

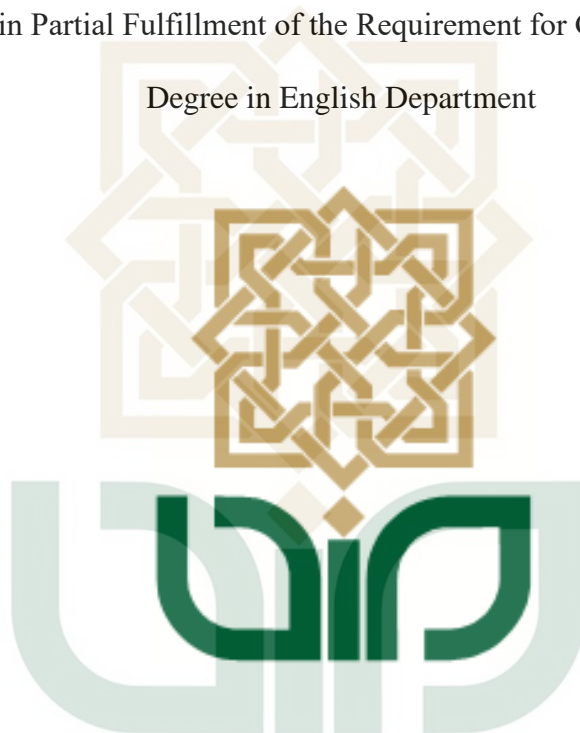
**KIERKEGAARDIAN EXISTENTIALISM IN LEILA ABOULELA'S**

***MINARET***

A GRADUATING PAPER

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for Gaining Bachelor's

Degree in English Department



By:

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**2023**

## A FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT

### A FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT

I certify that this graduate paper is definitely my own work. I am completely responsible for the content of this graduating paper. Other researchers' opinions or findings included in this research are quoted or cited in accordance with ethical standards.

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Atas perhatiannya, kami mengucapkan terima kasih.

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# **KIERKEGAARDIAN EXISTENTIALISM IN LEILA ABOULELA'S MINARET**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* portrays Najwa's struggle to become a devoted Muslim after she becomes an immigrant in London. The novel tells Najwa's personal struggles with her faith and self-discovery, aligning with Kierkegaard's three stages of aesthetic, ethical, and religious stage. This research aims to discuss Soren Kierkegaard existentialism in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method using documentation technique and Kierkegaard three stages of life concept. The result of this research shows that Najwa passes three stages of life according to Kierkegaard existentialism. There are aesthetic, ethical, and religious stages. The aesthetic stage is indicated when Najwa's life is ruled by passion. The ethical stage portrayed when she recognizes moral responsibility. While the religious stage is shown when she reaches a leap of faith and accepts God's command. In the end, Najwa finds a sense of contentment and purpose through her renewed connection with her faith and a commitment to living authentically.

**Keywords:** existentialism, aesthetic, ethical, leap of faith, religious

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# KIERKEGAARDIAN EXISTENTIALISM IN LEILA ABOULELA'S MINARET

Oleh: Shafa

## ABSTRAK

*Minaret* oleh Leila Aboulela menjelaskan tentang usaha Najwa untuk menjadi Muslim yang taat setelah menjadi imigran di London. Novel ini menceritakan tentang perjuangan keyakinan dan pencarian jati diri Najwa yang sejalan dengan tiga tahapan estetika, etika, dan religious dalam pandangan Kierkegaard. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendiskusikan Soren Kierkegaard eksistensialisme di *Minaret* oleh Leila Aboulela. Penelitian ini menggunakan kualitatif deskriptif juga metode Teknik dokumentasi, dan menggunakan tiga tahap eksistensi menurut Soren Kierkegaard. Yaitu tahap estetis, tahap etis, dan tahap religious. Tahap estetis mengindikasikan bahwa kehidupan Najwa dikuasai oleh nafsu. Tahap etis digambarkan Ketika Najwa mulai berubah dan lebih bertanggung jawab terhadap dirinya sendiri dan orang lain. Sementara tahap religious ditunjukkan Ketika Najwa mengalami lompatan iman dan menerima dan melakukan perintah Tuhan (Allah SWT). Pada akhirnya, Najwa menemukan tujuan dalam hidup melalui keyakinannya dan komitmen untuk hidup autentik..

**Kata kunci:** eksistensialisme, estetis, etis, lompatan iman, religious

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## MOTTO

To worship The Creator and serve His creation.



