era has propelled the exploration of women’s roles and experiences to the forefront of literary and critical discourse. Writers and critics grapple with the question of women’s agency, representation, and empowerment within societies grappling with identity and self-determination. Recognizing the intricate web of gender, race, and colonial history shaping women’s lives, they advocate for a nuanced examination that transcends the limitations of Western feminist frameworks. Through literature and critical analysis, these voices illuminate the multifaceted realities of women in postcolonial societies. They shed light on the challenges women navigate, the resilience they demonstrate, and their potential for transformative change. By engaging with these issues, writers and critics foster dialogue and promote social change, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding gender and postcolonialism. Postcolonial and feminist studies arose in response to the historical marginalization of minority voices, silenced cultures, and the perspectives of women within political, social, and literary narratives.

Feminist and post-colonial discourses both seek to reinstate the marginalized in the face of the dominant, and early feminist theory, like early nationalist post-colonial criticism, was concerned with inverting the structures of domination, substituting, for instance, a female tradition or traditions for a male-dominated canon (Ashcroft 1995, 249).

Discrimination against Arab women, particularly Arab Jewish women, remains a potent source of inequality and injustice in the Arab world. Feminist advocates and activists have challenged these entrenched patriarchal structures, meticulously examining the overt forms of disenfranchisement and ostracism that dominate male-female relationships, aiming to restore women’s usurped rights and dignity.

Conversion

Pioneering American thinker William James, a prominent figure in both philosophy and psychology, offered a unique perspective on religious conversion in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, published at the turn of the twentieth century. He described it as

to be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self-hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior, and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior, and happy in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities. (James 2002, 188)

The term “conversion” originates from both Latin and Greek. The Latin root, conversion, signifies a “turning from,” while the Greek word metanoia translates to “transformation” (Connor 1994, 27). Building on this core concept, Rambo (1993, 2-3) defines conversion as a “change...from religious affiliation with one faith system to another” or more broadly, “turning from and to new religious groups, ways of life, systems of belief, and modes of relating to a deity or the nature of reality”. Building upon the core concept of a “turning from” and “transformation,” Gooren (2010, 3) emphasizes the identity dimension of religious change. He defines conversion as “a comprehensive personal change of religious worldview and identity, based on both self-report and attribution by others”. Scholars like Connor (1994), Rambo (1993), and Gooren (2010) all concur that conversion fundamentally involves a change in religious affiliation. It is a process where an individual rejects their previous religious beliefs and embraces a new system of faith. Gooren (2010, 3) emphasizes the transformative nature of conversion, defining it as “a comprehensive personal change of religious worldview and identity, based on both self-report and attribution by others”. Steigenga states, “Conversion involves a process of radical personal change in beliefs, values, and, to some degree, personal identity and worldview” (Ibid, 6). This perspective highlights that conversion goes beyond a mere shift in religious affiliation; it entails a fundamental change in a person's self-perception. Conversion often involves leaving behind a previous religious framework, along with its associated cultural and social environment. This necessitates a period of readjustment as the individual adapts to a new belief system and community. This process of adaptation underscores the multifaceted nature of conversion, encompassing not just the psychological but also the political, cultural,

ethnological, and anthropological dimensions of identity. Despite its seemingly straightforward nature, conversion is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon. It entails a dynamic interplay of factors, including religious doctrines, social pressures, and personal experiences, that collectively lead to a significant transformation in an individual's beliefs, affiliations, and worldview. William James (2002, 195) says: "To say that a man is "converted "means, in these terms, that religious ideas, previously peripheral in his consciousness, now take a central place, and that religious aims form the habitual center of his energy".

Conversion, understood as a movement from one religious, social, and cultural context to another, fundamentally impacts an individual's sense of self. This encounter with new religious doctrines, cultural narratives, historical interpretations, and social norms often triggers a process of destabilization, challenging the convert's previous identity. This destabilization can be understood as a twofold loss. Firstly, a personal identity loss occurs as the convert struggles to reconcile the previously held beliefs of their former faith with the contrasting ideas encountered in the new religion. Secondly, a social identity loss can occur as the convert attempts to integrate into the new religious community. This process can be fraught with challenges, as the convert may not fully assimilate and may still feel connected to their former social group. A central theme in conversion studies examines the intricate link between religious conversion and the transformation of self-identity. Emphasizing the transformative nature of conversion, Brandt (2022, 19) defines it as "a kind of identity transformation resulting from inner and/or outer factors". This transformation is particularly pronounced in religious conversion, which Brandt (Ibid, 23) views as "an identity transformation resulting in particular from a change in the way of being affiliated with a particular religious system or spiritual tradition". This emphasis on identity aligns with Brandt's notion of identity as "a lifelong process of construction" (Ibid, 22). Here, conversion becomes a significant event within this ongoing construction process, potentially leading to a fundamental shift in an individual's self-perception and place within a religious or spiritual framework. These insights collectively underscore the profound link between conversion and the transformation of self-identity, a central theme that this article delves into.

Identity

The concept of identity is complex and includes both our inner and outside selves. Our experiences, beliefs, cultural background, and even biology are woven together to form a complicated tapestry. Identity is complicatedly shaped by both external and internal factors. To quote Freadman:

in the process of weaving an identity, an individual must bring together the threads of both the internal self and the external self. To make the cloth of life, it is the fabric of memory that provides the fibres that hold the created identity together and provides the protective covering of experience that leads to new and anticipated events of the individual's future. (Freadman 2001, 17)

Identity “is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture” (Hall 1990, 225). This emphasizes that identity is a process of being rather than something that is predetermined. It is always changing as we meet new problems and adopt fresh viewpoints. It undergoes “constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past”, it is “subject to the continuous play of history, culture, and power” (Ibidem). Brandt (2022, 19) considers “conversion as a kind of identity transformation resulting from inner and/or outer factors”. Religious conversion, a movement from one set of beliefs and social norms to another, significantly impacts an individual's sense of self. This encounter with new religious doctrines, cultural practices, and historical narratives can destabilize the converts' previously held identity. This destabilization often involves a dual sense of loss. On a personal level, the convert may struggle to reconcile their former beliefs with the newly acquired ones, leading to a fragmented sense of self. Socially, they may face challenges integrating into the new community, experiencing a sense of dislocation from their former social circle. When managing societal expectations or discrimination, identity can be a cause of struggle as well as a source of strength and belonging. Identity is ultimately a lifelong process of self-discovery and an investigation of what makes each of us a distinct individual.

