A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Role and Status of Women in *Nahj al-Balāghah* According to Norman Fairclough's Approach

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Abstract

Nahj al-Balāghah, a selection of directives from the Caliph and immediate successor of the noble Prophet of Islam, Imam Ali (AS), is a key source for understanding authentic Islamic discourse. This research examines the discourse on women in Sermons 27 (on Jihad)

and 80 (political), and Letters 14 (military) and 31 (educational), using Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis approach at three levels: description (linguistic features), interpretation (production and reception), and explanation (social structures). Findings indicate that by rejecting the conventional and Umayyad violent and exploitative ideology against women, the Alawite discourse represents women as sublime, complementary, respected, and delicate subjects. Considering the emotional and social vulnerability of women, it emphasizes the preservation of human dignity, protection of their rights, and avoidance of injustice and violence against them. By recognizing the group identity of all women, including non-Muslims in a religious society, it reveals the integrated identity of the community, social cohesion, and shared human rights. Relying on religious legitimacy, the Alawite discourse aims to correct incorrect cognitive-cultural presuppositions about women and reinforces its discursive authority through intertextuality with the Qur'an and Prophetic tradition, as well as the use of social identity elements like honor (*Ghayrat*) and zeal (*Ḥamīyyat*). This research fills the gap of a comprehensive discourse analysis in Islamic texts regarding women and, by relying on Islamic exegeses, offers a modern reinterpretation for discussions on women's rights. This analysis, conducted within the historical context of early Islam, contributes to a deeper understanding of the status of women in religious texts and has applications in women's rights policymaking.

Keywords: *Nahj al-Balāghah* Discourse Analysis, Imam Ali (AS), Women's Dignity, Women's Religious Rights, Islamic Identity of Women, Women in Imam Ali's Society

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Introduction

Nahj al-Balāghah, a collection of sermons, letters, and short sayings attributed to Imam Ali (AS), as a prominent Islamic text, has played a significant role in shaping religious, political, and social discourses in early Islam. In the context of the first Islamic century (7th Century CE), as Islamic society was transitioning from the pre-Islamic (*Jahiliyyah*) culture to a system based on Islamic values, the representation of women in these texts reflects the tensions between tribal norms and Islamic teachings. The main research question is: 'How are women represented in Sermons 27 and 80 and Letters 14 and 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah* based on Norman Fairclough's approach?' The present study aims to explain the role of these discourses in reconstructing power relations, ideologies, and social structures of early Islam. The significance of this research in analyzing the discourse on women in *Nahj al-Balāghah* is that it contributes to a deeper understanding of Imam Ali's (AS) words and can offer new perspectives to Hadith studies.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as an interdisciplinary approach, examines the relationship between language, power, and ideology in social contexts (Agagolzadeh et al., 2007 AD/1386 SH: 39). Norman Fairclough integrates Foucault's definition of discourse with a systematic framework of analysis based on text linguistics (Mills, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 187). CDA is a form of ideological analysis of text. In this method, using appropriate linguistic tools and referring to historical and social contexts, the ideology of the

discourse, which is often hidden through normalization and neutralization, can be identified (Agagolzadeh, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 236). Fairclough defines discourse as a social practice in which language not only reflects reality but also constructs power relations and ideologies (Agagolzadeh, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 236; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 128). In his three-level framework, Norman Fairclough divides discourse analysis into three stages: "Description, which deals with the formal features of the text, where lexical, semantic, and grammatical analysis of sentences and smaller units are examined." The interpretation level explores the processes of text production and reception (situational context and intertextuality), and the explanation level investigates the link between the text and social structures and power relations, identifying the ideologies embedded in the text (Fairclough, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 102).

Fairclough's framework, with its three levels of description, interpretation, and explanation, provides a suitable tool for analyzing these discourses, as it clarifies the link between text, social context, and its effects. The present study, focusing on Sermons 27 and 80 and Letters 14 and 31, analyzes linguistic features and discursive patterns to explore the semantic layers of women's representation in the Alawite discourse and to achieve a deeper understanding of their status in early Islam. Without imposing value-based assumptions, this study seeks to provide a scientific and impartial interpretation that moderates existing ambiguities and enriches studies on *Nahj al-Balāghah* and gender. To ensure the validity of the analysis, the data

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were compared with classical interpretations like that of *Ibn Maytham* and contemporary ones like Makarem Shirazi. Furthermore, the authors minimized potential biases by repeatedly and critically reviewing the findings.

1. Literature Review

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been utilized to identify hidden ideologies in the texts of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, but the discourse analysis of women using Fairclough's (2010) approach has remained neglected. Discursive studies on *Nahj al-Balāghah* focus on the role of language in reproducing social meanings. Kamyabiniya and Nemati (2015 AD/1394 SH) analyzed the Alawite discourse in the letter to *Mālik Ashtar* using Fairclough's approach, demonstrating the role of language in legitimization. Mohseni and Parvin (2015 AD/1394 SH) examined the description of Kūfans as a critique of social interactions. Safaee and Soltani (2016 AD/1395 SH) analyzed linguistic choices in the letter to *Mu'āwīyah*. Ghahramani and Bidar (2019 AD/1398 SH) explained the contrast between Alawite discourse and rival discourses in the sermons concerning the Khawarij and the public allegiance. Sayyadinejad et al. (2020 AD/1399 SH) explored the critique of domination in the tenth letter. While valuable, these studies have not paid attention to the representation of women in *Nahj al-Balāghah*.

Gender studies focus on the representation of women in religious texts. *Wadūd* (1999) in "Qur'an and Woman," reread Qur'anic verses with a gendered approach and criticized patriarchal interpretations. Mernissi (1991) in "The Veil and the Male Elite," raised the necessity

of a historical rereading of texts. Inloes (2015) in an article criticized Sermon 80 of *Nahj al-Balāghah* by comparing it with the book of *Sulayām ibn Qays* and challenged its authenticity. Momen, Gharavi Naeini, and Shokri Golpayegani (2024) analyzed judicial justice for women in the legal tradition of Imam Ali (AS). Darzi and Besharati (2021 AD/1400 SH) examined gender egalitarianism in the Qur'an and *Nahj al-Balāghah*. These studies have less frequently used Fairclough's approach.