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## DEDICATION

*To my mother in heaven,  
Ten years have not been easy,  
I miss you every day, all day,  
Falling into a never-ending well of agony after you passed away,  
I dwelled there for years.*

*I searched for many things to fill myself up,  
Many were bad,  
But some were good.*

*And here I am,  
I have survived.  
At least, until now.*



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

All praise to Allah SWT, the Lord of the universe, who always gives me His blessing and mercy to help me finish my graduating paper. I would like to express my gratitude to the following individuals for the people.

1. Prof. Dr.Phil. H. Al Makin, S.Ag., M.A. as the Rector of State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta
2. Prof. Dr. Muhammad Wildan, M.A. as the Dean of Faculty of Adab and Cultural Sciences State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta
3. Ulyati Retno Sari, S.S. M. Hum. As the Head of the English Department and as my thesis advisor. Thank you for your guidance and your endless support Ma'am.
4. Dr. Ubaidillah, S.S., M.Hum. as my academic advisor.
5. Dr. Danial Hidayatullah SS., M.Hum as my first examiner.
6. Harsiwi Fajar Sari, SS., M.A. as my second examiner.
7. For all lectures in English Department, State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta: Febriyanti Dwiratna Lestari SS., MA, Dr. Arif Budiman, S.S., M.A, Aninda Aji Siwi, S.Pd., M.Pd., Dwi Margo Yuwono, M.Hum., and others. Thank you for your dedication.
8. My dear mother, (Almh.) Kuntjorowati. I am sincerely grateful for being your daughter.
9. My best friend, Alya Masluhil Hawa. Thank you so much for the emotional and spiritual support. I am so blessed to have you in my life.

10. Chi Alpha (XA) Jogja, thank you for letting me discover myself and connect with God.

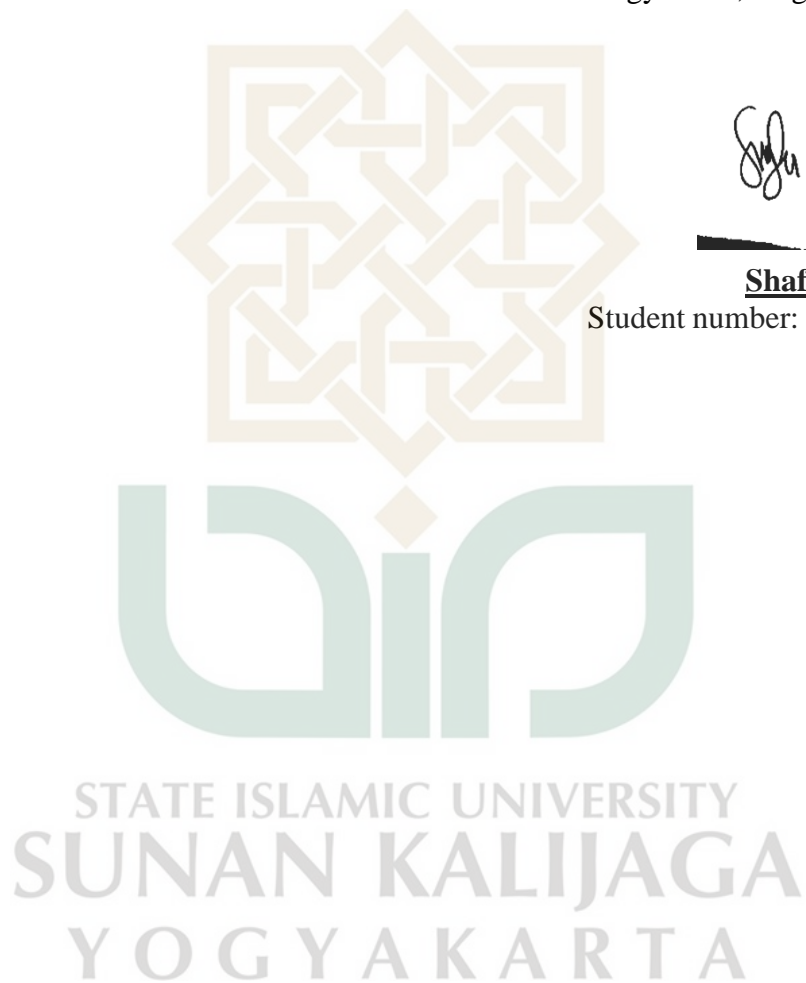
11. Couvee and 28 Coffee Tamsis, thank you for accompany me to finish my thesis.