Liminality

The anthropological term “liminality” refers to the state of confusion or disorientation that characterizes a transitional stage. It alludes to the “in-between” space, the boundary that separates one state of existence from another. Turner (1974, 232) defines this in-between as

“ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification”. It is essentially the state of being at the border or on the threshold between two distinct identities, states, or spots. Liminality, rather than a permanent state, is a transitory phase that emerges across diverse contexts. It manifests in personal growth, rites of passage, cultural or societal transformations, and even within specific rituals and ceremonies. This concept serves as a crucial lens for comprehending and navigating life's transformative periods. By acknowledging the inherent uncertainty that accompanies liminality, we can also recognize its potential to foster growth. Within the framework of conversion, liminality is important. A phase of liminality is frequently associated with the conversion process, during which people actively search for a new sense of purpose or belonging while feeling cut off from their former identities or beliefs. This transitional area offers a chance for introspection, self-examination, and the investigation of alternative viewpoints and modes of being.

Analysis

Ihsan Abdel-Quddous's captivating novel, *Don't Leave Me Here Alone*, throws us into the whirlwind life of Lucy, an Egyptian Jew caught in the currents of a changing society. Driven by both social ambition and a deeper yearning (perhaps for acceptance, security, or a sense of belonging), Lucy embarks on a transformative journey. She embraces Islam and takes the name Zainab, a decision that alters her world irrevocably. Thrust into the complex social landscapes of both Muslim and Jewish communities, Zainab, a woman of exceptional intellect and captivating beauty, must navigate a web of expectations. The narrative unfolds as she skilfully employs calculated strategies and adopts different personas to carve a path towards her aspirations, but the road to her desired future may not be without unforeseen challenges. However, Zainab's social ascent comes at a significant cost, potentially jeopardizing the well-being of her children. Through Lucy's/Zainab's narrative, Abdel-Quddous lays bare the stark class divisions that fractured the early 20th-century Egyptian Jewish community. His portrayal exposes a rigid social hierarchy, where wealthy Jewish families enjoyed a considerably more privileged position compared to their less fortunate coreligionists: “The classism and class-based arrogance within the Jewish community are uglier than those within any other community in Egypt” (Abdel-Quddous 2021, 18-19). Driven by a desire to break free from the social and religious

constraints of her Jewish community, particularly those imposed by her disadvantaged background, Zainab embarks on a rebellious path. This defiance finds its roots in a moment of self-reflection, fuelled by a deep regret over her marriage to Zaki Raoul, a union that fails to fulfil her ambitions. “Lucy blamed herself because she was the one who made the mistake and chose the impoverished level in which she and her son live” (Ibid, 11). A pivotal moment of self-reflection catalyzed Zainab’s rebellion. To establish her own identity, control her future, and change the world she lives in, she defies the social forces that seek to control her. She doesn’t sit around and wait to be given things. Instead, she takes advantage of the chance and employs the tools at her disposal to lessen socioeconomic problems like poverty. Zainab’s defiance of the constraints placed on her by her socioeconomic background is consistent with postcolonial feminist ideas of tearing down social systems that limit the chances and choices available to women. These restrictions might be cultural, religious, or economic, and they frequently result from customs that were strengthened or altered throughout colonial times. Recognizing the dissonance between her inherent attributes – beauty and intelligence – and the limitations imposed by her modest social background, a stark realization ignited her desire for emancipation. “She is beautiful with a special kind of sexy beauty...and she is smart” (Ibid, 10). Blindsided by her ambitions, Lucy failed to recognize Zaki’s limited aspirations within the Jewish community. In his eyes, their marriage represented the fulfilment of his modest goals. “All his ambition as a Jew was confined to obtaining and marrying her” (Ibid, 13). Lucy’s ambition and Zaki’s seemingly modest goals create disharmony in their aspirations. This foreshadows potential challenges as they navigate their relationship together.

Consumed by an ambition for social advancement, Lucy found limited opportunities for upward mobility within the established Jewish community. In a bold and calculated move, she embraced Islam, transforming herself into Zainab. This conversion served as a strategic gateway to infiltrate the upper echelons of Egyptian society. Driven by an unwavering desire for social status and financial security, Zainab adopted a ruthlessly pragmatic approach to navigating her new reality. Her conversion to Islam served as a calculated maneuver, severing ties with her Jewish family and opening doors to Egyptian high society. Skilfully navigating this new world, she leveraged her charm to secure opulent apartments, lucrative investments, and a life of privilege. Notably, her marriage to Shawkat, a wealthy landowner,

appears to be a strategic alliance rather than a love match, further solidifying her ascent within the Muslim elite. While Lucy paints her ambition as a path to family security, the narrative suggests a deeper desire for personal wealth and social elevation. Her conversion to Islam can be seen as a strategic adaptation to navigate her position as a minority in Egyptian society. By aligning with the dominant religion, she might have sought to establish a sense of belonging and potentially gain access to new opportunities unavailable to her within the Jewish community. The text portrays Lucy as a highly driven individual with a thirst for a life beyond her current circumstances. Undeterred by societal constraints, she embarks on a bold course of action – converting to Islam – to access a new social sphere. While the narrative remains silent on her ultimate goals, it reveals a keen understanding of the social landscape and a willingness to exploit available avenues for advancement.

Driven by a desire to transcend the limitations she perceived, such as limited professional opportunities for women, within the Jewish upper class, Lucy utilizes her beauty and intellect to forge a new identity and carve her path in life. “And she is intelligent... She believes in herself as a smart woman” (Ibid, 12). Lucy emerges as a resourceful and intelligent individual. Her reaction at the university donation drive (Niqtat Al-Laban) could be interpreted as a sign of discontent with social inequalities within the Jewish community. Perhaps these inequalities limited her opportunities, fuelling her ambition to forge a different path in life.