Jafari Tabrizi (1998 AD/1377 SH) and Mottaqi Fatavi (2017 AD/1396 SH) explained the high status of women. Jamali (2002 AD/1381 SH), Najvi Saleh (2005 AD/1384 SH) responded to ambiguities. Nasiri (2012 AD/1391 SH), Fazeli Dehkordi et al. (2010 AD/1389 SH), Fattahizadeh (2014 AD/1393 SH), Rezvani (2013 AD/1392 SH), and Fazayeli (2022 AD/1401 SH) addressed the identity and value of women. 'Aṭawī (1992) in *Ma'a al-Mar'ah fī Nahj al-Balāghah* (With Woman in *Nahj al-Balāghah*), attributed "Deficiency of Intellect" to social limitations and "*Rayḥānah*" (fragrant flower) to respect. *Ṭāhā* (2004) in *al-Mar'ah al-'Arabīyyah* (The Arab Woman), reinterpreted Sermon 80 with Islamic justice. Jafari (2015) challenged the authenticity of "Deficiency of Intellect." *al-Khafājī* (2018) analyzed the rhetoric of Sermon 80. Nasrollahi (2022) examined gender relations in social culture. *al-Khabbāz* (2025) criticized the disparaging phrases and affirmed the positive representation of women. Deymkar Garub (2025) reread Sermon 80 and criticized the attribution of deficient intellect. These studies are mainly interpretive and have overlooked Fairclough's discourse analysis.

Existing studies are limited to jurisprudential, historical, or descriptive

analyses, and a critical discourse analysis using Fairclough's framework on Sermons 27 and 80 and Letters 14 and 31 has not been performed. This research fills this gap through linguistic, contextual, and power analysis.

2. Description of the Discourse on Women

At the description level, the lexical, grammatical, experiential (social realities), relational (power relations), and expressive (identity and emotions) values of Sermons 27 and 80 and Letters 14 and 31 are examined to determine how language establishes gender roles and promotes Islamic values.

2-1. Description of Sermon 27

Sermon 27 was delivered by Imam Ali (AS) to call people to participate in jihad. Some believe the sermon was given late in his life, but *Sayyid Raḍī* states that this sermon was delivered when the Commander of the Faithful (AS) was informed that *Mu'āwīyah*'s army had attacked the city of Anbar and plundered it. He first speaks of the virtue of jihad, then describes the enemy's plundering of the city, and addresses the issue of women's social rights. He states that Muslim and non-Muslim women under the protection of the Islamic state were attacked, their honor violated, and their ornaments looted, and in light of this event, he reprimands his companions for neglecting their social duties.

2-1-1. Lexical Features

The vocabulary of Sermon 27 represents women as vulnerable

subjects in need of protection and promotes religious values by using terms like

al-Muʿāhidah (a non-Muslim woman under the protection of the Islamic state). Key vocabulary includes social terms like *al-Marʾat al-Muslimah* (the Muslim woman), *al-Muʿāhidah*; material terms like *Ḥijlāhā* (her necklace), *Qulbahā* (her bracelet), *Qalāʾidahā* (her earrings), and *Riʿāthahā* (her anklets); and military terms like *al-Rajul* (referring to the enemy soldier) and *Yantaziʿu* (referring to their looting).

1) Conceptual Relations

These include synonymy, antonymy, and hyponymy (Safavi, 2020 AD/1399 SH: 99-128). The terms *al-Muslimah* and *al-Muʿāhidah* demonstrate legal inclusiveness and express the relationship of female citizens with the Islamic state, showing an equal view of the rights of Muslim and non-Muslim women, which strengthens social cohesion. The opposition between *al-Marʾah* (the woman) and *al-Rajul* (the enemy soldier) delineates gender boundaries. The terms *Ḥijlihā, Qulbahā, Qalāʾidahā, and Riʿāthahā* exhibit meronymy, referring to different parts of women's jewelry, all of which are part of their adornments. Given that each of these adornments symbolizes personal values and sanctity, Imam Ali, by detailing them and mentioning them separately, tries to have a greater emotional impact on the audience and to depict the consequence of the Muslims' weak resistance and failure to defend, which led to the violation of women's honor.

2) Literary Devices

The repetition of words related to women (the word "Woman" twice and four references to them in the phrase *Ḥijlahā wa Qulbahā*

wa Qalā'idahā wa Ri'āthahā) creates rhetorical emphasis. The euphemism *Fayantazi'u Ḥijlahā* ("he snatches her necklace") indirectly expresses the violation of women's sanctity, in contrast to the pre-Islamic discourse that normalized violence. Examples of dysphemism include many reproaching expressions like curses and belittlement of the people who avoid jihad and are indifferent to the rights of women and children, seen throughout the sermon. In a sermon that is inherently about jihad, women play an important and influential role and are mentioned with euphemism as those who possess special sanctity. In one case, their cognitive and emotional states at a specific moment in their lives, the wedding night, are mentioned. In the phrase *'Uqūlu Rabbāt al-Ḥijāl* ("The minds of brides in their chambers"), he implicitly compares the men to newlywed brides who see everything emotionally and are lost in their own imaginations and illusions, thus criticizing their weakness. This characteristic is very good for women, but the Imam (AS) considers it contrary to the characteristics of men, because if a man's entire concern is himself, it is very undesirable for him. It is necessary for men to have the zeal to defend their honor and homeland, and therefore, he likened men who lack this zeal to effeminate men.

3) Values

Experiential values represent social and religious realities and the abhorrence of transgression and indifference to women's rights in the eyes of Imam Ali (AS). Relational values establish power hierarchies, and expressive values evoke feelings of empathy and responsibility. In the phrase "I have been informed that a man from the enemy army

entered upon a Muslim woman and another woman under the protection of the Islamic state," the words *al-Mar'at al-Muslimah* and *al-Ukhrā al-Muʿāhidah* represent the reality that women, regardless of their religious identity, have civil rights. The phrase "And they snatched their necklaces, bracelets, earrings, and anklets" represents the experience of looting and violation of women's honor with tangible details. The reference to jewelry conveys a personal and emotional experience of the violation of women's private space, which, in the social context of that time, indicates a violation of human dignity. The verb *Yantaziʿu* ("Snatches") shows that the transgression was not only against their bodies but also against their material and moral rights. This detailed description highlights the violation of the civil rights of women as subjects with ownership and sanctity. The reference to women's *Istirjāʿ* and *Istirḥām* indicates the limitation of women's means of defense, conveys a sense of oppression and powerlessness, and highlights the violation of women's honor as a challenge to the community's honor and the reality of their vulnerability to violence. In the phrase "If a Muslim man dies of grief after this, he is not to be blamed, but is rather, in my view, worthy of it," the experiential value of dying from sorrow over the bitter event of the violation of women's honor is shown. In the phrase *ʿUqūlu Rabbāt al-Ḥijāl* ("The minds of brides in their chambers"), there is a negative experiential value that implies emotional excitement and the dominance of feelings, resulting in reduced decision-making power or decisions made out of emotion among newlyweds. They have limited, individualistic, and emotional views that are in line with their

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functions, but for men who have abandoned jihad, this indicates their weakness and feebleness. The world of a newlywed bride is very different from that of a mature, understanding man, and all her thoughts are focused on her current situation.

