



إعادة صياغة المرأة المسلمة: تحليل نقدي نسوي لخطاب المئذنة بقلم ليلى أبو العلا

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ملخص

تستكشف هذه الدراسة تمثيل المرأة المسلمة في رواية "المئذنة" للكاتبة ليلى أبو العلا من خلال منظور تحليل الخطاب النقدي النسوي. تتناول الرواية رحلة نجوى، وهي امرأة سودانية تمر بتحويلات اجتماعية وشخصية جذرية بعد أن أجبرتها الاضطرابات السياسية على المنفى في لندن. بعد أن كانت جزءاً من نمط حياة النخبة، تتغير ظروف نجوى بشكل جذري، لتجد في النهاية الكرامة والمعنى من خلال الإيمان والحجاب والخدمة. يبحث هذا البحث في كيفية بناء أبو العلا لهوية نجوى ضمن السياقات المتقاطعة للنظام الأبوي والدين والهجرة والنزوح الثقافي. تطبق الدراسة نموذج تحليل الخطاب النقدي النسوي ثلاثي الأبعاد لنورمان فيركلوف، بالإضافة إلى وجهات نظر نسوية حول الخطاب، لتحليل مقاطع مختارة من الرواية. يتيح هذا النهج قراءة متعددة الطبقات للنص على مستويات اللغة والممارسة الخطابية والسياق الاجتماعي والثقافي. يكشف التحليل أن نجوى لا تُصوّر فقط كضحية للنظام الأبوي، ولا كمتحدة مُمكنة فحسب، بل كشخصية مُركّبة تتشكل قدرتها على الفعل من خلال الصمت والخدمة والتفاني الروحي. تتحدى الرواية الصور النمطية الغربية للمرأة المسلمة المحببة كشخصية سلبية أو مُضطهدة، مُسلطة الضوء على كيف يُمكن للممارسات الدينية أن تُشكّل استراتيجيات للصمود وتعريف الذات. تُظهر النتائج أن رواية "المئذنة" لأبو العلا تُقدّم خطاباً مُضاداً للقيود الأبوية والتمثيلات المُضلّلة من قِبَل المستشرقين، مُصوّرة المرأة المسلمة ككيان ديناميكي يعتمد على السياق. يُساهم هذا البحث في الدراسات الأدبية النسوية ودراسات التنمية المجتمعية من خلال التأكيد على أهمية السرديات المحلية المُتمحورة حول الإيمان في فهم هويات المرأة. في نهاية المطاف، تُؤكّد الدراسة أن "المئذنة" ليست مجرد قصة فداء شخصي، بل هي أيضاً تعليقٌ مهمٌ على الجندر والسلطة والتمثيل في السياقات الإسلامية ومجتمعات الشتات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ليلى أبو العلا، المئذنة، تحليل الخطاب النقدي النسوي، المرأة المسلمة، النظام الأبوي، الدين، الشتات، الهوية، التمثيل.

Reframing Muslim Womanhood: A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of Minaret by Leila Aboulela

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Abstract

This article endeavours to discuss how Muslim womanhood is portrayed in Leila Aboulela's her work Minaret using a feminist critical discourse analysis (CDA). The October Will Not Be What It Used To Be revolves around Najwa, a Sudanese woman exiled from her homeland of four years now living in London adjusting to life after the political cataclysms have changed society and private lives forever. Oncethrown into an elite lifestyle, then overnight — quite literally — her world falls apart but after some time she regains dignity and finds meaning in faith (veiling too) and of service. This study investigates how Aboulela anchors Najwa, her protagonist through an intertextual lens of the intersection between migration/cultural dislocation and patriarchy/religion. As per three-dimensional CDA model by Norman Fairclough, and a feminist framework on discourse analysis to analyze some extracts from the novel. Such an approach enables multilayered readings of the text as a work, at least along three dimensions: language; discursive practice and sociocultural context. The study reveals that



Najwa is neither a human being victimized by the patriarchy nor an empowered rebel but rather finds her agency within silence, service and devotion. In fact, the book push against ban broad and ambiguous Western understandings of topsy-turvy or docile green Muslim woman; faith they uncover through acts large and small Statures as hefty examples antisown placidity. The conclusions demonstrate how Aboulela's Minaret serves as a counter-discourse not just to the patriarchal oppression Muslims have long experienced but their Orientalist representations that so frequently deny them contingency with respect.. As such, this work contributes to feminist literary studies and CDA by showing how knowledge of the particular narratives women create around their faith can enhance our understanding of identity (Dada 2019). The research substantiates that Minaret is not so much a story of the individual salvation, however an essential articulation of issues surrounding gendered power and representation in both Muslim and diasporic realms.

