

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Carlo's 'The Muslim Woman'

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Abstract

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is concerned with analyzing social practices by demystifying specific patterns in different kinds of discourse. CDA encompasses three important elements i.e. discourse, language and power so as to unroll the hidden discourses and meanings for the sake of common people who are not apprised like power groups. The study analyzed a journalistic article, 'The Muslim Woman' written by Shariffa Carlo, printed in The Slate Magazine and Zawaj.com, using Anabella Carvalho's framework for journalistic writing. This framework stands as the methodology of this study. The purpose of the study was to extract the hidden meanings in the discourse that reflect a particular thinking about women especially the Muslim women. The writing at many places seems to enforce prescriptive existence for the Muslim women that chains them to household and family only, which is not always real. It in fact reflects a peculiar mind-set about female units of a society. The conclusion of the analysis is that different discourses use specific discursive strategies to pose thematic views in the relevant contexts thus the article is an enforcement of the theoretical movement that advocates a bifurcation between genders which may not be healthy in an array of modern situations.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis, Journalistic, Text, Carvalho, Carlo*

Introduction

Discourse Analysis is a nascent discipline with a variety of methodologies for example, critical linguistics, genre analysis, critical discourse analysis, positive linguistics and many others. These methodologies are applied in their relevant fields in order to reveal hidden layers of meanings beneath different kinds of discourse. Critical Discourse Analysis, henceforth CDA, encompasses three basic elements in it i.e. language, discourse and power. Each of them is significant to make discourses exist and navigate into one another for the final effect.

CDA is applied to demystify politicized affairs and issues which usually are not transparent to common people therefore the realm of power and politics along with an array of isms are directly related to it. Most of the political speeches, religious discourses, diffuse ideological discourses and advertisements are analyzed through CDA to highlight the underlying purpose of such discourses. There are two notable frameworks in this



field; one presented by Fairclough (1995) and the second framed by Anabella Carvalho (2008). The former is usually applied to any kind of text whereas the latter is considered to be appropriate for analyzing journalistic writing although with some alteration, it too can be used to analyze any kind of discourse. Fairclough (1995) highlights three levels for analytical application on a text i.e. description, explanation and interpretation. For power writings, Carvalho's framework (2008) seems to be more suitable than Faircloughian analytics because it delineates itself in the form of textual and contextual analyses of an available text through certain significant tiers.

Shariffa Carlo is a convert who frequently writes about her experiences regarding both Christianity and Islam. This study has no intentions to raise any doubts on her personal devotion but her writings seem to be one-dimensional thematically. This phenomenon lends great potential to her writings for critical discourse analysis so as to extract the hidden meanings and themes in them. This paved the way for this study encompassing textual and contextual analyses which further comprise different heads in them to take different aspects into consideration. The main purpose of the study was to reveal the camouflaged themes to point towards a restrictive prescription about the Muslim woman's life, which does not seem to be applicable on the woman of the 21st century.

The Framework applied in this study was presented by Carvalho (2008) and is two-fold. The first part analyzes structural organization, grammar, rhetoric, objects, actors, discursive strategies and ideological standpoint whereas the second part analyzes the synchronic and diachronic placement of the selected text. The article (the text) 'The Muslim Woman' is conveniently available online.

Literature Review

Both Fairclough (1995) and Carvalho (2007) extended their frameworks for the same discipline yet they deal with different kinds of discourses although they can be applied on any kind of discourse with minor suitable alteration. Fairclough structured his framework presenting multiple ideas about dealing with texts broadly. He grounds CDA into a step by step practice that allows analysts to divide his work into sections (Henderson, 2005). Three significant stages show that Fairclough thought that discourses contained at least three common factors which are that discourses could be described, explained and interpreted. The first step from Fairclough is to describe the text so as to prepare the ground for further explanation and process. The second stage is about finding out the type of the discourse that is the text under analysis and the third stage is concerned with the relevant interpretation. This stage is related with seaming in meanings by the analyst.

Carvalho (2007) gave her framework recently so it is grounded in exposing social and political problems through media as it plays an active role in the life of the present day individuals. She takes on a different kind of approach which suspises on a thorough critical analysis, not only of the meanings hidden in a text but also its language and grammar that exist in a close interplay with a discourse. Van Dijk (1993), in a way, talks about the same transit when he states that it is imperative to look for language and

discourse both in order to reach some workable and practical analysis in a work. This makes even the aspects like modality, form and adjectives significant carriers of multiple meanings in a text and it becomes pressing to analyze them while working for any CDA.