2-1-2. Grammatical Features

The voice of the text is active, and the Imam (AS) directly attributes the responsibility for action to the audience. The sermon's imperative, prohibitive, and reproachful structures convey the speaker's authority and the urgency of defending women. In phrases like "When I command you to set out for defense" or "May your faces be ugly and may you be companions of sorrow, you [evaders of jihad]," the reality and position of the Imam's power are reported. The conditional sentence "If someone dies of grief for not defending women, he is not to be blamed" induces a sense of shame. Imperative sentences like "Fight them" invite the audience to act. In this sermon, the number of sentences with a positive meaning, encouraging jihad and showing its value, is greater than the negative and reproachful sentences. By using more verbal sentences, the Commander of the Faithful invites the audience to action and conveys to them a sense of urgency and necessity for action. The pronouns *Hunna* (they/them) for women and *Kum* (you) for the audience strengthen the speaker-audience relationship. The conjunction *Fa* (so/then) expresses the logical connection between the violation of women's honor and dying of grief over such an event. The sermon, with its rhetorical style and reproachful tone, is divided into three parts (description of the violation of women's honor, reproach of men's weakness, and a call to

jihad). Cohesion is achieved through repetition (*al-Mar'ah*), pronouns (*Hā, Kum*), and religious references. The statements are delivered unilaterally, and the address *Qultu Lakum* ("I said to you") shows authority. The pronouns "I" and "you" are constantly repeated in the sermon. Rhetorical features like parallelism (*Fayantazi'u Ḥijlahā wa Qulbahā*) make the message more impactful.

3. Description of Sermon 80

Sermon 80 was delivered by Imam Ali (AS) after the Battle of the Camel and the defeat of *'Āyishah*'s army in Basra. Some matters related to women are raised, making it one of the most controversial sermons in *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Its apparent meaning suggests three deficiencies: cognitive, faith-related, and economic (in inheritance share). The reasons given are, respectively: "The testimony of two women being equal to that of one man, not performing prayer and fasting during menstruation, and their inheritance share being half that of men. Later in the sermon, the Imam emphasizes to beware of bad women and be cautious even of good women."

3-1. Lexical Features

The vocabulary of Sermon 80 represents the legal limitations of women and establishes the religious order. Key vocabulary includes religious, legal, and social terms like faith, prayer, fasting, testimony, inheritance, women, and deficiency. Due to their religious and legal nature, these words have been used as a tool to justify and legislate the status of women in society.

1) Conceptual Relations

The meronymy of prayer and fasting for religious faith links the devotional aspects. The antonymy of woman and man in *Shahādatu Imra'atayn ka Shahādati al-Rajul* ("The testimony of two women is like the testimony of one man") highlights the legal differences between women and men. The antonymy between

al-Ma'rūf (the good deed) and *al-Munkar* (the reprehensible deed), and *Shirār* (the bad ones) and *Khīyār* (the good ones) specifies moral boundaries and helps create a balanced view of women. The hyponymy of *al-Nās* (the people) and *al-Nisā'* introduces women as a part of society that needs special attention. The antonymy between *Khīyār al-Nisā'* (the best of women) and *Shirāruhunna* (the worst of them) negates misogynistic notions that attribute no good to women.

2) Literary Devices

The repetition of deficiencies and deficiency creates semantic continuity and rhetorical emphasis, fixing the idea of limitation in the audience's mind. The implicit analogy in the phrase *Shahādatu Imra'atayn ka Shahādati al-Rajul al-Wāḥid* ("The testimony of two women is like the testimony of a single man") specifies the legal difference between women and men. The euphemism *Lā Tuṭī'uhunna fīal-ma'rūf* ("Do not obey them in what is good") subtly recommends preventing misuse and points to the necessity of maintaining boundaries in interaction with women.

3) Values

Experiential values represent religious rulings. Relational values

establish the speaker's authority. Expressive values, with a decisive tone, evoke a sense of caution and acceptance in the historical audience. The experiential value of the phrase *Maʿāshir al-Nās, inna al-Nisāʾa Nawāqiṣ al-Īmān, Nawāqiṣ al-Ḥuẓūẓ, Nawāqiṣ al-ʿUqūl* ("O! People, women are deficient in faith, deficient in shares, deficient in intellect") is a general judgment about women, focusing on three characteristics (faith, material shares, and rationality). The experiential value of the phrases *Fa Ammā Naqṣu Īmānihinna* ("As for the deficiency of their faith"), *wa ammā Naqṣu Ḥuẓūẓihinna* ("And as for the deficiency of their shares"), and *wa ammā Naqṣu ʿUqūlihinna* ("And as for the deficiency of their intellects") expresses legal and religious values concerning women.

3-2. Grammatical Features

The voice of this text is active and stated from a position of authority. Most sentences in the sermon are nominal, such as *al-Nisāʾu Nawāqiṣ al-Īmān* ("Women are deficient in faith"), and begin with the emphasis particle *Inna* (verily), presenting concepts as permanent and self-evident. The mood of the sentences in this sermon is declarative and imperative, thus increasing the text's certainty. Declarative sentences like *al-Nisāʾu Nawāqiṣ al-Īmān* present rulings as self-evident. Imperative sentences like *Fattaqū Sharāra al-Nisāʾ* ("So beware of the evil among women") guide men's behavior in relation to women. The prohibitive sentence *Lā Tuṭīʿūhunna* ("Do not obey them") specifies a behavioral restriction. Conditional sentences like *Lā Tuṭīʿūhunna... Ḥattā* ("Do not obey them... so that") explain the

consequence of behavior. The pronoun *Hunna* (they/them) directly refers to women. In terms of relational value, these pronouns introduce women as a group distinct from the audience. Conjunctions like *Ḥattā* (until/so that) and *Ammā... fa-* (as for... then) are used to express conditions or explain reasons, making the argument logical. The sermon, with its argumentative style, is divided into three parts (faith, intellect, and shares). Cohesion is achieved through repetition (*Nawāqiṣ*), pronouns (*Hunna*), and Qur'anic references. The interactional conventions are one-sided, and the address *Maʿāshir al-Nās* ("O! People") shows authority. Rhetorical features like parallel structures (*Ammā... fa-*) create textual cohesion and make the message decisive.