Leila Aboulela, *Minaret*, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis
Keywords: Muslim women; patriarchy; religion and diaspora identity representation

1. Introduction

Language is a mode of articulation and sustenance for social values, ideologies and power relations (2006). All discourse, whether oral or written (including textual), is not just the act of speaking/writing a person chooses to disseminate for their processing. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) represents a methodological framework that offers tools for exposing the connections between language and society, including hierarchies of power and identity as well as social roles (Fairclough 1995:54; van Dijk 1998:22). Thus, when a feminist approach is added to CDA it becomes a lens through which the ways in which gendered identities are represented, challenged and reproduced by discourse can be analyzed (Lazar 2005:10)

Women's place in literature has long been used as a barometer for social attitude and cultural progress. As for feminist literary discourse highlights this same tension between centuries of male-produced representations of women (through texts produced through patriarchal frameworks) and those emerging from the hands, minds—and bodies—of women writers themselves. (Moi, 1985:42). Feminist criticism, on the other hand, attempts to expose and challenge imagery of women represented through a patriarchal lens and reconstructs this symbolic by offering new perspectives about subjectivity (Showalter 1985: p.131; hooks 2000:p.38), agency as often "patriarchal tradition has relegated them [women] to biologically determinate functions (Beauvoir 1949/2011:283). One of the pillars Feminist CDA as a field rests upon is that literature and discourse often reinforce or contest hegemonic ideology, hence providing opportunities for redefining womanhood other than conforming to prescriptions (Lazar 2014:187)



In this paper I offer a feminist critical discourse analysis of representing and reframing Muslim womanhood with the narrative in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005). *Minaret* follows the life of Najwa, a Sudanese exile who grapples with her faith and subjectivity in relation to gendered difference within postcoloniality⁹⁶. By employing narrative strategies like those seen in Aboulela, the novel interrogates identity and faith as well threatens to unearth a space where gender, culture or spirituality allows for impermanence between overlapping aspects of Muslim women (Ghazoul 2007; Al Maleh 51).

CDA and Feminism reinforce each other: feminism wants to reveal, propose world inequalities that are based on gender while CDA offers analytical tools in analysing how such distress is embedded discursively. In this regard, Lazar (2005: 12) emphasizes that feminist CDA attempts to highlight the indexical and naturalized means by which power relations are enacted in contextually specific ways alongside their gendered assumptions. So far as *Minaret* is concerned, this methodology enables us to track the discourse Aboulela engages in that disrupts persistent representations of Muslim womanhood as passive and oppressed figures by providing alternative understandings rooted in ideas about agency, religiosity and remade femininity (see Zalewski 2000: pp.64; a/aboulela).

While an emerging corpus of scholarship exists on the subject of Muslim women in literature, there is surprisingly little about how texts like *Minaret* might challenge or reproduce common beliefs and frameworks concerning gendered piety. Greater or lesser, previous research focused either on the hijab as a symbol (Ahmed 2011: pp.176) of more marginal Muslim women in Western feminist discourse (Mahmood 2005: p.15). The present study seeks to fill this gap by investigating how Aboulela's text negotiates questions of voice, identity and power that feed into feminist reimaginings of Muslim womanhood. This research also demonstrates the broader implications of literary representation for debates on gender equality, cultural identity and women's empowerment in Muslim and transnational contexts by implementing feminist CDA to investigate not only the discursive construction of Najwa but her role as a material consequence of social practices..

2. Literature Review

Critical discourse analysts want to show that the social power, inequality and ideology are both reproduced and challenged through language at a site of meaning making (Fairclough 1995:67; van Dijk 19) Lazar (2005) has proposed different feminist approaches to CDA that build upon these questions by focusing on discourses of women, and how they gain an identity in social practices such as culture literature or even political events. Several research applied CDA to



study the representation of woman in media, literature and religious texts that have revealed how language is used to structure images of female.

Scholarly Work in the Arab Context As an example of how CDA has been used to expose women's role conception, recent scholarship on discourse and gender in the Arabic-speaking world is also relevant. Progressive and conservative narratives that media discourse intersects to redefine social expectations for women were examined by Al-Hussein and Al-Saa'id (2022). Likewise, Alshammari (2023) examined policy documents and media coverage of Saudi women who achieved great heights in their different professions to demonstrate that the discursive framing surrounding empowerment tends towards negotiating between tradition and modernity (p. 89). These works illustrate how the discourse can both facilitate and limit women's engagement with society.

CDA has been used elsewhere in the world as both a cultural practice and literary text (not limited to Middle East). Using van Leeuwen's model of Social Actor Representation for conducting discourse analysis, Daham and Mizhir (2023) explored gender ideologies in Jordan Peterson's 12 Rules for Life. Peterson conclusions show how text by Peterson constructs traditionalist gender roles and he understands family in a conservative framework (p. 52). In other regions, Jaworska and Krishnamurthy (2012) examined media portrayals of women politicians in the EU with evidence of consistent gender-based bias and exclusion. These examples serve as illustrations of the way CDA can be used to interrogate cultural products that carry dominant definitions of gender.

Scholars have likewise examined the mediation of female voices through narrative form within literary studies. In *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, Ghazoul (2007) focused on Muslim women's writing and the links between images of Arab womanhood as expressed through themes such as exile, identity and religiosity. (p. 5). In the same vein, Al Maleh (2009) studied Arab women novelists in diaspora arguing that their narratives oppose Orientalist myths and patriarchal discourses by providing alternative articulations of femininity as self or agency (p. 47). Mahmood (2005) made a more theoretical intervention when she showed how Muslim women engaging in faith practices in Egypt vex the Western feminist desire for agency and autonomy as individualised constructs or ends. These works collectively illuminate the critical intersections of gender, culture and identity in discourse..