The doorbell rang, and it was the representative of the ‘Niqtat Al-Laban’ charitable association, which sends the donations collected from the Jews of Egypt to the Israeli agency in Palestine. Lucy shouted at the representative of the association, saying, “Stay away from us! You have taken enough from us without us knowing what you do with our money. Go to the Jews of Garden City and Zamalek!” (Abdel-Quddous 2021, 52)

While wealth undoubtedly held appeal for Lucy, the narrative suggests she recognized its limitations in securing social respect. This realization likely fuelled her pursuit of a strategic marriage to Shawkat Bey, a prominent figure within the Egyptian Muslim aristocracy. However, her ambition didn’t stop there. Before securing this marriage, Lucy demonstrably negotiated an agreement with another influential figure, Abdul Rahman Bey, securing an apartment in one of his prestigious Garden City properties. Despite this accumulated

wealth and the fortune she inherited upon Shawkat Bey's passing, a sense of insecurity persists, motivating her desire for long-term security for both herself and her daughter, Hagar Showkat Bek. Lucy's relentless pursuit of security continued after Shawkat Bey's passing. She cultivated relationships with influential figures like Abdul Rahman Ibrahim, a free officer, and Mahmoud Rifat, a prosperous businessman. Ultimately, she married Brigadier General Fahmi Jarallah, another free officer. However, these relationships unfolded against the backdrop of escalating tensions between Egypt and Israel. As political tides shifted and war erupted, Lucy's carefully constructed world began to crumble. Her children, caught between their heritage and the changing political landscape, eventually immigrated to Paris and then Israel. With the passage of time and the fading of her youth, Lucy's marriage also dissolved, leaving her isolated.

Lucy's conversion to Islam and subsequent marriage to Shawkat Bey, a prominent figure within the Egyptian Muslim aristocracy, suggests a strategic move aimed at social mobility. The narrative doesn't delve into her personal faith journey, leaving her motivations for conversion unclear. However, it's possible that religious conversion offered a path to integrate into Egyptian high society and potentially secure inheritance rights, which some interpretations suggest were limited for non-Muslim spouses. This indicates that Lucy's conversion can be interpreted as a desire-driven act driven by economics "cast as expressions of desire, both sexually and economically driven" (Starr 2000, 15). Using Homi Bhabha's terminology, it also conveys "mimetic desire" (Bhabha 1994, 88), which has the unsettling potential to obfuscate ethnic group boundaries. By adopting the unethical route to achieve her aims, Lucy embodies the novel's underlying societal condemnation of Jewish families' prevalent capitalist mindset.

Her conversion results in social isolation rather than social accommodation in the two societies. She finds out that she is not welcomed (Abdel-Quddous 2021, 76). She remains a non-Muslim "Jewish-Muslim woman" (Ibid, 10) in the Muslim community. This means conversion might present a dilemma for those trying to advance in society. It can provide an escape from the confines of their native community, but it can also result in a feeling that they don't quite belong anywhere. Despite being rejected by both the Muslim and Jewish communities, to which she does not belong, she has managed to retain her strong individuality. "She focused all her efforts on

integrating into the elite Muslim community, which consists of upper-class families, royal families, and the families of government officials. She believed that this society offered the broadest opportunities for her ambitions” (Ibid, 76).

Following her divorce from Zaki Raul, a reserved and unassuming Jewish man with whom she shares children, the protagonist seeks a new marriage. Motivated by a desire to elevate her family’s socioeconomic status, she sets her sights on a wealthy Muslim man. This decision to convert to Islam becomes a pivotal point in the narrative. It not only grants her access to a potential inheritance upon her new husband’s passing but also signifies a profound shift in her self-perception or identity. By converting to Islam, she experiences a metamorphosis that makes it easier for her to manage socioeconomic and cultural issues and assimilate into Muslim society. Regarding social mobility, identity exploration, and the pursuit of material achievement, this portrayal of the Jewish character highlights issues and examines themes. It explores the intricacies of individual decisions made in the name of society’s betterment as well as potential conflicts between the whims of the individual and their cultural or religious commitments.

Lucy’s ambition transcends the constraints of her life, fuelled not by personal aspirations or career ambitions, but by a more fundamental yearning for exploration. This restless desire, which some might attribute to her Jewish heritage, nonetheless remains unfulfilled by traditional markers of happiness like love or marital companionship. She desires the fullest life possible (Ibid, 13). Every Jewish woman embarks on a courageous journey for the welfare of her people, and Lucy personifies this trip. Even though she abandoned her spouse, he respects her ability to make important deals. “He ought to recognize her brilliance and consider it a great deal” (Ibid, 73). She achieves her goal through perseverance and dedication, and the Jewish community eventually respects and admires her for carrying out the Jewish message. “The Jewish community was one among the groups who held her in high regard. Her intellect won over the men and women in this community. She carried out the lesson of unwavering aspiration that every Jew should have” (Ibid, 75). To fulfil her goal, she will not hesitate to sacrifice anything, even to sell herself and her identity. Abdel-Quddous describes Lucy’s intelligence and sexuality as qualities typical of Jewish women, and she exploits them to satisfy her needs. Zaki remembers how Jewish women have used cleverness to gain the

respect of monarchs. Jewish women are resourceful and can set up traps for kings and other powerful persons to ensure the safety and well-being of the Jewish people. For instance, when her tribe lost a battle, the Jewish woman Safiyya married the Prophet Mohammed to preserve her people (Ibid, 72–73). Abdel-Quddous challenges the simplistic view of Lucy's actions as solely self-serving. He argues that the narrative portrays her as resorting to unconventional methods to achieve success, which some might interpret as aligning with a stereotype about Jewish women. This stereotype, unfortunately, was prevalent in Arab society then and, to a lesser extent, persists today.