Yogyakarta, August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background of Study

*Minaret* is the second novel by Sudanese author Leila Aboulela and it was published in 2005. The novel is set in Khartoum, the capital city of Sudan, and in London. *Minaret* describes the evolving life of Najwa, a Sudanese woman, after she becomes an immigrant in London. The novel is divided into six parts, allowing the reader to flash back to key moments, from its present time (2003-2004) to Najwa's privileged juvenile years in Khartoum as the daughter of a wealthy government minister (1984-1985) and during her family's depressing exile in London (1989-1991) following the coup in Sudan that led to her father's execution.

Najwa comes from a privileged family and she enjoys a lot of advantages that other girls couldn't get. For instance, she can attend a high-quality college and drive her own car in Khartoum. Her mother is from a wealthy family, while her father holds a high-ranking government position. During her time in Khartoum, she becomes more alienated from Islam, even though people in her surroundings are quite religious and have strong belief in religious practices. She views religious practice as a waste of her time, considering her wealth and happiness. She was rich and had a happy life, "I had a happy life. My father and mother loved me and were always generous. There was nothing that I didn't have, couldn't have." (Aboulela, 2005, p. 8). She finds comfort wearing miniskirts, "I wore my denim skirt that evening. It was my favorite, tight, longish, with a slit at the back" (2005, p. 35).

Moreover, she does not want to pray and is annoyed by her maid waking up fajr for prayer. “They were getting ready to pray. They had dragged themselves from sleep in order to pray. I was wide awake and I didn’t” (2005, p. 26). Both she and her brother, Omar, are students at the university of Khartoum. During her time in college, she meets Anwar and falls in love with him. Anwar, a radical communist, actively delivers speeches on campus about his political view. Nevertheless, the relationship between Najwa and Anwar ends after he verbally attacks Najwa’s father about its political views. He hates the fact that Najwa’s father supports the government, which he believes is guilty of corruption.

As the condition changes, Najwa, her mother, and her twin brother, Omar, are forced to flee to London after her father is found guilty when the coup occurs. Unfortunately, she lost her mother and her twin brother, Omar, who had already developed a drug habit in Khartoum, is arrested and imprisoned for stabbing a police officer in a drug attack. In London, Najwa faces the challenge of adapting to her new life and the freedoms it offers. She begins working for her aunt. She also meets Anwar and they begin to have a relationship again. However, this renewed relationship becomes toxic and emotionally abusive, with Anwar constantly belittling Najwa for her religious beliefs. Regardless of what Anwar did to Najwa, she still loves him. He even goes so far that he would never want to get married and have children with Najwa. His reason for not wanting to share the same genes as Najwa’s father is what drives his decision. Furthermore, Najwa’s loss of virginity to Anwar intensifies her feelings of guilt and creates a greater distance between her and her faith. These factors lead Najwa to end their relationship.

It has been 18 years since Najwa came to London and during this time, she

has been striving to focus on herself. She finds someone who guides her back to Islam, someone that remind her to pray five times a day, to attend Islamic class, and to be the best version of herself. Moreover, she works as a maid for Lamya and her family. She is getting more comfortable in her job as well. Gradually, she forms a connection with Tamer, Lamya's brother and their relationship is getting intimate because their shared values and devotion to Islam. Nonetheless, their relationship do not go further because Lamya catches them kissing and told Najwa to stay away from Tamer. Najwa decides to leave all the past behind and she wants to focus on becoming the best version of herself and to embracing her faith.

Najwa's choice to embrace her faith is a deeply personal and transformative decision. As Kierkegaard states that choices are important in changing a life to reach a better life. Kierkegaard's philosophy heavily emphasizes the importance of personal choice, subjective experience, and the individual's responsibility in shaping their own existence. Kierkegaard also mentions anxiety in relation to transformative changes in life. Anxiety arises from the awareness of our own freedom and responsibility in making choices. The individual is confronted with the burden of making significant decisions that shape their lives, and this awareness can evoke a profound sense of anxiety. Najwa experiences anxiety in relation to her personal and romantic relationships. The guilt and internal conflict she experiences due to her involvement in a romantic relationship that is considered forbidden within her religious belief. She wrestles with internal conflicts and doubts after she comes to London and leaves Baba alone in Khartoum after he was arrested.