It is usually believed that Western Marxism is an important backdrop of CDA (Richardson, 2008) so the very nature of CDA is oriented towards a critical social theory of diffuse situations and language in life. This factor works at the back of both the aforementioned frameworks.

Shariffa Carlo is known for her religious writings appearing on Islamic websites, after she converted from Christianity to Islam. Her ideas in the text which is analyzed in this study seem to create a paradox if they are compared with her statements in another article written by her. She states 'I had seen the Muslim women on TV; I knew they were a poor oppressed group, and I wanted to lead them to the light of 20th century freedom.' (Carlo, 2013). On the other hand, in '*The Muslim Woman*', she thinks that home is the best-suited place for females and is better than going for her professional career. She also states 'I studied Quran, hadith and Islamic history. I also studied the ways I could use this information. I learned how to twist the words to say what I wanted them to say. It was a valuable tool.' (Carlo, 2013). These, for modern readers, are conflicting ideas and that paves the way of discourse analysis to be applied on her relevant work to highlight her peculiar standpoint.

Research Methodology

The text under analysis was written by Shariffa Carlo with the title of *The Muslim Woman*, and was printed in *The Slate Magazine* (n.d.) and is now available online at *Zawaj.com*. The research methodology applied to carry out the critical discourse analysis of the text is Carvalho's framework for analyzing journalistic writing. The analysis is divided into two sections i.e. Textual and Contextual. For the textual analysis, Section I uses the tool of analyzing layout, structural organization, objects, actors, discursive strategies and ideological standpoint in the text. Section II applies the comparative-synchronic and historical-diachronic approach to the text for the contextual analysis.

Analysis

I- Textual Analysis

1. Layout and Structural Organization

The text at hand appears in the middle of a single advertisement: The Matrimonial Services. This, to the reader at her/his first look at the content and its placement in the magazine, somehow reveals the nature of the article even before reading it to the full. The layout, therefore, chooses its readers already: Only those who strictly adhere to the cultural stereotypes. To the readers with slightly or potentially different cultural disposition, this kind of layout may be quite irritating or even psychologically threatening because it batches them as a non-conformist thread in a social fabric regarding 'zawaj' and the relevant issues of motherhood and child-rearing.

The structural division and organization is contrived to suit the personal opinion of the writer as each paragraph is assigned a separate heading which is loaded with 'cultural cliché components' to induce a special effect. The starting structure is borrowed from research article booting to assign a scholarly layout and effect to what and how the authoress chose to write.

The article is divided into several paragraphs through headings which deliberately are made to carry linguistic sublimities regarding morphological choice. Out of seven headings, two of them are pretty much longer than the rest; the ones which carry the actual ideology of the writer. The latter ones pertain to the woman being a 'Queen' if she does not join the workforce and opts out to stay at home with her kids, and her role in enforcing the stereotypical domestic and social patterns.

The instances to support the viewpoint in the article are spread through the first two paragraphs and both of the instances are personal. The rest of the paragraphs carry Islamic information regarding what is being discussed. The Islamic statements which could pose a viewpoint otherwise are not exploited. That also shows the foregrounding and back-grounding effect through the choice of instances and the Quranic ayahs (statements).

A picture is also given at the start of the article which gives a quick look into the ideological standpoint shown through the use of multimodality. The picture shows only one kind of Muslim woman i.e. clad in al-hejab. The placement of this element is very close to the Title, The Muslim Woman, which strengthens the idea that the writer wishes to project. The online display is made strong by using different colors for the title, headings and text which gives the reader an opportunity to establish mental schema for different elements in the article.

2. Object

Objects, in discourse analysis, are the people and/or components of life that a text refers to. In this article, the Muslim women are the object plus the notion of the object is quite diffuse because the writer continuously perceives a 'woman' in terms of a mother and wife only, which obviously is quite incompatible with the social scenario, the knowledge economy, economic crisis and issues of personal growth in the running century. The prolix argument of Carlo, which does not carry any percentage or ratio when she delineates women's 'should-be' preferences 'to be or not to be a working woman', revolves around objecting to women's professional engagement in their societies rather than 'objectifying' them for any dynamic and transparent discourse. Furthermore, another dimension of objectification is that the 'Muslim Woman' is essentially a 'married and childbearing' woman not to forget that she 'has to be' a stay-home party.