Identity: Religion, self-interest, and the “Jewish nature”

Don't Leave Me Here Alone explores the complexities of identity through the character of Lucy. Lucy, who is Jewish, demonstrates that religious observance is not the sole definition of Jewish identity. What distinguishes a Jewish person is not only her/his narrow religious affiliation but her/his comprehensive connection to existential reality. Judaism becomes a mere religion within it, not a requirement for this affiliation to be religiously observant. Abdel-Quddous demonstrated the signs of non-religiosity in Lucy's life by her detachment from the narrow concept of the Jewish religion as a set of beliefs and rituals. Lucy's journey demonstrates a significant departure from traditional Jewish practices. This suggests a desire to forge her own identity, take control of her life's trajectory, and challenge the social norms of her community. Lucy is a proactive individual who appears to disregard traditional limitations. The text describes how Orthodox Judaism restricts activities on Saturdays, yet Lucy disregards these restrictions by turning on lights in her home. Similarly, she defies dietary customs by consuming forbidden foods. Furthermore, the narrative portrays her as critical of those who adhere strictly to religious rituals, suggesting she views them as man-made rather than divinely ordained (Ibid, 15). This ironic portrayal of rabbis reaffirming their religious belief and adherence to Jewish customs is set against a picture of a young woman who is striving to live her life as she pleases. She cannot surrender to all these extreme traditions and believes from within that God can't have commanded all these absurdities that are closer to forms of torture (Ibid, 12). Lucy prioritizes intellectual pursuits and personal agency in her life. This suggests a view where religious observance is not the sole determinant of success. Her faith seems to emphasize the power of the mind.

As she passed by the Jewish temple on her way back home, she turned towards the building with a smug smile, as if her tongue was sticking out at the rabbi. Her hand reached for the apartment key. Surely, God bestowed upon the Jews the ability to think and earn, and He did not bestow upon them these ridiculous obligations imposed by the rabbis. She was able to make a deal despite not praying or adhering to kosher bread... Indeed, God is reason itself. (Abdel-Quddous 2021, 29)

Though Lucy reveals her aversion to the Jewish temple, her Jewishness is deep-rooted. “Despite Lucy’s rebellion against religious traditions, she was fully Jewish. She lived in a world surrounded by Jews, and the community she felt a part of was the Jewish community. Both the wealthy and the poor within that community were Jewish” (Ibid, 16). This is how Abdel-Quddous wanted to present the main character, emphasizing in advance that what distinguishes the Jew as a Jew is not his religion, but his comprehensive affiliation to an existential reality. Judaism, to him, represents only a part of what is encompassed by the term “Jewish identity.” A Jew lives with the awareness that she/he is Jewish, regardless of whether she/he is religious or not.

Like her mother, Yasmin demonstrates a limited engagement with traditional Jewish practices. The narrative suggests she only visits a synagogue in exceptional circumstances, such as when seeking to convince French Jews of her heritage in Paris, likely for a specific advantage. This behaviour implies a pragmatic approach to her religious identity, suggesting it may be situational rather than deeply rooted in faith. “Yasmin would cover her head every morning and go to pray in the Jewish synagogue. However, she was not sincerely engaged in this prayer; rather, she aimed to convince the French Jews that she was Jewish like them” (Ibid, 132).

As already stated, Lucy’s conversion is different from what happened when thousands of Spanish Jews converted to Christianity in the late fourteenth century and during the mid-fifteenth century to escape the harm caused by Christians to avoid the harm inflicted upon them (Awad 1999, 17). Lucy doesn’t convert from Judaism to Islam out of fear or concern for anyone. Rather, her conversion is driven by ambition, specifically the ambition to escape the confines of the poor Jewish class, represented by the Jewish neighborhoods of Harat Al-Yahud, Al-Mouski, and Al-Dhahir, and move into another class, such as the affluent families like Shikouril, Adas, Sidnawi, Shmla, Qattawi, and others from wealthy Jewish families. The decision to convert to a new religion can stem from a complex interplay of factors. These

factors can be broadly categorized as individual, social, institutional, cultural, and political. An analysis of these factors reveals that religious belief may not be the sole motivator for conversion. Individuals may convert even if they don't hold a strong belief in or admiration for the tenets of the new religion. In other words, conversion can be driven by personal motivations, such as individual needs, aspirations, and personal orientations, rather than solely by religious conviction. Social considerations, political pressures, and ideological alignment can also play a significant role in influencing conversion. One potential explanation for Lucy's conversion could be her desire to transcend the limitations faced by the lower Jewish social class in her society. Gooren says: One of "The many factors influencing religious participation and change must be...A personal need to change one's life situation" (Ibid, 51-52). Abdel-Quddous paves the way for this conversion by denying Lucy's religious devotion, as she was not particularly religious.

She did not regularly attend the nearby Ashkenazi synagogue in her neighbourhood. She did not frequent the other nearby synagogue in the Abbasia neighbourhood either. Lucy was not convinced of the necessity of prayer. She once stole her father's prayer shawl, which he cherished and adorned with golden threads. The shawl is worn by Jews during prayer, and some might keep it tied around their chest throughout the day. She stole it and added it to the shirt she was knitting for herself. ... she remained convinced that this silk, embroidered shawl was more suitable for her shirt than for prayer. (Ibid, 13-14)

The symbol employed by Abdel-Quddous in the character of Lucy lies in her transition from one religion to another. However, this does not necessarily mean that she is convinced of the new religion or that she abandons her old religion. Despite her previous mockery of its rituals and traditions, the novelist intended for this character to express the achievement of personal interest through religious transformation. Lucy's religion is her self-interest, even if that self-interest lies in divorcing her husband. If Lucy wants to acquire Shawkat Pasha, she will transition through him from the Jewish neighbourhood to the aristocratic society, whether he is Jewish or Muslim. If Lucy wants to separate from her Jewish husband, Zaki, whom she loves, she justifies her request for divorce by citing the public interest. "How can divorce be in our favour? You're crazy..." And Lucy calmly responded, "I will marry a husband who honours you and honours our children" (Ibid, 54). However, this loving husband embraced Islam, along with his son

and daughter, to preserve his relationship and avoid divorce. However, when the lawyer offered him five thousand pounds, he immediately agreed to divorce, not out of affection for Lucy but for the sum of money. Despite his initial commitment, Lucy's husband ultimately agreed to a divorce upon receiving a significant financial settlement. The text suggests his conversion to Islam might have been motivated by a desire to preserve the marriage; however, the substantial financial offer ultimately swayed his decision.