Najwa's characteristic indicates a lack of religious belief. Every decision or choice she makes comes from decisions in his own consciousness. This makes



Najwa's character in this novel interesting to analyze. Kierkegaard introduces a philosophical theory asserting that life is experienced in three distinct stages; however, not every individual experiences all three stages. There are aesthetic, ethical, and religious stages. These three stages of life are more than just 'stages in life'; each stage represents a complete and comprehensive human world, complete with its own ideals, motivations, and forms of behavior (2001, pp. 76-77). Aesthetic stage is when people are after pleasure. They are preoccupied with hedonism, materialism, narcissism, and individualism. In Najwa's case, it can be concluded that her choices that prioritize her desires over her religious beliefs, and her romantic involvement in Anwar. People believe that life is to be enjoyed here and now, thus long-term goals are not considered. In this stage, people are looking for anything that will cure one's boredom to bring excitement and delight into their lives. Ethical stage focuses on making ethical choices and taking responsibility for one's action. As Najwa turns towards her faith and seeks to improve her life, particularly her decision to break away from unhealthy relationships and embrace her faith. Religious stage underlines on absolute devotion to one's faith and a higher purpose. Examining how Najwa's journey toward embracing her faith and striving for authenticity aligns with the religious stage.

The freedom that Najwa had before she committed again to Islam is something that we usually face in daily life. As a human, individuals often experience anxiety when they try to make the best decision of their lives, but they are sometimes unaware about it. Because of that, the researcher is interested to dig deeper into what characters Najwa fits in Soren's three stages of life.

Both Najwa's journey and Kierkegaard's existentialism revolve around the

internal struggle of individuals and their quest for self-discovery. Najwa faces numerous challenges in her life, including the loss of her privileged status, the burden of guilt, and the conflict between her faith and desires. It also emphasizes the importance of authenticity. Najwa grapples with her own identity, seeking to align herself with her true self, her values, and her faith. Moreover, Kierkegaard argues for the necessity of living authentically and embracing one's individuality.

In addition, Najwa's story and Kierkegaard's philosophy touch upon the themes of anxiety. Najwa confronts anxiety in the form of feelings of inadequacy, and disconnection from her faith. Kierkegaard's existentialism delves into the human experience of anxiety as a disconnection from one's true self and purpose. Both Najwa and Kierkegaard highlight the importance of facing anxiety and seeking resolution through self-reflection, personal growth, and a search for authenticity. These are what make the main character in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* significant to be analyzed. Based on the explanation, Najwa experiences the process to accept God's command and develops a deeper connection with her faith. She makes a choice to improve her previous life. All of Najwa's experiences align with Kierkegaard's three stages of life, exploring the human spiritual journey and the stages of personal development.

## **1.2. Research Question**

Based on the background of study above, the researcher arranges the research question as follows:

How are Soren's three stages of life existentialism concept portrayed by Najwa in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*?

### **1.3. Objective of Study**

Based on the research question which is described above, the objective of this research is : To explain how Soren's three stages of life existentialism concept are portrayed by Najwa in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*.

### **1.4. Significance of Study**

This research is expected to give benefits in the academic field, which can increase knowledge about how Soren's three stages of life existentialism cannot be separated from human's life according to Soren Kierkegaard's existentialism theory in determining their lives. The researcher also hopes that this research can actuate a critical perspective that shows the readers how Sudanese muslim immigrants fight for their lives after the uncertainty and terror of the country's westernization in the 1980s.

### **1.5. Literature Review**

The researcher finds some researchers that analyze *Minaret* as the object of the research. The difference among this research with previous research lies in the theory and the topic of research.

The first literature is a thesis written by Susan Taha Al-Karawi and Ida Baizura Bahar (2014) entitled "Negotiating The Veil and Identity in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*". This thesis focuses on the different hybrid identities and efforts Najwa makes to come to terms with her developing Muslim identity. The researchers use the conceptual framework of Victor Turner's liminality and Homi Bhabha's hybridity and the third space in order to analyze this struggle.

The second literature review is “Minaret by Leila Aboulela : From Exile to a New Home? (2011)” by Stefania Sterlecchini. This essay explores the problematic intercultural relationship between Najwa, the heroine, and the other characters, and most significantly between the girl herself while in London. The researcher uses postcolonialism and liminal space.

The third literature review is a paper written by F. Fiona Moolla (2021) entitled “Her Heart Lies at the Feet of the Mother : Transformations of the Romance Plot in Leila Aboulela’s *Minaret*”. This essay suggests that in Muslim romance, the dissenting mother may be a major and recurring obstruction to the resolution, and that the union of the beloved crucially depends on the mother’s approval.