4. Description of Letter 14

Letter 14 of *Nahj al-Balāghah* contains a series of moral instructions regarding behavior towards enemies in war. Imam Ali (AS) presents a military and ethical discourse in an imperative tone. He first commands the soldiers not to initiate war, so that the argument is complete against the enemy. If war occurs and the enemy is defeated, they should not kill the fugitives, nor harm the wounded and the helpless, and then he explains how to behave with women in war. He emphasizes that due to women's weakness, even if they insult, they should not be harmed. Finally, he mentions that even in the early days of Islam, they were not allowed to treat polytheistic women inappropriately, and even in the pre-Islamic era (*Jāhiliyyah*), violating the honor of women was a disgrace for a man and his descendants.

4-1. Lexical Features

The vocabulary of Letter 14 conveys religious and ethical concepts like legitimacy, patience, and mercy. The identity of the soldiers is represented as a legitimate group and the enemy as a marginal group, while women are introduced as a vulnerable group in need of protection. Words like *Bi Idhnillāh* ("By the permission of God") show the Imam's authority and humility before God. Key vocabulary includes religious terms *Ḥujjah* (proof/argument), *Bi Ḥamdillāh* (praise be to God); military terms *Tuqātilūhum* (you fight them), *al-Hazīmah* (defeat); and social terms *al-Nisā'* (women), *Ḍa'īfāt* (weak).

   1) Conceptual Relations

   The hyponymy of *Ḥujjah* and *Bi Ḥamdillah* strengthens religious legitimacy.

   Ḥujjah directly refers to defending the right, while *Bi Ḥamdillah* refers to praising God and emphasizing that this right is from God. The opposition between *al-Tahyīj* (arousing/provoking) and *al-Kaff* (restraining) represents the duality between violence and peace. Similarly, the duality between arousing emotions (*Lā Tuhayyijū al-Nisā'*) and rationality (*Fa Innahunna Ḍa'īfāt... al-'Uqūl*) is evident. The hyponymy of *al-Nisā'* also includes *Mushrikāt* (polytheistic) women, indicating attention to social and religious differences. The meronymy in the phrase *Fa Innahunna Ḍa'īfāt al-Quwā wa al-Anfus wa al-'Uqūl* ("For they are weak in powers, selves, and intellects") with descriptive words highlights the vulnerability of women. *al-Rajul*

(the man) and *Imra'ah* (woman) have opposite meanings and define gender boundaries.

 2) Literary Devices

The repetition of *Lā* (not/do not) in prohibitive sentences like *Lā Tuqātilūhum* ("Do not fight them") reinforces decisiveness and emphasizes moral principles and non-violence. The contrast between *Fihr* (stone) and *Kaff* (restraining) places Islamic mercy against pre-Islamic violence. The imagery of *Fihr* and *Hirāwah* (cudgel) recalls pre-Islamic violence. The implicit analogy in describing the state of women as *Ḍaʿīfāt al-Quwā wa al-Anfus wa al-ʿUqūl* ("Weak in powers, selves, and intellects") introduces women as beings in need of protection. The repetition of words like *al-Nisā'* and related pronouns challenges the culture of disrespecting women and creates a new attitude towards them. In this letter, the Master of the Pious, by repeating similar words *Adhan*, *Shatm*, *Sabab*, which are part of the meronymy of violence, decisively rejects any physical or verbal abuse against women.

 3) Values

Experiential values represent the reality of war, as well as the arousal of women's emotions under psychological pressure, and their physical, mental, and decision-making limitations in difficult conditions. Relational values show the speaker's authority and the Imam's supportive and commanding relationship with women and the soldiers. Expressive values, with an educational tone *Ḍaʿīfāt*, evoke a sense of responsibility and dignity in the historical audience and

reflect support for women based on their vulnerability.

4-2. Grammatical Features

The grammatical features of this letter, using prohibitive and conditional sentences, reinforce the Imam's authority and the legitimacy of the soldiers, distinguish the identities of groups, and promote a religious and ethical ideology. The mood is imperative and declarative. Prohibitive sentences like *Lā Tuhayyijū* ("Do not provoke/harm") show the leader's authority and the urgency for action. Declarative sentences like *Fa innakum bi Ḥamdillāh* ("For you, by the praise of God") express legitimacy. Conditional sentences like *Wa in Shatamna* ("And if they insult") specify the limits of the soldiers' behavior. The voice of the text is active; the audience (the Muslim army) is made directly responsible for implementing the orders, emphasizing their accountability. The use of verbal sentences is greater than nominal sentences. The repetition of parallel structures in the negative imperative *Lā Taqtulū* (do not kill), *Lā Tuṣībū* (do not harm), and *Lā Tujhizū* (do not finish off) creates decisiveness in speech and emphasizes the prohibition of violent acts. The description of women in the parallel structure *Ḍaʿīfāt al-Quwā wa al-Anfus wa al-ʿUqūl* ("Weak in powers, selves, and intellects") emphasizes their vulnerability. Pronouns distinguish *Kum* (you) as the identity of the soldiers (legitimate), *Hum* (they/them) as the enemy (marginal), and *Hunna* (they/them) as women (vulnerable), shaping discursive oppositions. These pronouns strengthen the speaker-audience relationship. Conjunctions (*fa*, *wa*, *in*) maintain the logical and

structural coherence of the text and reinforce discursive cohesion. The conjunction *Wa* in *Wa lā Tahījuū al-Nisā'* places the non-harming of women in the continuation of the Imam's (AS) ethical commands in war. The letter, with its imperative style, is divided into general sections (prohibition of initiating war) and specific sections (behavior towards women and vulnerable individuals). Cohesion is achieved through repetition of *Ḥujjah*, *al-Nisā'*, pronouns *Kum*, *Hunna*, and Prophetic references. Interactional conventions are one-sided, and the turn of speech is with the speaker.

