

Symbol of Males and Females as Social Actors in Naguib Mahfouz's Midaq

Alley: A CDA Study

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Abstract

This paper has aimed to investigate representation of gender roles in Naguib Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley*, a novel originally written in Arabic, in terms of critical discourse analysis by applying Fairclough's (2001) three-dimensional model as well as drawing on Van Leeuwen's (2008) representation of social actors. The purpose of the study is firstly to find out which of the two genders has been more frequently portrayed as the primary social actor in the text; and, secondly, to unveil the ideological orientations behind certain gender-related linguistic choices in the discourse of the novel –that is, by analyzing the text on the basis of linguistic instances like male/female proper names, male/female honorifics, genders' fitness in order of appearance in the text or in mixed-gender dialogues, appraising lexical items describing characters, and characters' physical identification. The findings of the analysis of the text revealed that the dominant discourse in *Midaq Alley* is mainly male-oriented in almost all of the gender-related instances under investigation.

Keywords Critical Discourse Analysis, Ideological Orientations, Gender Representation, Social Actors



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Introduction

In many academic fields, like sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and discourse analysis, the study of the relationship between the type of language use and the speaker or writer's gender has attracted many scholars' attention to investigate how actually men and women use language in speech events or in written discourse. Many scholars have published the results of their investigations concerning such relationship in the form of descriptive, exploratory or empirical studies (see for example, Wahyuningsih, 2018; Newman, Pennebaker, Groom, & Handelman, 2008; Mulac, Seibold, & Farris, 2000, to name just a few). Among the prominent scholars who have worked on language and gender one may also name Deborah Tannen (1990), Janet Holmes (1995), Deborah Cameron (2008). While some scholars have focused on different sociolinguistic aspects of women and men's language use, others have concentrated on how these differences can produce social differences. For instance, Coates (2004, p. 1) outlines four approaches concerning gender studies: "The deficit approach, the dominance approach, the difference approach, and the dynamic or the social constructionist approach". The earliest works on gender differences, according to Coates (2004), have adopted the deficit approach. It is termed as deficit because it considered women's language as a "deficit" language. Such a view has also been presented by Lakoff (1975), claiming that women tend to use linguistic forms that reflect "subordinate and

powerless roles such as tag questions, question intonations, avoiding using strong expressions of feeling in contrast with the preference of using expressions of uncertainty compared with men's language”(p. 45). The limitation of this approach lies in the description of women's language as wrong as well as in the idea that if women want to be taken seriously, they should speak in the same manner as men do concerning the use of linguistic devices. As far as the second approach is concerned –that is, “the dominance approach” – women are viewed as the subordinate group, while men are viewed as supreme beings. On the other hand, the main focus of the “difference approach”, is the difference between men and women belonging to different subcultures (Coates, 2004), but they are equal in their meaning and impact. That is why it is sometimes called the approach of equality. The major scholar who advocates this approach is Deborah Tannen, who says that gender differences in language are due to cultural differences. The strength of this approach lies in that research studies started to deal with women from different perspectives: having their own "different psychology", "different voice", "different experience of the world" and so forth (Coates, 2004, p. 6). As far as the fourth approach (i.e., “the dynamic” or “the social constructionist” approach) is concerned, it is considered as the most recent approach in gender studies. The main concern of this approach is that “gender identity is seen as a social construct rather than as a given social category”(Coates, 2004, p. 2).

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In the present study, we have investigated Naguib Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley*, A novel originally in Arabic but translated into several other languages, including English, from the perspective of the roles socially allocated to each gender in terms of critical discourse analysis (CDA) to see how male and female characters as social actors have been portrayed in the text, which gender has more frequently been represented as the primary actor, and what social roles women have been granted in the discourse of Naguib Mahfouz, as a 20th-century Oriental writer. By focusing on such issues, the study has aimed to explore the writer's ideological orientations with respect to genders' social roles.

2. Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA, henceforth) has so far gained great attention in the area of social research studies. Wodak (2013), in her editorial introduction, has described CDA as: A problem-oriented interdisciplinary research program, subsuming a variety of approaches, each drawing on different epistemological assumptions, with different theoretical models, research methods and agenda. What unites them is a shared interest in the semiotic dimensions of power, injustice and political-economic, social or cultural change in our globalized and globalizing world and societies. The roots of CDA lie in rhetoric, text linguistics, anthropology, philosophy, socio-psychology, cognitive science, literary studies and sociolinguistics, as well as in applied linguistics and pragmatics. (p. xix)

Accordingly, different approaches have been developed in different disciplines,

namely, those that combine the study of verbal texts with the social orientation of discourse. Fairclough (1992) classifies these approaches into two types according to their social orientation to discourse: “non-critical” and “critical” approaches. The difference between them lies in the sense that critical approaches manifest "how discourse is shaped by the relation of power and ideologies and how discourse affects constructively the social identities, social relations, and system of knowledge and beliefs"(p. 12). Since this study has adopted a CDA perspective, close attention has been paid to currently-developed CDA approaches. The major focus of the critical approach is on Hallidayan systemic functional linguistics(1985), as well as drawing at times on Austin’s theory of speech acts. Cognitive approach is another approach to CDA, of which the major figure is T. A. Van Dijk (Fairclough, Mulderrig, & Wodak, 2010). Van Dijk’s main concern is exploring the cognitive dimensions of discourse in studying racism, ideology, and knowledge. Ruth Wodak and her associates’ concern has been the discourse historical approach (DHA). Recently, this theory has witnessed a remarkable development through its integration of ethnographic methods in order to identify politics and patterns of decision making in EU organizations, besides the investigation of social changes in EU countries. Another new contribution to CDA, particularly in making meaning, has been made by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996). The core of their approach is that communicating ideas, values, identities, attitudes, can be realized not only through the use of linguistic items such as

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words, verbs, clauses, and so forth, but also through the use of several other modes such as visual images, computer games, fonts, colours, and the like. Machin(2013) has pointed out that the strength of their approach lies in the application of social semiotic approach to any kind of communication which may result in a deeper analysis as well as a systematic level of description. Hence, their approach has been called multimodality approach and the studies following this approach are called multimodal critical studies.

Another aspect of Midaq Alley is investigated by Salma Sherif (2016) concerning how Mahfouz manipulates narrative fiction to reveal the place's dysfunction. This is manifested throughout the negative emotions of the Alley's people towards each other, towards their places of residence, and towards their life in Almidaq Alley. In addition, the researcher explores Naguib Mahfouz's style, the use of language, and interpretations that provide the readers with the presuppositions that help them relate to the past, present, and future aspiration of the characters and make the readers be aware and develop a better understanding of the various phenomena occurring in Midaq Alley. Furthermore, the researcher investigates the relation between the strong negative emotions portrayed in the novel and the spatial qualities of Midaq Alley. Saddik Gohar (2015) attempts to present a new reading of Midaq Alley via uncovering the hidden patriarchal ideology underpinning the narrative. He states that the aim of Mahfouz's narrative is to distort the identity of the female protagonist by transforming her into a rebellious

whose overriding all the foundations of the patriarchal society. Hence, the author argues that Mahfouz asserts the masculinity phase instead of presenting the female protagonist as a victim of a patriarchal society.

4. Method

In this study, the ideological orientations behind gender representation in Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley* in general, and the social roles allocated to males and females in the text, in particular, have been investigated by analyzing the novel in terms of CDA, by applying Fairclough's three dimensional model, on the one hand, as well as Van Leeuwen's ways of representing social actors, on the other hand. The two frameworks of analysis have been briefly described below.