Fourth, the paper written by John A. Stotesbury entitled “Muslim Romance in Diaspora: Leila Aboulela’s *Minaret* (2005) and the Ethics of Reading in the West”. The researchers discuss ambiguous norms in the *Minaret* by Aboulela and are examined in the light of Andrew Gibson’s critical reception and receptivity.

A graduating paper written by Ade Nine Suryani from State Islamic University of Sunan Kalijaga entitled “Jack Frost: A Kierkegaardian Existentialism in *Rise of Guardians* Movie” (2017). It analyses the struggle of Jack Frost as the main character in determining his way of life. The researcher uses an objective approach by applying Soren Kierkegaard’s existentialism theory and supported by film theory. The researcher focuses on Soren’s stage of life existentialism concept to help in analyzing the stage of life that is determined by Jack.

Last, an article entitled The Kierkegaardian Existentialism of Richard Linklater’s *Before* Trilogy by Zachary Xavier (2021). This article examines the Kierkegaardian existentialism set in motion by Richard Linklater’s *Before* trilogy:

*Before Sunrise* (1995), *Before Sunset* (2004), and *Before Midnight* (2013). The identification of three existential stages of life – the aesthetic, ethical, and religious – is Kierkegaard’s most notable contribution to philosophy. The article goes on to discuss how the differing existential states of Jesse and Celine prevent a proper appropriation of the ethical requirement into their lives, and that this existential disparity is what eventually surfaces the dysfunction of their romantic union.

From the literature above, the researcher concludes that there has not been any researches on Leila Aboulela’s *Minaret* using Kierkegaardian Existentialism. This study is expected to contribute to the research using Kierkegaardian Existentialism and serves as a reference for the application of this theory.

## **1.6. Theoretical Framework**

In this research, the researcher chooses Kierkegaard’s existentialism as a theory because the concept of Kierkegaard’s existentialism fits what the main character, Najwa, faces in her life. There are aesthetic, ethical, and religious stage. Furthermore, it is also because Soren and Najwa have the same point of view of believing in God.

### **1.6.1. Kierkegaard’s Existentialism**

Choice is the main theme in Soren’s existentialism. It is very important in changing a life to reach a better life. Kierkegaard’s philosophy heavily emphasizes the importance of personal choice, subjective experience, and the

individual's responsibility in shaping their own existence. Kierkegaard's central concept is the notion of 'authenticity' or 'individuality'. He argued that individuals should strive to live authentically, embracing their unique selves and avoiding conformity to societal norms or expectations. True freedom lies in making choices that align with one's own values and beliefs, rather than simply following the crowd.

Kierkegaard emphasizes the importance of objective truth, subjective truth and personal responsibility. Objective truth refers to truths that are independent of individual perspectives and are universally valid. It is based on reason, empirical evidence, and logical coherence. They are not influenced by personal opinions, emotions, or subjective experiences. While Subjective truth refers to the truth that is personally meaningful and relevant to an individual's existence. It is subjective in the sense that it is internal to the individual and is based in their subjective experiences, beliefs, and values. Subjective truth involves a passionate and authentic commitment to one's own existence and values, even in the face of uncertainty. It is intimately connected to individual freedom, responsibility, and the pursuit of an authentic relationship with God.

In Islam, subjective truth is a concept that revolves around an individual's personal beliefs, experiences, and relationship with God. It recognizes that each person has a unique perspective and understanding of their faith and spirituality. Muslim subjective truth encompasses the individual's personal connection with Allah, their personal interpretations of religious teachings, and their spiritual



experiences. It acknowledges that individuals may have different levels of understanding. Muslim also believe that the Qur'an is the ultimate source of objective truth, revealed by Allah. It serves as a guide for moral and spiritual principles that are universally valid. However, the subjective truth comes into play when individuals interpret and apply these objective truths to their own lives.

Kierkegaard criticizes the prevailing objective and impersonal approach to truth, advocating for a more subjective understanding of truth that takes into account the individual's lived experience. He believes that true knowledge and authentic existence could only be achieved through personal reflection, individual choice, and the acceptance of personal responsibility. Key concept in Kierkegaard's existentialism is the 'leap of faith'. He argues that faith is not a rational, logical belief but a passionate commitment that requires an individual to make a leap beyond the limits of reason. Kierkegaard considers faith as a way to transcend the limitations of the finite self and connect with the infinite and the divine.