Thus, changing religions becomes a matter unrelated to transitioning from one belief system to another. Instead, it becomes a means to achieve personal interests and gain social and class advantages by belonging to a socially and economically stronger community. The text highlights Lucy's evident joy following the divorce settlement. Interestingly, it doesn't explicitly link her happiness solely to the dissolution of the marriage. Perhaps the significant financial sum awarded to Zaki also played a role in her reaction. After all, he is the father of her children, and everything he obtains will eventually benefit them. It was a profitable deal: Lucy obtained Shawkat Pasha, and the father and children received a Garden City apartment and five thousand pounds. This situation confirms that despite Lucy's conversion to Islam, she has not deviated from her Jewish nature, just like other Jewish women mentioned throughout Jewish history. They always strive to ensure the safety and prosperity of their fellow believers from any location they reach. It reveals to us the underlying motives for a Jew's conversion to another religion, as it involves the desire to save the Jew within oneself and perhaps to save other Jews, who may be children or future generations at the very least (Al-Shami 1992, 270). Thus, her marriage, which was a successful deal, should be appreciated, and her genius should be recognized. This is the genius of Jewish women who, by their femininity, managed to subdue kings and other powerful individuals and ensure the safety and well-being of the Jewish people. The deal was accomplished, and Zaki received his share (Abdel-Quddous 2021, 72–73).

Lucy's conversion to Islam, along with her daughter's, appears to have been influenced by external circumstances. Following Shawkat's death, Lucy resumes using her birth name and alters her outward religious expression. This shift suggests a change in her situation and perhaps a re-evaluation of her adopted identity. This appearance has been lost, and the justification for her being Muslim has been lost with Shawkat's death, so she is no longer a Muslim. She feels that she is

drifting away from Islam (Ibid, 105). This means the death of Shaukat revealed Lucy's lack of deep-rooted affiliation with Islam after her conversion into the character of Zainab, the Muslim Jew.

Yet, to convince herself and others that she is a Muslim, Lucy begins to exaggerate as much as possible about the manifestations of Islam and to distance herself from the Jewish community. Yet, adherence to Islamic traditions does not necessarily reflect a sincere believer as much as it reflects a personality driven by self-interests. Abdel-Quddous states here that self-interest, and nothing else, is what drives the behaviour of the Jewish individual. This self-interest manifests in that the more Zainab, the Jewish-Muslim, increases her diligence in adhering to the manifestations of Islam, the more she preserves the gains she has achieved. "Now that her husband is gone, to whom will she give her Islam?" (Ibid, 106) Despite all that, Lucy/Zainab cannot do without her Islam. Her future and the future of her daughters, Hajar and Yasmin, are intertwined with this Islam. Furthermore, Shawkat's inheritance is based solely on Islam. If she were to return to Judaism, Muslims might hold her in contempt, and Jews might ridicule her. The ambiguity of Lucy's identity is portrayed as a third space, like Bhabha's concept of "in-between," as it neither points to the original identity nor the intended one. Lucy is therefore still not accepted in Muslim culture despite her conversion. She is Showkat's wife, which is why she mainly talks to ladies and goes to their events. Despite her embrace of Islam and her exaggeration in adhering to Islamic customs and obligations, she was not accepted by the Islamic community. Though she makes a concerted effort to overcome the boundaries of religion and social hierarchy, the absolute barriers are palpably present everywhere. Though "She focused all her efforts on living in her husband's society ... the high-class Muslim community ... the community of the royal families, the families of the pashas and the Beys... But she noticed that this society does not receive her except with her husband" (Ibid, 76). Lucy's conversion to Islam might not guarantee complete acceptance within the Muslim community. Certain deeply rooted beliefs, reflected in proverbs like "he who was born a Jew remains a Jew" (Ibid, 64), can create barriers for converts seeking full integration. It is also believed that a Jew cannot be a Muslim and must remain Jewish regardless of her/his dedication to Islam. Exaggerating adherence to Islamic traditions does not reflect a genuinely devout character. It would be more appropriate for her to have a deep faith in her religion, which she has grown up

with and been nurtured in, rather than embodying a character that moves towards self-interest. Despite her efforts (Ibid, 10), such views might label her as a “Jewish Muslim,” highlighting a potential source of ongoing otherness. Lucy’s experience underscores the enduring sense of “otherness” that can persist even after religious conversion. This resonates with the core tenets of postcolonial feminism, which challenge the concept of the ‘Other’ used to marginalize individuals.

Even if she was secular, the customs, behaviour, and traditions associated with the Jewish religion permeate its existence, whether consciously or unconsciously. This implies that the Jew retains some unchangeable, fundamental Jewishness in nature even if she/he has embraced another religion and do not follow Judaism. Lucy and Yasmin are portrayed as “malleable Jewish women” and “receptive by nature to suggestion and conversion” (Lackner 2016, 28). According to their interests, they are authorized to renounce their religion. Lucy arranges a potential marriage between her daughter Yasmin and Aziz Pasha Rady, a Muslim man in his thirties, significantly older than Yasmin and the son of a wealthy nobleman. Material security appears to be Lucy’s primary concern, overshadowing the significant age difference. Interestingly, Yasmin seems to share some of her mother’s values. Like her mother, she is ambitious and constantly fantasizes about achieving financial and social success by taking advantage of her sexuality. She is therefore seen to be excited about the marriage proposal, not because it will satisfy her sexual needs but rather because it will provide her with an opportunity to advance in society. Since she was a young child, she has understood that until she marries and poses as the wife of a wealthy man, she will never be able to have her own identity in this haughty society. After the 1952 revolution, the new government confiscates Yasmin’s father-in-law’s riches, putting an end to her happy existence with her husband. After her husband filed for bankruptcy, Yasmin used her sexuality to get financial advantage—not from men, but from women. Yasmin develops a lesbian relationship with Khadija, her pal. After discreetly hoarding it for themselves since they first met, they sell women's enjoyment (Abdel-Quddous 2021, 167). Lucy makes an unsuccessful attempt to become involved in Yasmin’s affairs by using both morality and social convention. Yasmin, who is presented as a lesbian, justifies her behaviour by arguing that, unlike the clear prohibition of relationships between men and women outside of marriage, Islam does not outright forbid women from having intimate relationships. Yasmin believes that

female companionship is a natural position for women to be in. That kind of material doesn't have to be kept under wraps, and people need to feel free to disclose it. She thinks they are above the laws of Islamic sharia. Even if they did get together, it would be purer than relationships between people since, at the absolute least, nothing strange would taint her stomach and contaminate her (Ibid, 168).