4.1. The material for the study:

Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley* Naguib Mahfouz was an Egyptian writer, who won the 1988 Nobel Prize for literature. *Midaq Alley* is one of his famous novels. It was published in 1947 in Arabic, the author's mother tongue. The plot of the novel is set in Cairo during the 1940s, while World War II was still going on and the British army had occupied Egypt. The novel narrates the arduousness and dystopia of the life of the lower class people in a poor alley known as "Al-Midaq Alley". It was Mahfouz's first novel to be translated into other languages,

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including English. The English translator of the novel was Trevor Le Gassick.

The novel has been divided into 35 sections.

As it was already displayed in Table 1, above, as far as representing male and female characters in terms of using proper names is concerned, in the discourse of Mahfouz's *MidaqAlley*, there is a significant difference between the frequencies of occurrence of proper nouns between male and female characters. To put it another way, males' proper names have been more frequently mentioned in the text than females' proper names: 750 instances (i.e. 79.78%) versus 190 instances (i.e. 20.21%) out of a total of 940 instances. In addition, the analysis revealed that the 940 instances of males' and females' proper names were distributed disproportionately throughout the 35 sections of the text. Such a disproportionate distribution is perhaps related to the nature of the events in each section. For example, in section 1 only males' proper names were mentioned without any reference to the females, since Mahfouz has described, in details, the everyday life in the Alley in addition to the description of the Alley itself (i.e., the streets, the shops, and the houses, the café, etc.). However, there was the baker's shop, the owner of which being a woman (i.e., Husniya), whom Mahfouz did not mention in section one at all. Such an exclusion may suggest the effect of the patriarchal community of the setting of the novel. Since Mahfouz was describing the everyday life of an Arab popular alley, it is so clear why most of the people in the

ally use the first name to address each other, particularly those people who have intimate social relationships with each other (e.g., in female-female interactions or in male-male interactions, or even in male-female relationships). Thus, that is why they address young men and women by their first names. However, in terms of an Arabic tradition of deference towards the elderly, they usually address elderly women by resorting to their sons or daughters' names (for example, instead of addressing an elderly mother by her first name, they address her as "um Hamida" – that is, Hamida's mother). As far as the forms of address are concerned, the male characters in the novel are addressed as "Mr.", referring normally to men of rather high social status, while elderly female characters are addressed by "Mrs". The analysis of the males' and females' honorifics revealed that honorifics used for males have been more frequently used than those for females throughout the whole text (i.e., 627 instances – that is, 72.90% -- of honorifics referring to men versus 233 instances – that is, 27.09% -- referring to women out of a total of 860 occurrences in the entire text). As it is mentioned above, Mahfouz has presented only male characters in section one, a fact suggesting that even the firstness in gender representation (i.e., the order of the characters' appearance in the text) seems to be male-oriented in his discourse. He has presented merely ten male characters in section one (e.g., Uncle Kamil, Abbas, Sanker, Dr, Booshy, Kirsha, Sheikh Darwish, etc.), but no female character at all. It is in section two, where he has started presenting only 4 female characters (e.g., Mrs. Saniya Afify,

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Umm Hamida, Hamida -- the main protagonist -- and Husniya). Even more, the analysis of the firstness in gender-mixed dialogues displayed that males' firstness was significantly more than females' firstness, that is, 13 males' firstness dialogues and merely 3 females' firstness dialogues (i.e., 81.25 % versus 18.75 %, respectively). As for the frequencies of physical identifications of the characters in Table 4, above, once more, the data indicates a disproportionate distribution throughout the novel, with male characters being identified more frequently than female ones (i.e., 64.77% of physical identification being associated with males, but only 35.22% being related to females). Even more, Mahfouz has attempted to portray females in terms of their behaviors as hypocritical, vicious, and fierce women, such as Um Hamida, Husniya, the bakeress, and the wife of Mr. Husseiny. For example, he has described Um Hamida: 114 “. . . both shrewd and talkative. To be sure her tongue was hardly ever still and she scarcely missed a single report of scandal concerning anyone or any house in the neighborhood. She was both a herald and a historian of bad news of all kind and a veritable encyclopedia of woes.”(Midaq Alley, p. 16). As far as far as the main female protagonist“ description (i.e., Hamida) is concerned, although Mahfouz has described her as a beautiful strong woman, he has represented her as a tough, greedy ambitious, selfish, and fierce woman. She is a greedy woman because she always thinks and dreams of a wealthy life in future. She always asserts that life without nice dresses and jewels deserves nothing. She usually says to her mother:

“And is a dress something of no importance? What’s the point of living if one can’t have new clothes? Don’t you think it would be better for a girl to have been buried alive than have no nice clothes to make herself look pretty?” “If only you had seen the factory girls! You should just see those Jewish girls who go to work. They all go in nice clothes.” (Midaq Alley, p. 27). Fairclough (2008) has argued that any restrictions on contents, relations, and subjects will affect the beliefs and knowledge, the social relationships, and the social identity of a community. Hence, Mahfouz has attempted to highlight the indirect effect of war, colonization, the transition from traditional life to modern life, besides the effect of poverty particularly on the morality of the people living in the alley. Hamida, for instance, became a „whore“, and gained money from the British soldiers to fulfill her greedy ambition. One more example is Mahfouz’s description of Hamida’s working friends, as if behaving in a way to gain new identities: “They were girls from the Darasa district, who, taking advantage of wartime employment opportunities, ignored custom and tradition and now worked in public places just like the Jewish women. . . . Some even used unaccustomed language and did not hesitate to walk arm in arm and stroll about the streets of illicit love” (Midaq Alley, pp. 40-41). Naguib Mahfouz has also highlighted the effect of war on male characters’ moralities and judgment. For example, Hussein (the café owner’s son) believed that war offered him the chance to become rich by providing the opportunity for him to join the British army: “The

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war isn't the disaster that fools say it is. It's a blessing! God sent it to us to rescue us from our poverty and misery. Those air raids are throwing gold down on us!" (Midaq Alley, p. 36). Moreover, Mahfouz has attempted to describe the female-female and male-female social relationships as insincere, disturbed, aloof, and full of quarrels. A couple of examples may illustrate such social facts better: . . . She [Hamida] was constantly beset by a desire to fight and conquer. This she showed in her pleasure in attracting men and also in her efforts to dominate her mother. It also revealed itself in quarrels which were always flaring up between her and other women of the alley. As a consequence, they all hated her and said nothing but unkind things about her. . . . (Midaq Alley, pp. 39-40) Down the street they saw Husniya, the bakeress, beating her husband, Jaada, with her slippers. The man collapsed in front of her, offering no defense at all. The woman continued pummeling him until Jaada lay at her feet weeping and begging forgiveness. (Midaq Alley, p. 32) As far as the appraising lexicon is concerned, our analyses revealed the greater frequency of the males' appraising lexicon over the females' lexicon. In other words, table 5, above, portrays that the female characters in Midaq Alley have never used a single lexical item to appraise male characters. Mahfouz seems to have suggested the idea that women are by nature vicious, fierce, and impolite by not allowing her female characters to utter even a single word of praise for men, as if there was no man worth of being praised from a women's point of view. Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 107) describe terms of

address like „honey“, „dear“, and „sweetheart“ as “in-group identity markers”, which are used by language speakers as one of the positive politeness strategies stressing in-group membership. It seems that such a strategy is employed unilaterally by some of the male characters in *Midaq Alley*, when they interact with females; the employment of such a strategy by women, however, seems to be absent from the discourse of the novel. Last but not least, the analysis of Mahfouz’s *Midaq Alley* discourse concerning gender representation reveals that the text is more dominantly male oriented with respect to representation of genders in terms of all the instances investigated in this paper: Namely, proper names, forms of address, physical identification, characters’ order of appearance, firstness in mixed-gender dialogues, and appraising lexical items.

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