However, although this scholarship is rich most of it has dealt with policy and media discourses (e.g. Alshammari 2023; Al-Hussein & Al-Saa'id, 2022), or wider sociological as well religious frameworks (Mahmood 2005). While literary explorations have often sketched a broad landscape of Arab women's writing in its entirety (Al Maleh, 2009; Ghazoul, 2007), there is little narrowing to close reading and critical discourse analysis on specific texts In addition, whilst feminist CDA has been used on Western texts (for example Daham & Mizhir



2023), there have not yet been so many uses of it to Muslim women narratives in Anglophone fiction. This study fills that gap by conducting a feminist CDA on the narrative strategies in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* and how they reshape reflections of Muslim womanhood. This study deepens understanding of how discourse functions to construct more complex versions of Muslim women in postcolonial and diasporic settings by paying close attention to a single literary text.

Discourse and Critical Discourse Analysis

Discourse is a broad area of human life, yet its linguistics often narrowly defined as language use (written texts and spoken interaction). According to Awan (2017, p. 2), whereas some linguists conceptualise discourse as “text”, and others emphasise “speech”, both perspectives agree that ‘discourse embodies the meanings relayed through communication at individual or societal levels’ Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) take this understanding further as it seeks to understand not only how events are expressed through language but also to better conceptualize social realities by performing different roles in the discourse, legitimizing and contesting. CDA, as Fairclough (1995, p. 54) states is an interdisciplinary approach aimed at uncovering the relationship between discourse and ideology and power so that we become aware of a hidden process by which discourse symbolizes our social struggle for purity from inequality-initiating meanings with widespread implications in knowledge production.

CDA, in its broad definition as van Dijk (1998) claims that CDA is concerned with study of text and talk to reproduce dominance or challenge it. [5] As Nasser and Khalil (2021) point out: Traditional CDA is by definition 'critical' because it does not simply describe language features, but rather examines the ideological premises of texts to determine whether those premises are supporting hegemonic structures or offering alternative discursive practices that might serve as counter-discourses of resistance. CDA is particularly suited for the textual analysis of gender and identity, thanks to its twofold emphasis on language use in social contexts because power can be both overtly visible yet also invisible (van Dijk 1993).

Critique is what CDA involves. This mirrors Wodak and Meyer (2016, p. 5) definition of being “critical” as analyzing discourses in regard to their implicitly associated values, roles or perspectives — frequently revealing ideological meanings that are naturalized as common sense. Throughout his work, Simpson (2018, p. 34) offers linguistic tools to investigate the textual choices authors make — whether persuading or excluding; stereotypicalizing or empowering — in light of how these signify wider social meanings using Essential stylistics. Such methods are crucial in feminist contexts to reveal how gender stereotypes and inequalities are encoded into the discourse of our daily lives.



Feminism has a long history of connection with CDA. Sunderland (2006, p. 17) argues that feminist research has shaped studies of language and gender since the late sixties sharing with CDA a critical concern over relationships not much different than power relations. This work interrogates the ways in which discourses about women and men, girls and boys are produced and circulated — such as contributing to (re)inscribing or resisting certain versions of a gender hierarchical order. In a similar spirit, as explained by Lazar (2005, p. 10), the combination of feminism with CDA led to “feminist critical discourse analysis” (FCDA) that has one main goal: namely destabilizing taken-for-granted assumptions about gender and showing how these are ideological in nature. Combining feminism and CDA enables researchers to explore how ideologies of gender are created, maintained or resisted through texts from a variety of cultural and literary backgrounds.

Particularly, Fairclough has been a renowned name with the methodological aspect of CDA. He writes in *Language and Power* (1989) that discourse is a social practice, indicating the linkage of linguistic features to power relations created at discursive levels. In his later framework (Fairclough, 2013, p. 123) there are three mutually interrelated dimensions of CDA: (i) the text itself —the linguistic features through which a magazine cover may operate as a source of meaning for readers— vocabulary/grammar/metaphor; (ii) discourse practice – how texts get produced, distributed and read; and finally sociocultural practice [twentieth-century] – any ‘wider social or institutional level at whatever that is relevant to this particular instance’ (p. This three-level model enables the analyst to connect micro-linguistic facts with macro-societal structures and provides an integrated account of how discourse constructs reality as it reflects it.

There are many CDA methodologies that differ each according to theoretical orientation. Mayr (2008, p. 9) emphasizes that approaches to CDA are informed by different philosophical commitments: Marxism and critiques of capitalism; Foucauldian power/knowledge; or the feminist critique of patriarchy. Knowing this, Fairclough’s model becomes incredibly useful for literary analysis, as it connects the micro/meso/macro perspectives together. At micro-level, the analyst looks at stylistic features such as metaphor and intertextuality (the reuse of text) or narrative voice. The meso level pertains to discourse practices, such as how Aboulela wrote *Minaret* in the context of transnational diaspora and read by various audiences. The synoptic level becomes the macro, or the stage set up on an ideological battlefield over whether Muslim women are indispensable representations of either postcolonialism or the global context.

4. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

Feminist stylistic approaches deal with the linguistic positioning of women and men in texts, regardless of whether this is explicitly patriarchal or not. These methods point to the ways in which language draws on and reproduces (or potentially subverts) rigid binaries of masculine/feminine identities; they also



reveal spaces where alternative modes of performing gendered identity becomes intelligible (Gheni, 2021: p 944). This concern is taken further into the realm of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) within CDA. Despite psychoanalytical approaches to the subjectivity of gender in ideologies across CDA applications, FCDA is not a specialized discourse analysis that responds exclusively to issues specific about feminism or women question as postulated by Lazar (2005:12), rather it covers an more meaningful critical practice on discursive construction of both gender and power, across respective ideology intersection.