On plunging a little deeper than the aforementioned elements regarding objectification in this discourse, we can easily perceive that the real issue with the

authoress is not the social role of a woman but religion. Therefore, Islam stands as another object in the essay. Going to the core of the argument, we come to see a third but very important object i.e. Islamization. I do not intend in any case and shape to hit real Islamization in any case but just opining that Islam itself supports moderation and consideration of diverse situations before being utterly decisive about them. The Objects collectively create a homogenizing effect that matches the title and helps the reader to develop a finely-knit thread that has several different loops that hold the thematic frame of the text in place. The paragraph division makes the article branch out its significant objects and arguments even when the reader is just skimming. The same objects are enlarged into a bigger map on close reading.

3. Actor

Apparently, women are also the Actors in the text because their decision to stay or not to stay at home can either make it or break the Islamic society in the writer's opinion. On a close look, society, religion, husband and children are the real actors. On the other hand, street crimes and 'unruly beaus' are visualized as the active factors that push women back inside their homes. An interesting point is that in the scenario of Pakistan, apart from street crimes, the rest of elements are now close to an assumption.

4. Language, Grammar and Rhetoric

The language of 'choice' in the article seems to be otherwise, of 'telling' rather than 'asking' thus creating an either/or situation. The shades of different difficulties facing women are quite overlooked and back-grounded. Choice-less Feminism is curtailed by Choice Feminism consequently the choice rhetoric carries dictatorial, self-important and close-ended signaling towards staying home. The chosen vocabulary starts with an attractive word i.e. 'economic' whereas ends up at crime and duty passing through the words like 'fitnah' and 'hormones'!

A contrastive pair is exploited repeatedly by targeting the Western women while making them a foil to see and highlight the Eastern women. That makes the argument a little daunting for both. Rather than seeing the problem analytically, the 'showing-the-right-way' language is used that baffles the female Eastern and Western readers as how to find out the grey categories between the either/or verbosity. The Muslim women living in the West is the most relevant subject to the article but in completely back-grounded.

The language of the text is concentrated with persuasive vocabulary and task-oriented vocabulary. The whole debate is put forward using an unwavering focus on two ideological elements i.e. women and mothers. That shows the strength of Carlo's belief in domesticity and safety inside home which sometimes is appealing to the female readers. The words like 'honour', 'queen', 'safety',

'support', 'quality' and 'success' create an aura of relaxation and peace despite the fact that most of the ideas are contrived from the cultural stereotypes' bank that fail to be compatible with the difficulties that women face today. The modal verbs are utilized to grade the problems that a workplace has in store for enthusiastic women 'in consequence of' their personal aspirations. Nowhere is found a single word denoting a woman as a being who is stuck between the debate of the Sacred Cow of motherhood and a full complete monadic individual in a well-knit society. The text assumes that domesticity is inevitable for women and forbidden for men. It is shown using social cliché and traditional orientation towards the qualities of a capable Muslim woman. The adverbs like 'servants, inferior, lower, cheap' for the plight of women joining workforce are used that leave an impression that women who stay at home are royal and far from any trouble. The words 'information age, personal growth, individual, satisfaction' are not to be seen anywhere which seems to be a strategy used to highlight only those facts which are favourable to the writer's point of view regardless of the matter's complexity. Furthermore, personal instances and observation are put forward to maintain the impression of the firsthand knowledge regarding how women feel without thinking that such choice might deter the readers to believe in the multidimensional nature of the text. On another note, this linear approach keeps the reader focused on the same belief that Carlo entertains in her mental consciousness.

5. Discursive Strategies

The article is rich with discursive strategies. A specific kind of cultural discourse is used to establish the tone and argument in the text. The Choice Feminism rhetoric totally backgrounds the issues of the 21st century economic crisis, the invading economic crisis, necessity of female economic empowerment and unbearable economic burden on men. The diverse social and family situations are all back-grounded.

The article starts with the reference of an economic philosopher who favors the idea of women staying home. This statement is used to frame the authoress's point of view. Moreover, most of the references chosen to make the argument are Western; it is to create a high frame that could leave the impression that women are opting out of professional life. The other side of the picture is totally kept undercover so as to foreground the cultural stereotype of Muslim women staying at home. Hirshman (2006) in her book, *Get to Work*, states that it is imperative for women not to opt out of employment to stay home in present day economic crisis. Only by working (in the present century with social troubles), can women have a fully flourishing life. My purpose behind mentioning a Western authoress's opinion is to show that totally opposite views also exist and exist for a reason but the other side of the coin is kept totally unturned by Carlo to

foreground the idea that women and particularly Muslim women should stay at home to improve motherhood.