5. Description of Letter 31

Letter 31, one of the longest letters in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, is the will of Imam Ali (AS), as a compassionate and kind father, to his son, Imam Hassan (AS), whom he deeply loved. In reality, this letter is a charter of the best creedal and ethical instructions. In parts of the letter, the Commander of the Faithful (AS) discusses monotheism, the greatness of God, the attributes of God, the purpose of creation, and the signs of divine mercy. In other parts, he raises issues of self-purification, social ethics, moral values, the necessity of paying attention to spirituality, the necessity of remembering death, focus on the hereafter, attention to gathering provisions, recognizing world-lovers, and the rights of friends. At the end of the letter, he addresses the status of women as delicate beings in need of protection.

5-1. Lexical Features

The vocabulary of Letter 31 represents women as delicate subjects and **21**

promotes family values. Key vocabulary includes social, religious, and ethical terms like *al-Mar'ah* (woman), *Rayḥānah* (fragrant and delicate flower), *Qahramānah* (steward/manageress), *Taqwā* (piety), *hijab* (veil/covering), *Afn* (deficiency), and *Wahn* (weakness).

1) Conceptual Relations

The synonymy of *al-Nisā'* (women) and *al-Mar'ah* (woman) creates variety while strengthening the text's cohesion. The opposition of *Rayḥānah* and *Qahramānah* in *Fa inna al-Mar'ata Rayḥānatun wa Laysat bi Qahramānatin* ("For a woman is a flower, not a stewardess") highlights the contrast between delicacy and hard work. The word *al-Nisā'* means women in general. The word *Rayḥānah* (flower) is used as a metaphor for women, indicating their delicacy, beauty, and sensitivity. This hyponymy suggests that women are delicate and beautiful beings who need special protection and attention.

2) Literary Devices

The metaphor *Rayḥānah* likens women to flowers, conveying a sense of respect and value.

al-Ṣaḥīḥah is a euphemism for a pure and sound individual, and *al-Saqam* is a euphemism for contamination with betrayal and corruption. This type of expression, without using explicit and direct words, provides a delicate and cautious image of moral concepts. The opposition of *Rayḥānah* and *Qahramānah* makes gender roles tangible.

22   *Rayḥānah* is a symbol of delicacy and grace, while *Qahramānah* is

a symbol of heavy responsibilities, pressures, and being confined to difficult roles. Literary devices, by emphasizing Islamic values, social and moral roles, and the importance of family and lineage, emphasize the role of women as beautiful and delicate beings and steer them away from power-displaying roles. It emphasizes the importance of protecting women in society.

3) Values

Experiential values represent gender roles. Relational values establish paternal authority. Expressive values, with an emotional tone *Rayḥānah*, evoke a sense of delicacy and protection in the historical audience. The phrase *Ukfuf ʿAlayhinna min Abṣārihinna bi Ḥijābika Īyyāhunna fa inna Shiddat al-Ḥijābi Abqā ʿalayhinn* ("Restrain their glances by veiling them, for the strictness of the veil preserves them better") represents the hijab as a tool for women's social protection and considers it a guarantor of their social security and stability. The phrase *Wa laysa Khurūjuhunna bi Ashadda min Idkhālika man lā Yūthaqu bihī ʿalayhinn* ("And they're going out is not worse than you admitting someone untrustworthy to them") expresses the value of protecting the sanctity of women as a vulnerable group. *Wa lā Tumallik al-Marʾata min Amrihā mā Jāwaza Nafsahā* ("And do not entrust a woman with matters beyond her capacity") represents the necessity of limiting responsibility and pressure on women. *Fa inna al-Marʾata Rayḥānatun wa Laysat bi Qahramānatin* ("For a woman is a fragrant flower, and not a stewardess") represents woman as a delicate being.

23

5-2. Grammatical Features

The letter's grammatical features convey paternal authority and moral guidance. The mood is declarative and imperative. Imperative sentences like *Wa Īyyāka wa Mushāwarat al-Nisā'* ("And beware of consulting women") and *Wakfuf 'Alayhinna min Abṣārihinn* ("And restrain their glances") and the prohibitive *Lā Tumallik al-Mar'ah* ("Do not entrust a woman") convey a strong sense of obligation and recommendation, guiding men's behavior. Declarative sentences like *Fa inna al-Mar'ata Rayḥānah* ("For a woman is a fragrant flower") present facts as self-evident. Conditional sentences like *In Istaṭa'ta* ("If you are able") imply individual responsibility as well as a remote possibility. Letter 31 is a combination of nominal and verbal sentences. Most sentences in the text are active and positive. The pronouns *Anta* (you) and *Ana* (I) create a direct and intimate feeling, presenting the reader as an individual and responsible being. The pronoun *Hunna* (they/them) shows that they are speaking to men about women. Conjunctions like *Fa inna* (for verily) and *Wa* (and) maintain the logical flow of the text. The letter, with its paternal style, is divided into various thematic sections. Cohesion is achieved through repetition of *al-Nisā'*, *Rayḥānah*, pronouns *Hunna*, *Īyyāka*, and religious references. The use of similar structures (like the repetition of *Wa Īyyāka*) creates formal and semantic harmony between sentences. Interactional conventions are intimate and authoritative with the address *Yā Bunayya* ("O! My dear son"). Rhetorical features like the simile *Rayḥānah* make the message impactful.

24   The following table compares the grammatical features of the texts

mentioned above:

Grammatical Feature	Sermon 27	Sermon 80	Letter 14	Letter 31
Number of Sentences	49	7	12	127
Positive Sentences	38	4	6	97
Negative Sentences	11	3	6	30
Active Sentences	31	6	10	115
Passive Sentences	10	1	2	12
Nominal Sentences	17	4	4	47
Verbal Sentences	32	3	8	80
Conjunctions	48	7	13	142
Referential Pronouns	25	8	8	68
Declarative Sentences	33	4	6	73
Imperative Sentences	10	3	6	53
Interrogative Sentences	1	0	0	1

Chart comparing grammatical features

The table of grammatical features for Sermons 27, 80 and Letters 14, 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, at the description level of Fairclough's framework, shows linguistic differences in the representation of women. Sermon 27, with declarative and verbal sentences, describes women as vulnerable individuals in need of support. Sermon 80, with nominal and declarative sentences, establishes their jurisprudential status, both of which reinforce the religious order of early Islam. Letter 14, with a balance of declarative and imperative sentences, deems women worthy of respect in the context of war, while Letter 31, with an abundance of verbal and imperative sentences, introduces them as valuable beings with family roles and guides supportive behaviors. Conjunctions and referential pronouns enhance textual cohesion in all texts.