In the modernist paradigm, much feminist critique was thus more limited in scope whereas later iterations of combination with post-modernism are directed toward broader critiques about identity/multiplicity/difference for such contexts (AL-Sudani 2019; p.65). FCDA sticks to guns, casts aside static taxonomy of gender: yes endless entangled prostrating humility robe — a socially constructed not just fated by chromosomes. Observing the theory and practice of FCDA approach, Lehtonen (2007: 5) stresses that it `breaks new ground immediately in contrast to what is call generic CDA — because its process de-patterning elucidates a significant conceptual leap concerning gender as conceived by means of third-wave feminist political idea and post-structure which represents an advanced level knowledge. In this model, gender is a continuum of masculinities and femininities that are always being rhetorically reworked.

Her analysis of discourse relies on context for understanding the importance that emerges from gender fluidity. Ableism doesn't not work in isolation; the authors state gender identities are mediated through intersections with ethnicity, religion, class sexuality and age (Olusaanu & Oloruntobi 2020:213). Consequently, gender is performed or manifested as unique to the various cultural and situational contexts in which it occurs. Feminist CDA is particularly sensitive to the multiplicity of women's experiences, eschewing essentialist models of "womanhood" in favor for analyzing how various femininities and masculinities are discursively created.

FCDA is more focused on empirical than purely theoretical issues. It inquires about how gender is represented, negotiated and contested within particular texts and discursive contexts (Lazar 2014: 185). Although it recognises that gender is not simply discursive but also materially and socially constructed, its analytical emphasis remains on the role of discourse in producing gendered power relations. In literary studies, it means not only looking at how women characters are represented but also the ways in which narrative voice (who tells the story), language and ideology build models of gendered identity.

We use FCDA to analyse the reframing of Muslim Womanhood in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*. Using Najwa as a diasporic Muslim woman contending with issues of faith, identity and agency to illustrate how the text resists what Patricia



Hill Collins has termed “the matrix of domination” depicting Muslim women only ever as passive victim or archetype according to either already existing nativisms. Much, much more, Minaret shows — in line with feminist critical discourse analysis and other theories of gender/ religion/power intersectionality— how complex subjectivities created by globalisation do not only destabilise patriarchal political systems at home but undo some for the Orientalist construct abroad.

5. Leila Aboulela

The Sudanese feminist novel, like the Iraqi one but with its own history shaped by migration and diaspora at postcolonial contexts, is a branch of larger narrative marked in Arab feminim. Leila Aboulela is one of the more widely known contemporary voices in this tradition: a Sudanese-British novelist whose novels are hallmarks literature, grace — and religious and ideological currency that crosses cultures. Originally from Cairo in Egypt and raised in Khartoum, Sudan after her family relocated there when she was seven years old, Aboulela settled into a UK home (where her family had been allotted) where after studying economics then statistics began working as a full-time writer : Al Maleh 61). Echoing through her fiction is her transnational identity as a writer; it articulates the intricacies of navigability, in both Arabness and Westernness.

Aboulela has been publishing since the early 90s; her debut novel, *The Translator* (1999), however, cemented her as a new voice in Anglophone Arab literature. However it was *Minaret* (2005) that established her reputation as a major feminist novelist based in Sudan. It is what makes Aboulela such an original talent: her austere, spare and clear prose allows her to draw the reader in up close with the lives of a cast of characters. As many feminist writers do, she obviously gives much importance to the subjective experiences of women in our present socio-political context. But where other writers might simply consider it in those terms alone — gender politics, and how power dynamics inform feminine selfhood — this is well trodden territory; here we start moving along marginally different axes: spirituality (or a lack of), immigration/cultural dislocation

In *Minaret*, the heroine Najwa represents the lives of all uprooted Sudanese women like her who are forced to renegotiate their identity in exile. Aboulela brings themes of displacement, loss and resilience to the fore while grounding her narrative in village life—of women negotiating patriarchal societies and Western stereotypes all at once. Similar to *Maysaloon Hadi*, whose short story recentstories was also based on domestic settings and took readers into the intimate realities of an Iraqi household; in Aboulela’s fiction we see a writer who is skilled at reflecting the lived reality for some Sudanese or Muslim women with characterisation that presents their lives without obfuscation. But her story ultimately reaches beyond these personal difficulties by situating them among the



global anxieties of exile, postcolonial identity, and belief in a secularized universe (Ghazoul 2007:156).

Najwa in *Minaret* and Sammar in *The Translator* are among the central characters of Aboulela's fiction. They are fragile and strong, resilient yet vulnerable—you can feel the author's consciousness behind all of these pressures existing at once on women from across cultural spectrums and political cities. She does have women at the centre of her novels, like Hadi but Aboulela Heroines contrast sharply to competing with their own dilemmas of diaspora caught between East and West, tradition and modernity faith or secularism. It is through these characters that Aboulela amplifies the silenced voices of women, and not simply to tell their stories or highlight their pain but also to recognize them as agents capable of so much more; agents who will bring about a fundamental change.