Not surprising that Carlo tries to spread the stay-home female standards all over the world cultures unfortunately without considering that 93% of women in the US (the West that she uses as the foil frame to make her half-baked point) who opted out of jobs and are mothering also, want some way back into the workforce (Hirshman, 2006). On another note, modern Muslim women, even when they are mothering their children, aspire to hold beneficial and profitable posts to participate in the domestic and social progress on the whole. A recurrent stereotype is established which speaks of Muslim woman's 'obligation' not to join any workforce to maintain their religious image. Several persuasive techniques are used to make the readers to 'definitely' give a second thought if they are females and Muslim as well. A major assumption is that all workforce stations extend sexual harassment towards women therefore it is better to stay at home to stay safe. Even an ordinary reader knows this is not the case. Sexual harassment is indeed one of the major problems for women but that can take place inside home as much as a workplace. Almost all of us adults have heard several cases of sexual harassment being extended to women eventually by their own cousins, members in in-laws, friends whether male or female in some families. Rather than talking about the generation of efforts to lessen and eliminate the loathsome behavior in the society, Carlo shows to women an escape way back home, which again enforces the idea that home is the best. The timely use of Quranic ayahs embedded in her own imagination stamp the writer's thinking as the only available option in 'such a rotten state' because a layman would usually not argue against the interpretation of the ayahs.

The stay-home women are framed to be the most honourable, safest and dutiful. The contrariety is excluded from the text to give it a solid frame which raises rather debatable points in it. The headings are chosen in such a way so as to use only those words which are sublime i.e. 'honour', 'Queen', 'mother', 'Quality Time', 'Responsibilities', 'Honourable Duty' and the 'Tools to Fulfill' etc. The woman is put into a position in which it is imperative for her to execute multi-layered domestic functions not through organization and division but sticking inside home and that for the betterment of her kids and husband.

The factors of sexual harassment and child-rearing are exploited to legitimize the act of making all the Muslim women stay at home irrespective of their difficulties and different bunch of situations. The text goes even to the extent of saying, 'waitresses are nothing more than cheap advertisement for men.' This kind of degree of certainty regarding dynamic social situations is rather upsetting but this is strategically very apt for attracting the attention of semi-educated or uneducated stay-home women and the result is the formation of a homogenous ideology that thinks woman is incapable of bringing in organization in her life.

The writer seems to be working with a cocoon ideology that stays inside its own boundary rather than getting out and analyzing the grey areas of the issue.

6. Ideological Standpoint

In spite of concentrated forms of language, persuasive attempts and structured vocabulary, the writer's ideology is shining through as stereotypical in tone and nature. The text lacks an open-minded and multidimensional thinking towards the problem. The problem in fact is not at all approached rather the text starts with suggestions to reach a single solution: Women should stay home! Carlo perceives a 'Woman' as a mother only who cannot be a working woman because religion stops it. That shows a very narrow approach towards an open-minded religion that emphasizes the obligation of securing knowledge, exercising research and then utilizing it for the social good. Carlo holds on to naive norms and culturally hard core stereotypes fast to keep women home. That indeed does not have the potential to match the prevalent social and economic troubles.

After a thorough reading, the reader most probably comes to two points; the writer is either not really have much of the experiential exposure to the problems that men and women have to suffer in general or she is deliberately back-grounding the complex and demanding social reality in order to promote a particular kind of ideology. Under the expansive umbrella of the topic, *The Muslim Woman*, Carlo discusses only married women and then within the group social group of married women, she thinks that all of them have children. The reality is indeed diverse and multi-tiered. Not all the married women are economically strong as Carlo's exemplary Saudi women who think that joining the workforce and driving a car are the acts of lowering oneself down to menial tasks. She talks about 'upper income level' women who never work but she does not mention that they do not stay at home all the time. They usually have a scheduled routine of parties and dinners that keep them engaged in venturing out of the home. They just do not join the workforce. It keeps them away from frustration and the feeling of a futile existence. Another instance that she brings forward is that of a pregnant woman who is happy to opt out of job, does not mean that all the pregnant women will feel satisfied if they prefer staying at home. Furthermore, she does not give any reference to the health, age, qualification and nature of that pregnant woman.

The writer's ideology shines through when she believes that domesticity belongs to women and men are supposed to do everything outside. Again the social situation might be quite different. She does not take into accounts the cases in which husbands are handicapped for good and unable to join a workforce, or wives who want certain help in accomplishing domestic chores.

Nowhere in the Quran is mentioned that men are forbidden to participate in the household chores, and where Carlo brings forth the ayahs from the Quran to

be at home, she totally forgets the Sunnah; the Holy Prophet (SAW) felt quite happy in accomplishing his own work at home rather than making his wives do everything for him and children. This shows that she has an insistent ideology which chooses to make the point whatever the social situations.