Kierkegaard's existentialist ideas also explore the tension between the aesthetic, ethical, and religious stages of life. He describes the aesthetic stage as one focused on personal pleasure and self-indulgence, the ethical stage as a commitment to universal moral principles and duties, and the religious stage as a personal relationship with God. Kierkegaard states the subjective nature of this progression and the importance of the individual's subjective choices in navigating these three stages.



In the aesthetic stage, individual lives in the present moment, often avoiding commitment and responsibility. This stage is characterized by a lack of deeper meaning or purpose beyond personal pleasure. This stage is not inherently negative, but rather a necessary starting point for self-discovery. The ethical stage represents a higher level of existence. The ethical individual recognizes the importance of making ethical choices and adhering to moral principles that direct their relationship and actions. The ethical stage involves making commitments, facing ethical dilemmas, and recognizing the significance of personal choices in shaping one's character.

The religious stage is the final stage and represents the highest level of existence. It transcends the aesthetic and ethical stage by emphasizing a personal relationship with God and a leap of faith. They confront the uncertainties, and anxieties of life by surrendering to a higher power and embracing a relationship with the divine. It is involving a deep sense of individual subjectivity and the acceptance of paradoxes that cannot be fully understood through reason alone.

Literature is a part of human life, we use literature to socialize and communicate with others. Novels are one of them. Novel can portrays characters and actions which represent real life dealing with human life, passion, ambition, desire, happiness, sadness, love, and many other things related to human life. Literature is traditionally described as the body of writing that exists because of inherent imaginative artistic qualities (Lukens, 2003, p. 3).

## **1.7. Method of Research**

### **1.7.1. Type of Research**

This research uses qualitative methods to analyze the data. To collect the data, the researcher uses library research. Thus, the researcher does not do any interview but to gather and observe data from some books, journals, and other data resources.

### **1.7.2. Data Sources**

The data source in this research consists of primary data as the main data and secondary data as supporting data. The primary data in this research is Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* discourse, action, and symbol. The secondary data are books, journals, and other sources related to Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* and Soren Kierkegaard's existentialism theory.

### **1.7.3. Data Collection Technique**

The researcher collects the data through several steps. First, the researcher uses documentation techniques to collect the data. Documentation technique is the observation or close reading that directly to the object of research to see more deeply to the object of research. Second, the researcher close-reads Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* and finds the plot as an indicator of the depth of understanding of the story. Moreover, the researcher takes notes from the novel that includes the concept of Soren Kierkegaard's existentialism theory by underlining the text.

### **1.7.4. Data Analysis Technique**

The researcher uses an objective approach to analyze the data. The data from the novel are analyzed by using Soren Kierkegaard's existentialism theory. In taking the data, the researcher classifies the data that are found based on Soren's three stages of life. The form of existentialism in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* can be found in this variable, namely the action, discourse, and symbol. Thus, it reveals the classification and the relation of each stage of life that Najwa has. The data are interconnected with all of Soren's concepts of stages of life. Then, the researcher draws the conclusion from the analysis.

### **1.8. Paper Organization**

This research is divided into four chapters. The first chapter is an introduction, which presents background of study, research question, objective of study, significance of study, literature review, theoretical framework, methods of research, and paper organization. The second chapter is a theoretical background that discusses Soren Kierkegaard's existentialism in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*. The third chapter consists of the discussion of the analysis. The last chapter contains the conclusion and suggestion for further research.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

#### 4.1 Conclusion

As already explained in the previous chapter, Kierkegaard existentialism is related with human's freedom and choice. Based on the analysis presented in chapter three, it can be inferred that Najwa experiences the three stages of Soren Kierkegaard's existentialism. The first is when she has the pleasure of going to a party. She also didn't pray nor fast in Ramadan. In the ethical stage, Najwa tries to become responsible about her life. She started to work as a maid, and started to attend the Islamic class.

After she was caught kissing with Tamer by Lamya, Najwa entered the religious stage without hesitation and accepted God's command. In other words, she is living her best life and she relies her life on Allah. She also experiences a leap of faith to make a choice in her life in order to reach this stage. She has to make a decision that determines her life towards it.

#### 4.2 Suggestion

In this research, the researcher analyzes Najwa as the main character in *Minaret* by Leila Aboulela using Soren Kierkegaard's existentialism. The writer suggests for the future writers to analyze the novel using other theories such as feminism, representation, and so forth or using Soren Kierkegaard's existentialism in other novel or other literary works such as, short story, poem, movie, and so forth.

Moreover, the researcher suggests for the future writers to analyze another character in Leila Aboulela by using the same theory or another theory.



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