In addition to writing about the struggle of women, her literary works help redefine what feminist writings means within a cis-standpoint that is Islamic and diasporic. Combining concerns with gender and questions of faith and cultural hybridity, Aboulela has added a new dimension to Arab feminist literature that reflects the changing circumstances for twenty-first century women in Muslim societies but also global diasporas. Her continued explorations of women's inner lives alongside larger historical, political and transnational contexts are further evident in her subsequent works—namely *Lyrics Alley* (2010), *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015) and *Elsewhere, Home*(2018).

As evidence for Maysaloon Hadi's importance, the Iraqi equivalent is Aboulela in Sudan and Arab feminist fiction generally. On the one level, her women are victims of a patriarchal type-face world; on another, they fight back against patriarchy as best they can and often with little left beyond their will to do so. Aboulela continues to place women at the forefront and in doing so she reinforces that this Arab-Muslim voice is a space best written with woman thus solidifying her position within feminist and postcolonial studies..

6. Method

Research methodology is the structured plans and steps for studying a specific question, theme or phenomenon. In a very general way, research methods can be split into two broad groups: quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative research focuses on numbers and statistical analysis, whereas qualitative research is centered around the use of language, meaning, and interpreting text in order to uncover the broader social or cultural aspects behind it. Since the present research sets to investigate in gender similarities and disparities a qualitative approach is most fit, as it intends to look at how and why ladies are characterized in that manner inside writing discourse. This enables you to fully understand how discourse mirrors and shapes power relations, ideologies and cultural narratives.

7.Participants



Using the Fairclough's three-dimensional model of analysis, this study investigates how women are represented in Leila Aboulela Minaret (2005) within a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Sudanese-British writer Aboulela has traditionally focused the bulk of her fiction on women, reflecting their struggles and tenacity with identity in settings defined by patriarchy, exile or cultural hybridity. It combines elements of status and culture (what the reader can expect from a novel about Sudanese women) with potential for examination in feminist discourse, which is why Minaret was chosen as practicum text.

8. Instrument

As emphasized before, this study employs Fairclough's (2001) three-dimensional model of CDA as the main analytical tool to investigate how women are represented in Leila Aboulela's Minaret. After that, Fairclough who has been (and still is) one of the foremost CDA pioneers views language as a socially situated practice by means role ideological effects and waging power relationally is carried out in identity issues. According to Fairclough, a discursive event can be just about anything you communicate through oral speech, writing or visualisation and that all communicative acts have different layers of meaning which should be interpreted in order not to lose the nuances hidden within discourse power/ideology..

Fairclough's model operates through three interrelated dimensions:

Text (Micro-level Analysis): ١

The first dimension is textual, encompassing words, grammar and syntax forms through the linguistic choices made (metaphors etc). In this respect, I will analyze the use of personal pronouns, evaluative adjectives and metaphors in Minaret to demonstrate how subjectivity is constructed through frames surrounding female protagonists. Lexical choice, including a word like "submission," or even if it is an idea associated with femininity (like purity) will provide information on attitude that helps shape our ideas of what makes someone female and moral. The analysis questions how implicit ideological positions are expressed through word choice and stylistic elements influencing the reading of women in Aboulela (2005).

Discursive Practice (Meso-level Analysis): ٢

The second dimension investigates the production, circulation and reception of texts With Minaret, this means positioning the novel in broader cultural and literary histories (especially those of Arab, Islamic and diasporic feminist discourse). This reading aims to demonstrate how some aspects of Aboulela's narrative techniques (namely her choice of first-person narration and dynamism between faith/gender) lead one way but not the other. This is showing that language can never be non-partisan: it has ideologies embedded in it as much the writer and reader are. By discursive practice it exemplifies how Aboulela



mediates female representation along the axis of conventional cultural norms with contemporary feminist ambitions..

Social Practice (Macro-level Analysis): .٣

Third dimension Gives the text a larger social context and establishes concordance in multitude with broader frameworks of society, ideologies almost along whilst strategies. This example exposes the socio-political and cultural realities of Aboulela's work, which deals with postcolonial identity, migration along with religious revivalism system alongside patriarchal structure. The protagonist's negotiation of gender and faith, and regulation more generally in Minaret can be viewed as microcosms symptomatic of wider social struggle classically understood (this assumption is data mined) by Muslim women in Sudanese contexts or diasporic settings. Viewing the novel within this dimension, the research illuminates that Aboulela is both reflecting and critiquing social structures through her discourse while using literature as a means to contest pervasive narratives on Arab/Muslim women.

The three dimensional model by Fairclough, through these same those dimensions used as an analytical tool not only finds out how women have been linguistically represented in Minaret but also what ideologies are generalised and developed into social reality. Language thus becomes a terrain of power, struggle and possible transformation; ideally suited to feminist literary analysis..

9. Procedures

Since the focus is not on analyzing entire Minaret but some specific fragments chosen for their importance in conveying what women undergo by which they formulate identity, religiosity and struggle against patriarchy and culture. The analyses are based on Fairclough's (2001) 'three-dimensional model' of Critical Discourse Analysis and demonstrate a Foucauldian view informed by Feminist CDA, as Ingram (2016), among others points out. Such an approach allows for the investigation of how Aboulela crafts female subjectivity in relation to gender, religion and power.