Khadija and Yasmin have been successful in luring affluent women. With their wealthy clients, they indulge in sexual activity. The other customers, including Khadija, are Muslim women, proving that not only Jewish women can engage in such behaviour. Yasmin's partners are rich, which may be interpreted as evidence that her conventional Jewish traits—rather than a natural desire for sex with other women—are the cause of her homosexuality. Her seductions of rich and privileged women serve as a means of making money. Abdel-Quddous employs the pre-existing stereotype to describe Yasmin's character, claiming that her cravings for money and sexual fulfilment are due to her "Jewish nature". Yasmin's unbridled drive for financial achievement is shown in her desire to be as prosperous as legendary Jewish businessmen and "to establish a large business that would enable her to realize her dream of attaining the heyday of Cicurel" (Ibid, 171). Despite having a close relationship with her Muslim partner, Khadija, she betrays her by getting into a partnership with a Jewish Egyptian businessman named Elia Curiel in France behind Khadija's back. It is implied that the betrayal and duplicity conform to the long-standing caricature of Jews as people who will stop at nothing to further their interests. Yasmin's re-establishment with her people represents her adherence to her race and religion. What is crucial in this instance is that the Jew still possesses some unchangeable, fundamental Jewishness in character, even if she/ he has accepted another religion and adapted to a different culture and is not practising her/his Jewishness or Judaism.

Abdel-Quddous's personality conflicts

The Jewish characters in Ihsan Abdel-Quddous's narrative differ greatly from the recurring image of Jews that is echoed in literary works. It is not the image of Shylock, the Jewish character who demands his right to a pound of flesh from Antonio, as stated in the document down to the last letter in *The Merchant of Venice*. No power on earth would make him compromise on what he demands. He prefers a pound of Antonio's flesh over three thousand dinars. Unlike a

character motivated by a mere grudge who seeks only their due, the Jewish protagonist in Ihsan Abdel-Quddous' novel faces a far deeper conflict. They grapple with the wrenching dilemma of dispersion: the choice between remaining in their homeland and seeking a new life elsewhere. This internal struggle stems from the fact that their Jewish identity transcends religion; it's an intrinsic part of who they are, deeply intertwined with their sense of belonging.

Judaism is a character that surpasses any other character that a Jew can associate with. The Jew is either Jewish or not Jewish, and after that, they can be anything. They can be a Jewish French, a Jewish American, or a Jewish Russian. No matter how they move from one nationality to another, they are still either Jewish or not Jewish. Similarly, if they convert from one religion to another (for example, if they embrace Christianity), they are Jewish Christians. (Abdel-Quddous 2021, 10)

This means Jewish heritage can persist even after conversion to another religion. A core aspect of Jewish identity is its persistence. Wagner (2015, 77) adds that Islamized Jews "became the lowest-status Muslims of all: Black 'dawāshīn', who lived in tents and could not intermarry with other tribesmen". It transcends personal belief and integrates deeply into an individual's sense of self. This remains true even for those who are not observant of the religion's tenets. Jewish law, for instance, recognizes a person as Jewish if their mother is Jewish, regardless of their personal religious beliefs. Furthermore, cultural elements like customs, behavior, and traditions often permeate the lives of individuals with Jewish heritage, even if they are secular. This awareness, conscious or subconscious, contributes to the ongoing nature of Jewish identity. Conversion to another religion doesn't necessarily sever ties with Judaism. Individuals who convert may still carry a sense of connection to their Jewish heritage, both psychologically and culturally. This can manifest in various ways, even if their adherence to the new religion is genuine. The complexity of Jewish identity makes complete separation a difficult proposition for anyone, regardless of their level of religious observance. The conversation between Lucy, a woman with a Jewish background who converted to Islam, and her daughter Yasmin exposes Lucy's ongoing connection to her Jewish identity. Ihsan Abdel-Quddous utilizes subtle verbal cues, often referred to as "slips of the tongue," to portray the unconscious or subconscious influence of one's past. Through these instances, Abdel-Quddous explores the complexities of religious conversion, particularly the persistence of cultural identity despite a

change in faith. Zainab is heard saying, “You’re right, my son. Who said we are not Jews? If we weren’t Jews, why did I come to you today?” (Abdel-Quddous 2021, 87) Lucy’s interactions within Islamic society reveal a potential tension between her outward adherence to Islamic traditions and her inner sense of self. While she may exhibit a heightened level of participation, it’s important to consider if this stems from genuine conviction or an attempt to mask her unresolved feelings about her Jewish heritage. In contrast, her interactions with her son, Isaac, suggest a more open acknowledgement of her Jewish identity, despite her conversion to Islam.

The novel presents an intriguing irony. Zainab (formerly known as Lucy) and Jasmine, who converted to Islam and distanced themselves from Jewish religious traditions, now experience a peculiar yearning for the very symbols they once disregarded. Despite embracing Islam and severing ties with her husband’s family, Lucy clings to her birth name, “Lucy,” which holds a connection to her Jewish heritage. This seemingly contradictory behavior highlights the complexities of identity and the enduring influence of one’s background, even after conversion. Lucy’s insistence on retaining her birth name, “Lucy,” even after converting to Islam and adopting the name “Zainab Hanidy,” becomes a potent symbol. It suggests a desire to preserve a link to her Jewish heritage. This internal conflict manifests physically as a “tightness creeping upon her chest” and an emotional outpouring of tears (Ibid, 62). Conversion, intended as a new beginning, appears to have unearthed a wellspring of bittersweet emotions – a mix of distress and a yearning for past religious celebrations and family gatherings.

She felt distressed crawling on her chest after she finished recording her conversion to Islam. She did not want to see Showkat or see Sheikh Abdul Latif. She wanted to cry. She got into the car on her way back to the lodge, the one in which she was staying and cried. She could not stop crying. She had never cried as she did now. She might have been crying for her Jewishness. She had never felt that she was Jewish as she felt now. All the rituals of Judaism came to her mind. (Abdel-Quddous 2021, 61)

Despite abandoning Jewish religious practices, Lucy exhibits a continued attachment to Zionist ideals and the concept of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The novel highlights this through a statement where Lucy firmly believes “Palestine is the right of the Jews” (Ibid, 83). This unwavering support for Zionism resurfaces during the 1948 Arab Israeli War, as she finds herself sympathizing with the Jewish side in the conflict (Ibid, 59). Lucy’s complex relationship with her

Jewish identity underscores the multifaceted nature of such an identity. It can encompass cultural heritage, religious observance, and a deep connection to one's ancestral homeland, even when aspects of that identity are seemingly abandoned. Though she realizes that the conflict between Arabs and Jews in Palestine is intensifying, she does not want to know what the Arabs say or what the Jews say. "However, deep down, she believes that Palestine is the right of the Jews." She has lived her whole life waiting for the Promised Land. When she prayed, she would chant, "To meet you, O Jerusalem" (Ibid, 83). Her main objection and concerns stem from the fear that her Egyptian Eastern Jewish children (Sephardim) would suffer in Israel from what she experienced in Egypt, with the class distinction between the residents of the Jewish Quarter and the residents of Garden City and Zamalek. She fears that her children would be placed in the second-class status of Eastern Jews, much like the African Americans in America at that time. They would remain at the bottom, underfoot, and marginalized.