6. Interpretation of the Discourse on Women

At the interpretation level of Fairclough's approach, the situational context and intertextuality of Sermons 27 and 80 and Letters 14 and 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah* are examined to clarify the role of language in representing groups and power relations.

6-1. Interpretation of Sermon 27

The author of *Maṣādir Nahj al-Balāghah* (al-Husseini Abd al-Zahra, 1988 AD/1367 SH: 415) considers this speech one of Imam Ali's (AS) famous sermons, which many scholars before *Sayyid Raḍī* had mentioned. *Sayyid Raḍī* and many others have considered its literary genre to be a speech and oration, but some narrators have considered its literary genre to be a letter, believing that Imam Ali (AS) was ill at that time and unable to speak, so he wrote a letter. He sat by the *Sudda* gate of the Kufa mosque, which was connected to the mosque, with *Ḥasan*, *Ḥusayn*, and *ʿAbdullāh ibn Jaʿfar* also with him. Then the Commander of the Faithful called his servant *Saʿīd*, gave him the letter, and ordered him to read it. He stood in such a way that the Commander of the Faithful (AS) could hear everything he and the people were saying. According to Thaqafi's report of the message, its audience is everyone for whom this statement is read, and consequently, those present in the Kufa mosque are its primary and initial audience. *Abū Ḥanīfa Dīnawarī*, in *al-Akhbār al-Ṭiwāl*, also considers its literary type to be a message (Dīnawarī: 406). From the perspective of this research, the genre of the discourse under study is

26 neither a speech nor a letter, but in today's terms, a message (in

Arabic, *Bayān*) issued by the highest divine and spiritual authority.

Sayyid Raḍī explains the situational context of the sermon in 35 words, stating that after the news of *Muʿāwīyah*'s army attacking the city of Anbar and the people's reluctance to respond reached Imam Ali (AS), he pointed out the virtue of jihad, called the people to action, expressed his knowledge of war, and placed the responsibility of disobedience on them. The Imam (AS) brings up the incident of the attack by *Muʿāwīyah*'s soldiers on the city of Anbar (37 AH/658 CE). He then proceeds to rebuke and reproach the people (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, 1958 AD/1337 SH: 2, 85-90; Ibn Maytham, 1983 AD/1362 SH: 2, 30-33; Khu'ī, 1979 AD/1358 SH: 3, 389-407). The city of Anbar was located 62 kilometers from present-day Baghdad, near a canal connecting the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The people of Anbar did not have a significant history of warfare and fighting, and this city was conquered by *Khālid ibn al-Walīd* during the caliphate of *Abū Bakr*. The Commander of the Faithful's (AS) goal is to arouse the men's sense of honor (*Ghayrat*) to defend their religion, honor, and homeland. In this sermon (message), the indifference and inaction of the Commander of the Faithful's followers towards his commands and orders in the later part of his rule are evident. Specifically, they abandon the command for jihad and fighting the Syrians, which the Imam emphasized. At the end of the message's reading, according to *Thaʿālibī*'s report, except for a few, they again make excuses or openly express their objection to the Imam's words.

One of the presuppositions of this sermon is that people held honor as a significant traditional and ethnic culture, which was linked in

their minds to elements like home, homeland, women, defense, and valor. Another presupposition is that the duty of men is war and defense of the homeland, and women should not go to war.

The reference to *al-Mar'at al-Muslimah wa al-Mu'āhidah* ("The Muslim woman and the one under covenant") has Qur'anic intertextuality with the hadith *Istawṣū bil Nisā'i Khayra* ("I enjoin you to be good to women") and Qur'anic verses (Surah al-Nisā': 19, al-Aḥzāb: 35, al-Baqarah: 232) that emphasize kindness and mercy towards women, reinforcing the representation of women as subjects deserving of support. The expression of *Istirjā'* relates to verse 156 of Surah *al-Baqarah*; the women considered this a calamitous event, and this reference highlights the social limitations of women within the framework of the cultural values of that time.

Istirḥām (pleading for mercy) had ethical intertextuality, using human values to defend them. The word intellect in the phrase *'Uqūlu Rabbāt al-Ḥijāl* ("the minds of brides in their chambers") has intertextuality with the Prophet's hadiths about intellect (Ibn Bābawayh, 1943 AD/1363 AH: 352; Daylamī, 1949 AD/1370 AH: 198). The defense of women is especially comparable to pre-Islamic poetry, where *'Antarah ibn Shaddād* stood by the women in a battle and resisted so that they would not be harmed (Sayyahi et al., 2022 AD/1401 SH: 103). This link places the sermon's description within the cultural values of protecting dignity. These references, by creating a sense of religious empathy, facilitated the acceptance of the discourse, and intertextuality places the discourse within a network of Islamic and customary values.

6-2. Interpretation of Sermon 80

Some sources state that Sermon 80 is part of a detailed letter that the Commander of the Faithful wrote in Safar of the year 38 AH (July 658 AD), after the martyrdom of *Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr* and the rise to power of *'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ* in Egypt, in response to a question from a number of his companions. In the letter, he fully explained the conditions of the Islamic society after the Prophet (PBUH) (Modarres Vahid, n.d.: 5, 87). However, *Sayyid Raḍī* in *Nahj al-Balāghah* indicates that this sermon was delivered after the Battle of the Camel (Jumada al-Thānī, 36 AH / December 656 CE) (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, 1981 AD/1401 AH: 6, 215-230). Sermon 80 has been narrated by *Ibn Qutaybah, Thaqafī, Ṭabarī, Shaykh Kulaynī, Makkī, Ibn al-Jawzī*, and *Alī ibn Ṭāwūs* in seven of his works (Jafari, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 1, 704).