Veiling and praying, a journey of transformation for Najwa

Extract:

“This is not a fancy-dress party and we are sick of this dark comedy. To put it plainly, though the hijab is not all-blue denim and iron-pressed cotton blend—the overall our official, outdoor version. Our nature is laid bare without it. And that is how wearing the hijab feels to me. It's the feeling of being surrounded by light, I'm safe. The way men look, and women judge: I have abandoned concern for that status so well (Aboulela: 2005;176).

A) Textual Analysis (Description).



This vocabulary — pure, protected, light – drips in a positivity that transforms veiling from social to sacred. Saying that Najwa has been “wrapped in light,” is a massively loaded religious metaphor; it by definition lays down divine favor and to some extent removes all such behavior from the realm of human judgement. Edged, with a confident declarative style and experience clearly before. Saying I feel a lot gives space for personal subjectivity and it is much more the idea that wearing your veil was entirely her choice rather than something she ever has to be forced into.

B) Discourse Analysis (Interpretation)

This utterance in the declarative mode acts as a speech act that conveys beliefs held by internal agents. NB, that if Najwa is reporting which feelings she thought just the voice of season to be locutionary; its illocution as an agent in a regime here cambio this veil. A coherence is forged via inference: the evil eye of eval (male gaze, female competition) enters into a textured counterweight with inner repose that dons those wild custom paramours we know as the veil. The naive mindset in the western world holds that hijab means oppression, that's where Najwa comes time to swim against this current. Instead she transforms it into a means to rule herself—retaking her power; ushering in a new era of woman.

C) We Explain Social Analysis

It places Najwa within Islamic discourses of modesty that intersect with feminist re-readings of agency at the practical level. Others interpret it as the American albatross around every neck of those in the Northeast who want to colonize: slave thinking is incorporated into their consciousness, so too is imagery; democracy comes next. Ironically, such views—including this one^_ do naught but produce waxen outlooks through which perceptions about what veiling means for women living within patriarchal Sudanese society are conditioned ^_, including voices speaking up against policies threatening to carve away at lives African American Muslim Women like Amani should have never experienced if only instead of being there abused were free But different realities remain Highest insight Eunuch A black man with vision! (choicelessly) outside) and the thing is they opened These chasms wider! In Najwa's words, the veil thus takes on a more empowering role as it claims spiritual freedom and protection. . In writing this story, Aboulela both confronts and defies patriarchal impositions as well as the tendencies of Orientalism to reduce. Above all, feminist CDA shows how Najwa’s piety (unintended and never thoroughly considered) disrupts “common-sense” discourses that posit Muslim womanhood as passive.

2. Najwa’s Shift from Privilege to Servitude

Extract:

I was unconvinced—and her argument grew tense. Your father would never approve. And you couldn't live that way, no servants, no travelling. I mean damn, you'd feel played in front of your friends and the family. Once I owned servants;



now I was one. I ironed shirts, cleaned toilets, polished shoes. Each task served as a reminder of the gap I had dropped into. (Aboulela, 2005: p41).

Description (Textual Analysis) (A

It is a dramatic reversal of Najwa's social identity, the lexical divide between owned servants and now I was one. The physical verbs ironed, scrubbed, polished are labor and tasks inscribed as menial labor done by an identity coded feminine. Not only obscene, but immoral: that "the distance I had fallen," finding the descent blurring at once moral and social A sloughing—class privilege almost indistinguishable from her shame that its loss will displace it. The parallel, repetitive clauses all beginning with verbs create a rhythm showing the monotony.

B. Discursive Analysis (Interpretation)

This phrase operates as a declarative about confession. Although the illocutionary act emphasizes her Figuring fig=showing, Najwa recounts a revelation; The locutionary act substantiates lost and shame. Opposition before/after, power/service—this is how coherence. When discursively worded, the very passage illustrates how women's identities do not operate in a vacuum of their own but are rather deeply tied to class and labor. The ground slips underneath Najwa and she tumbles – her gendered privilege, that once kept her safe under the protective shield of wealth, is now dangerously malleable.

C) Social Analysis (How this is Continue Reading

On the macro level, Najwa's servitude mirrors wider systems of re-negotiation that migrant women from previously privileged backgrounds are forced to navigate in exile. Feminist CDA exposes the interweaving of patriarchy with class as Najwa may be humiliated because gender norms are only one part of being displaced into feminized labor markets in diaspora. Aboulela critiques Sudanese elite patriarchy (sheltering Najwa) and Western socio-economic systems that define her to be prostrated in servile positions. The story puts women in an intersection of class, gender and migration.

Najwa's Relationship with Tamer

Extract:

She is someone that I suppose admire, said Tamer for the I'M). She stays dedicated to her studies and she takes care of herself My grooming and taste in clothes. Tamer pushed me slowly towards getting married to him and by the time I was thinking my way through things there would be no chance for his family to argue. Somehow it must have been God's will that such a good-Muslim lady as me would help him) (Aboulela 2005:116).

A) Textual Analysis (Description)

With the own words of God, pious woman and guide him to trap Najwa inside religious rhetoric no less but also to demonstrate how the male appetite for



domination is sugar-coated in puritanism. The modal verb should express obligation thus gripping Najwa to bear the spiritual training of Tamer. One is composed of imperatives from Tamer, grammar that conveys an inequality between the two: Faith means everything. Najwa plays no active role in conversation; her only mode being passive (saying)تابع

B. Discursive Analysis (Interpretation)

This is: locutionary, Tamer's proposal; illocutionary, a binding of Najwa through faith. Implicatures work very much the same way: they forge associations with cultural expectations; for example, a phrase creates presuppositions that imply Najwa was there to rescue male piety or her femininity is confirmed by marriage. This is the way that tension between divine will and social objection creates coherence: Tamer reaches for faith to sidestep familial patriarchal normativity, but then upholds patriarchy by predetermining in what capacity Najwa must act.