Although Lucy enjoyed a life of wealth, security, and social status in Egypt, the novel suggests her decision to leave may have stemmed from deeper motivations. These could be ideological, a yearning for a different way of life, a pursuit of personal fulfilment, or perhaps a longing for a connection to her ancestral homeland. Human decisions are rarely one-dimensional; a complex interplay of factors, beyond immediate material comfort or security, often influence our choices. A key difference emerges between Isaac and Zainab's perspectives. Isaac, influenced by Zionist ideology, adheres to the concept of the "eternal wanderer" - the notion that a Jew living outside Israel is somehow incomplete. This belief suggests a disconnect from their faith and a potential path to fulfilment through repatriation. He even holds onto the idea of a specific prayer, the "Prayer of Vows," that supposedly absolves Jews of past commitments. The significance of the "Prayer of Vows" lies in its historical context. Traditionally, it was used by Jews who had converted to another religion under duress, seeking a way to reclaim their Jewish identity. This concept resonates with Isaac, particularly considering his daughter Jasmine's recent conversion. While Isaac's past religious affiliation remains unclear, his interest in this prayer suggests a desire to potentially reconnect with his Jewish heritage. This instance exemplifies the complexities of individual beliefs and the multifaceted nature of religious and cultural identity.

She used to go to the Jewish Association, where they welcomed her as someone who had repented and returned to her roots. When the time came for the days of Yom Kippur, she could pray the “Kol Nidre” prayer, which absolves her from all her previous commitments, obligations, and ties. It frees her from Islam, from Egypt, and even from her husband Aziz. (Ibid, 188)

In contrast to Isaac, Zainab remains hesitant to embrace the “Prayer of Vows” as a path back to her former identity as Lucy Hanidy. This suggests a deeper resistance to fully reclaiming her Jewish heritage. Ultimately, Zainab chooses to leave Egypt and reunite with Jasmine in Paris. The novel leaves open the possibility that this movie represents a search for a sense of belonging, both religious and cultural. Whether in Paris or perhaps even in Israel, a journey Zainab contemplates, she yearns for a connection that has eluded her.

She cannot. She built every day of her life here, in Egypt. Every day, she built her daughter herself. Every day, she unleashed a spark of success, for success is life, it is homeland. Wherever she succeeded, she was in her homeland. She should not regret it merely because her children left her alone. What she has taken from her life will always be attached to her through her children. She will remain here, and she will die here, and she will be buried in the soil of her success. (Ibid, 198)

Zainab, the Muslim Jew, has decided to remain true to her original religion, which is a success. It is a new religion embraced by the Jews wherever they go, and it allows them to transition from Judaism to any other religion without losing their inherent identity because Judaism is a personal characteristic before being a religion. The cycle of life repeats itself with Zainab’s daughter, Yasmin, who has also chosen to embrace a single religion, which is a success. Whether that religion is based on staying in Islam and abandoning Judaism or on renouncing Islam and returning to Judaism, it is a business transaction where interests determine the religion (Ibid, 101). The world of ambition shapes the steps and actions. This indicates that the Jewish character presented by Abdel-Quddous is a Jew who is thoroughly ingrained in the culture of Egypt as a whole and who desires to stay there if no external forces force him to leave. If circumstances force him to leave, he prefers to live in Paris or any European capital to fulfil his Jewish aspirations. Unlike some Jewish communities in Europe, which faced persecution and violence, this Egyptian Jew’s experience of leaving Egypt appears less burdened by regret. The narrative suggests a possible absence of widespread anti-Semitism or large-scale violence against Jews in their departure.

Unbelonging and beyond: Lucy's struggle for identity

Lucy/Zainab went through several crises after she declared her conversion to Islam. One of these crises was her family's rejection of her decision to embrace Islam. As a result, she experienced an internal struggle that tore her apart, a conflict between her deep-rooted Jewish identity and her Islam. Following her conversion, Lucy grapples with the complexities of her evolving identity. This internal struggle is further intensified by the perceived rejection from both her Jewish and Muslim communities. Her wish to transcend religious bonds and cross-religious limits is realized to be unfulfilled because of being rejected by both communities, leaving her in a condition of turbulence and in-betweenness. Lucy's conversion to Islam, intended as a bridge to a new life, ironically led to a sense of isolation from both her Jewish community and the Muslim elite she aspired to join. To borrow Gooren's words, it causes a "sense of isolation from the outside world" (Ibid, 73).

The narrative explores Zainab's internal struggle as she grapples with reconciling her Jewish heritage and her adopted Muslim faith. This creates a sense of ambiguity for her. Ultimately, she embraces Islam and expresses a desire to integrate into a sophisticated Egyptian Muslim society. Notably, her sense of belonging seems tied to Egypt itself, transcending religious labels. This suggests a strong identification with Egyptian culture. Similarly, Yasmin's choices, such as marrying Aziz Radi and raising their children within the Muslim community, further solidify their Egyptian identity. The narrative explores Zainab's (formerly Lucy) internal conflict as she reconciles her Jewish heritage with her adopted Muslim faith. Ultimately, she embraces Islam and seeks integration into a prominent Egyptian Muslim society. This choice underscores her strong identification with Egyptian culture, which transcends religious affiliation. Similarly, Yasmin's life choices, including marriage to Aziz Radi, solidify their Egyptian identity within the Muslim community. Despite her conversion, hints suggest a deeper connection to Egypt for Lucy, potentially raising questions about the motivations behind her initial conversion.