The Queen-Servant analogy is really interesting through which Carlo sees that women who stay at home, whatever the efforts to acquire education and its nature might have been, are queens and those who are socially beneficial for others are servants. This might irritate the educated females who have to become 'the servants' because they are not married and they have to support either their siblings or the old parents who have been sacrificing everything for the education of their female children.

The stereotypical ideology of the writer can be seen in her belief that all men are economically strong to provide for their families and that they do not have any desire to receive any support from their spouses. It remains quite out of the debate arena as to what would happen if 'becoming servants' become inevitable in this century under crisis. Most of Carlo's arguments are plain assumptions. Analyze these statements from her: Not joining a workforce 'agrees with her natural temperament, to keep her honour safe ...', 'It is better for a woman to stay home than to work.', 'the Western women hopes for the ability to be a stay-at-home mother.' and (at home), 'we are free from fitnah and harassment'. Now analyzing these conclusive statements, most of the women, Muslim or non-Muslim, get depressed living all at home and not utilizing their education and expertise. They are capable of maintaining a balance between their professional and domestic life. Moreover, children need a quality time yet joining the workforce does not necessarily impoverish this quality time. That totally depends on the nature of the individual and differs from person to person. Regarding the second statement, not all the Western women seek a way back home. I have discussed the 'Fitnah' statement earlier in my analysis. Furthermore, the ideological paradox can be seen in the 'Fitnah' section where Carlo admits women are allowed to go outside in the time of need but then she says the Holy Prophet (SAW) told them to stay at home. My stance is that the Holy Prophet (SAW) was the best analyst of situations, past and future, and he never said a word that did not match the Quran. Women 'are' allowed to go join workforce in order to bring in economic comfort for their spouse and kids, when in need. Even otherwise, education is a duty and utilizing it is not forbidden.

The writer exploits the Quranic ayahs, without any deep analysis of them, to gain framing power to build her argument in the text. The Quranic language, being the most rich and full of metaphor and rhetoric, cannot be taken literally most of the times. Therefore utilizing it to make barely plain points seems quite an immature approach. The write does not delineate the thesis showing the both sides of the picture even when using ayahs. If she wanted to express her concern

about the quality time for the kids of professional mothers, the proposition then is not appropriately posed. By positioning 'woman' in a scenario where she is left with no choice, shows a particular kind of ideology that is intent on promoting it also through journalistic expression. The magazine's repeated customers are the women who believe they are born to stay home and mar down their individual contentment if ever it gives a call. Such a mental make-up totally ignores the several solutions that help women balance their domestic and professional life. We cannot ignore the opportunities now extended by most of the institutions that allow kids care and make the timings for the female workers flexible due to the burden of family and children in them.

II. Contextual Analysis

There is a vast difference between how contemporary writers dealt with the issue of women joining workforce or staying home. I gave a contemporary juxtaposition of the thesis taken up by Carlo with Hirshman (2006). Should there be an objection to the choice of the reference, it is basically meant to be juxtaposed with the writer's Western references so the collateral instances can be acquired to show opposing opinions that the writer back-grounded. The synchronic handling of the issue in our newspaper is very well known. Women in the present century economic crisis join workforce to balance their domestic budget and help the spouse. This can induce a long list of references in the print and does not need a hard proof for a laymen reader. Women, with the passage of time, are developing the potential to manage time for the kids along with maintaining their professional life. Those who cannot do so and have the means of staying home can easily opt out of job. In our Muslim society, many families don't like their daughters and wives working outside home. If this is acceptable for the stakeholders, nobody stops them to stay at home. The contemporary writes like Anita Desai and Linda Hirshman have analyzed the issue taking a multidimensional view that seems natural and reasonable.

The course of the matter through time has been complicated. Decades back, the journalistic writing favoured women staying at home still there were opinions otherwise as well, as in Shaista Sohrawardi Ikramullah's writings. With the passage of time and invasion of technology, the social demands on economy increased to a great extent therefore women had to come out join workforce along with men. Economic suppression on women also forced them to come out fend for themselves; no matter they were married or single. The issue at hand is extremely complicated that requires a sophisticated eye to analyze it while being less sensitive to women's condition in the present day social demands.

Conclusion

The text by Shariffa Carlo is steeped with certain cocoon ideology that revolves around its own elements rather than opening up to the social problems that lie at the heart of the issue. Naïve readers might be kept uninformed about the grey shades of the social issues

through this kind of discourse. The point to make is that there have been other contemporary authors as well who have taken up the issue at hand, analyzed it thoroughly but did not reach the solutions in haste rather uncovered the main issue and tried to suggest what was appropriate according to the present day economic pressures.

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