C) Social Analysis (Reasoning).

Generations patriarchy on the macro level This excerpt exhibits generations patriarchy in a macro scenario. His undermining of the patriarchal reasoning in his family, is for all intents and purposes a reproduction; his presumption that Najwa must submit to him outside religion. Feminist CDA shows how recruitment of religious discourse aligns power with gender in giving legitimacy to relations of power. While Aboulela describes marriage as a place of oppression, the power dynamic is muddled by Najwa's ambivalence: she likes Tamer for being religious but also hesitates to marry him.

. The tensions reflect larger battles Muslim women are fighting in balancing faith, love and independence..

4. Najwa's Nostalgia for Sudan

Extract:

Time went slowly. I missed having my own bathroom, sleeping on a bed. There were too many of us there and when I'd sleep they would talk loudly, or read Qur'an. I did not hear the call to prayer in London, I could not smell acacia in October 2023. The chatter of women walking beside me was absent from our garden. This is what exile took from me, silence" (Aboulela 2005: p.180).

A: Textual Analysis (Description)

Words such as call to prayer, scent of acacia and the chatter of women trigger sensory recollections associated with place, culture and community. Loss is emphasized by the verbs missed and took, while isolation is expressed through the noun silence. Silence (exile) versus sound and scent (community). Grammatically, the finding of race on a power line through declarative sentences moving from lack to excess reflects exile's rupture.

B) Discursiv Analyse (Interpretation)



The expression becomes an elegy. On the locutionary-level Najwa yearns; on that of illocution parole — she abhorred exile alienation. This coherence derives from inferential oppositions: Sudan / London, presence/absence, sound/silence. In this regard, in the display of spaces where women come together — here summoned by its homage to “chatter” around towns and cities— romantically depicting a lost support mechanism rapturously engaging on topics like migration. The absence of all these women together, this kind of collective existence and presence reveals Najwa.

C) Social Media Analysis (Description)

Exile inverts identities at the social practice level by burning down signposts of belonging and citizenship. Meanwhile, for all that diaspora tends to reconstitute patriarchal power on the move (one only needs think of a figure such as Nema and her entourage), woman with Najwa cutting themselves out from their communities - Feminist CDA demonstrates this displacement magnified $\{-\theta\}$. Aboulela addresses political situations that create exile and the patriarchies which silence women in travelling. Here, the nostalgia is about more than just homeland: it's for all those gendered spaces of solidarity which have been erased.

Najwa's Silence and Voice

Extract:

A deafening silence wrapped me up so tight that I could hear my own heart beating louder than the song of birds. So, I tried to say no, but the word wouldn't come out. December 13,2021 I was sick of his silence. It sucked like a brick on my tongue

A) Textual Analysis (Descriptive)

Since silence is the opposite of no, then that turns all forms of silence into a kind power. Silence becomes an oppressive force "pressed against my lips." And from the grammatical perspective, modal verb (wanted to tell) indicates desire suppressed by inability. Short, declarative clauses heighten tension.

B) Interpretive discursive analysis

Najwa is dialectical (locution), conjuring in the silence of an unvoiced (illocution) dismissal. Coherence being inferential: Readers read the weight of silence to grasp its unuttered “no.” Silence is a curious creature, simultaneously performing submission and resisting alignment. Silence in feminist CDA is not absence but



rather a voice of its own, as it expresses Diskurs that illuminates the complexity to act.

C) Social Analysis (Narration)

And at the incipient level of macro, silence represents a patriarchal sentiment that enables female vessels where their purpose is to reproduce. The mutism of Najwa denotes the tension between personal desire and civic practice. For feminist CDA, this could be considered a gendered state; women internalise obedience and refusal becomes unsayable. All this is dramatized by Aboulela with her emphasis on silence, silences pregnant of meanings linking up to oppression and resistance in which unsaid words have left traces through their subaltern voices floating around the air until they are said (P 4)..

Results

The current study focused rather on describing the image of Muslim womanhood in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* within a framework looking through Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis. Extracts from the book were poured over and it was discovered that via Najwa's plight, bigger ideological clashes about gender are played out not only in Sudanese local contexts but also among diasporic groups.

The researcher has drawn the following conclusions,

Firstly, Leila Aboulela is arguably the most established Sudanese women writer whose fiction focuses on faith in relation to gender and migration. In *Minaret*, she situates Najwa's journey between more significant identities in Muslim women's discourse through an intimate and political paradigm.

Secondly, very often, it presents opposing images of womanhood. *Hungry Yet Articulate*: Najwa's vulnerability and power, submission and obstinacy embody the kinds of negotiations Muslim women make in patriarchal landscape/postcolonial landscapes..

Third, The findings concluded that religion and spirituality constitute a central part of Najwa's subjectivity. This view of the veil, prayer and Islamic customs do not appear as mere instruments for oppression but rather as means through which to restore dignity, moral authority and voice. This challenges the dominant Western feminist dogma and reminds us to consider veiling more as a form of agency.