Through the character of Zainab, Abdel-Quddous depicts the picture of the Jews and the psychological crises they experienced during the war in Egypt. They were depicted as being worried and disturbed despite their conversion to Islam, as they were affected by

the political situation during the war between Egypt and Israel. “The officers’ revolution began, and everyone who had another country started to flee from Egypt. Zainab was bewildered, and confusion led her to fear. She couldn’t decide what to choose. Should Zainab stay or go back and become the other Lucy?” (Ibid, 111) In a state of mental and emotional degeneration, Lucy makes one final effort to incorporate both beliefs into herself and resolve her internal conflict. She tries to bridge her two identities by referring to her Muslim daughter Hajar. Her intention in naming her daughter was to give her a name that honored both her Muslim and Jewish origins. The name Hajar is used by Muslims, Jews, and Christians (Ibid, 80). According to Starr (2000, 75), Lucy’s decision to give her daughter this name might be seen as a call back to an Egyptianness that existed before the split of religions from the early monotheism that Abraham/Ibrahim signifies. Another meaning of the name Hajar is a possible link between these two religions. In the end, it’s possible to see Lucy’s choice of name as an effort to resolve the internal struggle she faces and create a new, cohesive identity. The narrative of Lucy highlights two key elements of how Jews are portrayed in Arabic literature: first, she is portrayed as being victimized, sultry, materialistic, exploitative, and ungrateful, who uses her sexuality to control others. On the other hand, she possesses qualities that are typically assigned to all Jews, such as intelligence, maternal love, and pragmatism. Yasmin’s journey highlights the nuanced relationship between faith and belonging. Though she converted to Islam alongside her mother, the Muslim community feels alienating, a stark contrast to the familiar world she left behind (Abdel-Quddous 2021, 98). This shift has left her adrift, a stranger in her neighborhood, yearning for a place that truly feels like home. Driven by a dual desire for financial security and a rekindled connection to her heritage, Yasmin seeks to establish a shop within Paris’ Jewish community. This decision transcends mere business goals and bureaucratic hurdles. It appears to be a subconscious yearning to reconnect with the latent Jewish identity that has always been a part of her.

Don’t Leave Me Here Alone delves into the complexities of identity through Lucy’s experience. Her conversion to Islam severs the familiar ties of her Jewish heritage, thrusting her into a liminal space. This hybridity extends beyond faith, encompassing ethnicity, social class, and the tapestry of her cultural experiences. The novel poignantly portrays Lucy’s yearning for acceptance, a yearning that remains

frustratingly out of reach within both Jewish and Muslim communities. Her conversion, initially envisioned as a bridge to a new life, becomes a source of internal conflict and social isolation.

In addition to the qualities listed above, Zainab is presented as having her own philosophy of war and not preferring conflict. She detests people warring among themselves and hates conflict. For her, both victories and setbacks leave fatalities in their wake. Neither victory nor failure is what she wishes for. She wishes for a world free from conflict (Ibid, 150–152).

Conclusion

Ihsan Abdel-Quddous's novel, *Don't Leave Me Here Alone*, offers a nuanced portrayal of Arab Jews, dismantling simplistic narratives of alienation. It presents a new image that contrasts with previously dominant stereotypes. Through the character's experiences, the novel critically examines the survival strategies employed by Arab Jews caught between conflicting religious doctrines and ideologies. These strategies enabled them to navigate the Islamic world, but not without consequences. Additionally, the novel challenges the traditional notion of conversion as a divine choice. Instead, it portrays conversion as a personal decision driven by individual needs and circumstances.

The narrative offers a complex portrait of the Egyptian Jewish-Muslim woman via Lucy. Her conversion to Islam, which she at first saw as a means of belonging, ends up being the starting point for a serious identity struggle. The intricate relationships between faith, tradition, and the need for acceptance in a society with clear social and religious boundaries are all poignantly explored in this narrative. Lucy's story transcends the specific context of Egyptian society, offering a universal exploration of the human desire to belong. Her liminal existence, caught between two cultures and faiths, resonates with the experiences of individuals navigating multifaceted identities. Through Lucy's journey, Abdel-Quddous compels readers to confront the limitations of societal constructs and celebrate the richness of hybrid identities.

Abdel-Quddous, through the character of Lucy, explores the concept of a persistent Jewish identity. The novel suggests that conversion to another religion may not fully erase one's inherent Jewishness. Judaism is portrayed as a complex web of social identity, rituals, and traditions that deeply influence a person's actions, self-perception, and worldview. This inherent Jewishness, according to the

novel, can persist even if an individual no longer actively practices the religion, assimilates into another culture, or adopts the practices of another faith. Zainab's story exemplifies this concept. Despite her conversion to Islam, she demonstrates a continued connection to her Jewish heritage. This connection is evident in her unwavering commitment to the safety and prosperity of her fellow Jews, regardless of her social standing. However, it's important to acknowledge the limitations of this portrayal. The notion of an unchangeable Jewish essence is a complex one, and the novel's representation may not reflect the full spectrum of experiences within the Jewish diaspora.

The novel's portrayal of Lucy offers a complex exploration of Jewish women in Arabic literature. While the character exhibits ambition and resourcefulness, the narrative also employs potentially problematic tropes, such as portraying her as manipulative and using sexuality for control. However, Lucy also embodies traditionally positive traits associated with Jewish characters, such as pragmatism, maternal love, and intelligence. Beyond its unique portrayal of the Egyptian Jewish-Muslim woman, *Don't Leave Me Here Alone* delves into themes relevant to contemporary gender studies and postcolonial feminism. The novel offers a nuanced exploration of the challenges faced by women in patriarchal societies as they strive for autonomy and equality. Abdel-Quddous portrays the complex role women play within social structures, highlighting their struggle to balance the preservation of cultural traditions with their aspirations. Additionally, he examines how women's participation in various spheres of life, such as politics and culture, shapes their daily experiences. The novel's portrayal of Jewish women, particularly through the character of Lucy, presents a complex challenge. While it departs from stereotypical images of passivity and submissiveness, it assigns certain traits to Lucy – ambition, for instance – that can be misconstrued as negative within a patriarchal context. This underscores the need for a more critical examination of how female characters, particularly those who defy expectations, are represented. A nuanced analysis that considers the historical and cultural context would provide a richer understanding of these portrayals.

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