The Battle of the Camel, the first civil war in Islamic history, was the result of political disputes after the assassination of *'Uthmān*, the third Caliph. *'Āyishah*, the Prophet's wife, influenced by the instigations of *Ṭalḥa* and *Zubayr*, raised the banner of avenging *'Uthmān*'s blood and entered into battle against the Commander of the Faithful with a large army; this war, which took place in Basra, ended in the defeat of *'Āyishah* and her followers and led to the deaths of thousands of Muslims. This sedition not only threatened the unity of the Islamic community but also created deep rifts in the social and political structure (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, 1981 AD/1401 AH: 6, 215-230; Ibn Maytham, 1942 AD/1362 SH: 2, 223-225; Hashemi Khui, 1980 AD/1400 AH: 5, 302-324). The Commander of the Faithful, in this

sermon, addressed the men of Baṣra, criticizing the behaviors that fueled this crisis.

From Fairclough's perspective, the situational context of the sermon indicates a discursive effort to reconstruct the social order and establish leadership authority. The sermon not only criticizes *ʿĀyishah* for her role in the sedition but also invites the men who were influenced by her to accept their responsibilities.

The presuppositions of this sermon are the acceptance of the Islamic legal and cultural frameworks regarding the role and status of women. Imam Ali (AS), by referring to religious rulings such as differences in inheritance, testimony, and women's acts of worship, points to jurisprudential limitations that were accepted by society at that time. The soldiers also accepted these rulings and views as part of religious teachings.

Sermon 80 is situated within a rich intertextual network through explicit and implicit references to religious and cultural texts. These references reinforce the legitimacy of the Alawite discourse and persuade the audience to accept the sermon's concepts. The phrase *Nawāqiṣ al-Īmān* ("Deficient in faith") has intertextual links with verse 221 of Surah *al-Baqarah* (regarding acts of worship), *Nawāqiṣ al-ʿUqūl* ("Deficient in intellect") with verse 282 of *al-Baqarah* (regarding testimony), and *Nawāqiṣ al-Ḥuẓūẓ* ("Deficient in shares") with verse 11 of Surah An-Nisā' (regarding inheritance). This sermon is related to the Prophet's (PBUH) hadith *Nawāqiṣ ʿUqūl wa Dīn* ("Deficient in intellect and religion") (Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī: 20, 25). One can also point to the connection of this sermon with Qur'anic verses

such as Surah *al-Nisā'*, verse 34, which mentions men's authority (*Qawwāmah*) over women. Referring to the Qur'an and Sunnah places the sermon's discourse within the framework of divine principles and transforms it from a social critique into a religious discourse. This intertextual strategy allows Imam Ali (AS) to strengthen his discursive authority by using authentic texts. The Imam (AS), by referring to the oral culture of the Arabs and customary intertextuality, speaks in the language of his audience and presents his critique of men's incorrect behavior in dealing with women in an acceptable form.

6-3. Interpretation of Letter 14

This letter was issued by the Commander of the Faithful as a military and ethical command. *Sayyid Raḍī* says this letter was delivered before the Battle of *Ṣiffīn* (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, 1981 AD/1401 AH: 15, 104-107). The author of *Maṣādir*, quoting from *Waq'at Ṣiffīn*, *al-Tarīkh*, and *al-Kāfī*, states that Imam Ali (AS) would remind his soldiers of these points before starting any war (Husseini Abd al-Zahra: 3, 217). *Ibn Athīr, al-Tamīmī*, and *Ibn Miskawayh* narrate these words in the Imam's (AS) response to a man from the *Azudī* tribe about *'Āyishah* during the Battle of the Camel (Ibn Athīr, 1965 AD/1385 AH: 2, 613; al-Tamīmī, 1993: 1, 180; Ibn Miskawayh, 2000: 1, 505; Ṭabarī, 1879: 4, 540). The main purpose of this letter is to regulate the behavior of soldiers in war conditions with an emphasis on ethical and religious principles, such that war is only initiated if the opponent transgresses, and improper behavior towards non-combatants and vulnerable individuals, especially women, is avoided.

The shared presuppositions of this letter are adherence to the ethical and religious principles of Islam in war. Imam Ali (AS) emphasizes observing justice, avoiding unnecessary violence, and preserving human dignity, even towards the enemy. This view is based on the shared belief that war must be conducted while observing divine and ethical limits. The soldiers have accepted these principles and are expected to avoid killing non-combatants, harming women, and inhumane behavior on the battlefield, as these values are rooted in Islamic teachings and divine guidance. Another presupposition is that injustice towards women was a shame and disgrace even during the pre-Islamic era (*Jahiliyyah*).

The phrase *Lā Tuqatilūhum Ḥattā Yabda'ukum* ("Do not fight them until they start with you") is related to verses 32 of *al-Mā'idah*, verse 9 of *al-Ḥujurāt*, and 194 of *al-Baqarah*. The phrase *Lā Tahījū al-Nisā'* ("Do not provoke/harm women") is linked to the Prophet's (PBUH) hadith *Inni Anhākum 'an Qatl al-Nisā'* ("I forbid you from killing women") (Ibn Abī Jumhūr, 1983 AD/1403 AH: 1, 136) and verse 190 of *al-Baqarah*. The reference to the "Sanctity of polytheistic women" during the Prophet's time (like the story of the killing of *Abū Rāfi'* and the Prophet's order not to kill women and children) aligns with the historical norms of Islamic society, which shows that protecting women, even polytheistic ones, has a precedent in Islamic tradition (Shushtari, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 13, 517). The phrase *Wa in Kāna al-Rajulu lā Yatanāwal al-Mar'ata* ("And indeed, a man would accost a woman...") refers to pre-Islamic customs where violence against women was considered reprehensible (even in that era). The

intertextual context of Letter 14 shows that this text finds its meaning in relation to other religious, customary, and historical texts, and these connections reinforce the representation of women in the discourse. These references legitimize the discourse of protecting women and extend it beyond religious boundaries. The phrase "Even during the time of the Prophet, we were ordered not to bother polytheistic women and not to accost them" creates intertextuality with the era of the Prophet, showing that refraining from harming women was a confirmed religious and prophetic tradition, emphasizing the importance of ethical principles and the promotion of human values towards non-Muslims, especially their women. Likewise, the intertextual context of the letter also pays attention to the pre-Islamic era, and the phrase "Even in the *Jahiliyyah*, if a man attacked a woman with a stone or a stick, he and his descendants after him would be blamed for this act" shows the universal reprehensibility of disrespecting women, even in lower cultures.