Fourth, Aboulela highlights the social and cultural forces bearing down on women wherever they may be. Her character unpacks the nuances of gender, class & migration power dynamics through elite women in Sudan who result to being a maid discovering themselves among a throng other seemingly nameless domestic workers.

Fifth, the book deals with how silence and voice co-exist in women's lives. Najwa usually conceals her distress, the silence she gives off has to do with cultural concepts of modesty; but this same quietude is also a subversive and defensive expression under patriarchy regimes.



Sixth, Najwa's relationship with Tamer shows different generational and gendered power relation within a cultural/religious paradigms. In these encounters, Aboulela portrays how the expectations placed upon women often limit their ability to choose but also that they mediate and reproduce those very constraints ultimately through creating spaces of agency for themselves..

Seventh, symbols and imagery (e.g. the veil/exile domestic sphere) are multivaluated : oppression/empowerment Through repetition of these devices Aboulela substantiate her notion that Muslim womanhood is fluid but complex as it relates to faith and place

Essentially, the results of this study indicate that Minaret presents a very clothed and layered image of Muslim women. Rather than mimicking the binary representations of liberated women and oppressed enabling her to foreground the contradictions in women lives, Aboulela's narrative focuses on negotiations that shape women's realities.

11. Discussion

Applying Norman Fairclough's perspective on Critical Discourse Analysis, and Feminist CDA frameworks either implicitly or explicitly this study explored the Authentic Self of Muslim womanhood embedded in Leila Aboulela's Minaret. This complexity is what the novel provides an example of women moving between religion, patriarchy and displacement who craft identities that are pivotally interesting in resisting binary definitions on oppression or liberation.

These results suggest that Najwa's story is not only her own, but also a window into the sociocultural negotiations of Muslim women in Sudanese and diasporic life. Her circuitry of from elite university student, to domestic worker and finally "pious Muslim woman" is a potent symbol of the reframing of identity through response to transformation in cultural-religio power relations.

. So the text is an example of what Fairclough (2001) theorizes as discourse; it reproduces and reflects social structure, but also has room for agency or resistance.

It is what this study adds to gender studies and literary that [el]erature, specifically. Aboulela challenges these dominant western feminist discourses which tend to present the veiled Muslim woman as passive or oppressed. However, Minaret proposes veiling prayer and Islamic practice as intimate empowerment gains dignity—which are analogous to Feminist CDA's objective (Lazar 2005) which is the Unromanticisation of entrenched conceptualisations that have sprouted gender ideologies. By foregrounding Najwa's voice, Aboulela remaps the own female Muslim space as a woman who slips in and out of sometimes opposing discourses.



Furthermore, the Aboulela study illustrates how her work undermines the dichotomies of tradition and modernity. Najwa not bending down to anybody is one of the most striking things about her alarming, beautiful silence: she does not offer a narrative out loud; at all paltry forms of worship and necessity that patriarchal structures would expect from its women. That echoes Sunderland (2006) when she says that feminist approaches to discourse need to take into account not only the obvious and explicit resistance, but also more muted or subdued forms of negotiating power.

Fairclough's three-dimensional model proved invaluable for exposing ways the choices made by writers of a text (for example, metaphors of light surrounding veiling passages or consistent appeals to service and humility elsewhere) accord with broader discursive practices and social ideologies. It shows why CDA is such a powerful analytical framework in the study of literary texts, operating as it does at an angle to how language mediates lived experience rife with structural relations of power that are not first apparent.

It also grows our cultural understanding of gender. The term also expands the potential for feminist literary criticism beyond Euro-American sites in that it considers Sudanese diasporic narrative within discussions of Aboulela's work. Minaret shows us that constructions of Muslim womanhood—universalist, feminist narratives to name a couple-- are mute when faced with the articulations by so many other women who do not remove themselves from those same frameworks of faith and community..

12. Conclusion

However, many literature studies on representations of Muslim women are case works drawn from both Arab and African contexts. Leila Aboulela's Minaret provides a rare case study in this field exploring both womanhood and identity at the crossroads of faith, migration, as well as patriarchy. The old research was implemented on contrasted assumptions about negotiation in constructing Muslim Womanhood to the text using frameworks of Feminist CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis).

Built on a foundation of the interrelationship between literature, discourse and gender—and complete with scope through which her contemporaneous crisis can be viewed alongside wider structures of belief in Sudanese society — this study uses Najwa's resolution for greater freedom against that same landscape permeated by women whose (greater) empowerment comes from exile as precursors to demonstrating its complexity. The three-dimensional model of text analysis by Fairclough depicts the implications for multiple layers such as Language, Silence and Symbol and Religious Discourse used in historical formulations that create a multi-faceted concept of Muslim female identity construction.



More importantly, the findings subvert ideas at their most reductive of oppressed Muslim women in history as hapless victims. When silent and serving the main character draws strength from faith and dignity instead. Whose transparency about the importance of feminist literary theory - defined as situated readings that recognize difference and correlate them to lived experience in women's lives rather than offer an abstract universalist idea is consequentially massive.

This study adds to the feminist CDA debates in paradigm of an alternative discourse on using literary texts against dominant western and patriarchal constructions of women. By doing this it contributes to and broadens the field of transnational feminist scholarship, providing its analytical tools for studying narratives where gender is intertwined with religion or migration — indeed identity politics in general.

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