6-4. Interpretation of Letter 31

The author of *Maṣādir* considers this text one of the most famous testaments of the Commander of the Faithful (AS), which was narrated by a group of the greatest scholars such as *Kulaynī*, *Mālikī*, *Shaykh Ṣadūq*, and *Ibn Shuʻba al-Ḥarrānī* before *Sayyid Raḍī* (Husseini, 1989 AD/1409 AH: 3, 296). Letter 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah* is structured as a will in which a wise and responsible father is advising and teaching his son. This will contain instructions for life to prepare him for this world and the hereafter. *Sayyid Raḍī* states that

this will was written for Imam Hassan (AS) upon returning from the Battle of *Ṣiffīn* in the region of *Hāḍirīn* (a town near Aleppo) (Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 1, 391).

The shared presupposition of this letter is the commitment to Islamic and ethical values that were shaped within the religious and cultural framework of that time. Imam Ali (AS), while respecting the status of women, emphasizes preserving their dignity, chastity, and security. This view is based on the shared belief that women, as *Rayḥānah* (fragrant flowers) and valuable beings, need protection and guidance to play their role in a safe society. His son also accepted these values as religious and ethical principles and is expected to adhere to them.

Letter 31 of the Commander of the Faithful uses intertextuality to strengthen the legitimacy and credibility of his words. This process shows that this text follows the trajectory of sacred texts (the Qur'an and the hadiths of the Prophet) and adheres to their values and principles. The term *Rayḥānah* is linked to verse 34 of Surah *al-Nisā'* and Arabic culture. The reference to *Shiddat al-Ḥijāb* ("Strictness of the veil") is consistent with verse 31 of Surah *al-Nūr*. This reference creates a meaning of respect and protection of women's sanctity. The use of the phrase *Wa lā Tumallik al-Mar'ata min Amrihā mā Jāwaza Nafsahā* ("And do not entrust a woman with matters beyond her capacity") defines women's responsibilities within the framework of their capabilities and is related to verse 286 of Surah *al-Baqarah*. These references establish the discourse in religious values and promote the protection of women as an Islamic value.

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7. Explanation of the Discourse on Women

At the explanation level, the representation of women in Sermons 27 and 80 and Letters 14 and 31 of *Nahj al-Balāghah* is analyzed to determine how the discourses, influenced by tribal, religious, and political structures, have established or challenged social hegemonies.

7-1. Explanation of Sermon 27

Sermon 27, with the verbal authority of Imam Ali (AS) as the divine ruler of the Islamic society, presents a discourse on jihad to mobilize the people of Kufa. Reproachful phrases like *Fa Qubḥan Lakum* ("So, ugliness to you") and *Qātalakumullah* ("May God fight you") show the Imam's verbal hegemony and steer people's minds from indifference to responsibility. At that time, men saw power in personal matters and attending to their homes. One part of the tribal and political structure, attributed to the Umayyads, does not grant any human or ethical rights to women and children, and the Imam's discourse negates these ideas. The other group consists of individuals indifferent to these plunderers, and the Imam also rejects the behavior of this group, instead emphasizing responsibility and defense of vulnerable strata. There is no difference between Muslim and non-Muslim women in this matter; rather, the identity of the Islamic society is defined by all individuals and citizens, regardless of religion or gender. Sermon 27 is also an emphasis on social order and cohesion in the Islamic community. According to Fairclough's approach (Fairclough, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 215-245), such supportive discourses for women reconstruct social order against external threats by

controlling collective emotions.

The ideology of Sermon 27 is a combination of Islamic justice, human dignity, and religious honor. The description of women as victims with no refuge but *Istirjā'* and *Istirḥām* and the emphasis on their rights criticizes the norms associated with the Umayyad caliphate, which was violence-centric and misogynistic. Reference to the verse of *Istirjā'* and the Prophetic tradition (protecting non-combatants) legitimizes the discourse (Makarem Shirazi, 1996 AD/1375 SH: 95). This ideology conflicts with the discourse of the enemies (transgression against women's rights) and strengthens the legitimacy of the divine government against social indifference. The reference to *'Uqūlu Rabbāt al-Ḥijāl* as a reproach to men means a change in gender-specific functions and the failure to meet society's expectations of men regarding their social and defensive duties. It defines the identity of women in preserving their sanctity and dignity and keeping them away from vulnerable arenas.

In terms of identity elements, jihad and struggle in the way of God are considered the element that preserves the identity of the community, used for the defense of home and women. Woman and home (homeland) are recognized as identity-forming components of society, and attacking them and leaving them defenseless by men leads to the men being reproached. The repetition of the words home, Muslim woman, and covenanted woman shows that the great matter and religious duty of jihad is a divine ideology for the Commander of the Faithful (AS), the burden of which is on men. Participating in it indicates the community's awareness and responsibility for preserving

the home and the security of women, and men's indifference to jihad means a lack of honor and zeal; because it has endangered the entity of the homeland and its women, and there is no difference in this matter between a Muslim and a non-Muslim woman. The Imam's emphasis on the issue of honor shows that this concept was quite familiar to the audience as a cultural element reinforcing identity, and Imam Ali (AS) uses this national concept and ethnic cultural element as a bridge towards the unity and cohesion of the people, and ultimately, uprising and jihad in the way of God as a religious culture. The Imam questions their cultural identity; because in Arab culture, manliness was always tied to valor, honor, and homeland, and he questions their religious identity by showing the weakening of their Arab tribal cultural identity and beliefs.

In summary, the discourse of Sermon 27 recognizes the civil rights of women. The emphasis on protecting women, without religious discrimination, strengthens their social security and mental health as part of the community's dignity. This discourse condemns the inhumane behaviors of *Muʿāwīyah*'s army, such as looting, and promotes a culture of respect for women. By representing women as sublime subjects, it establishes the hegemony of the divine ruler in opposition to the discourse of the Umayyad caliphate. This discourse, while arousing religious honor, promotes the dignity of women beyond religious boundaries.

7-2. Explanation of Sermon 80

In Sermon 80, the religious and political authority of Imam Ali (AS) **37**

as the leader of the Islamic community turns the discourse into a tool for establishing political order. This sermon, by criticizing the misuse of social influence, helps to reform the pre-Islamic (*Jahiliyyah*) culture and strengthen the Islamic system. By emphasizing biological and social differences such as menstruation, testimony, and inheritance, it redefines gender roles within the framework of justice and piety. The patriarchal structure, which saw men as guardians (*Qawwāmūn*), shapes the representation of women as complementary subjects. According to Fairclough's approach (Fairclough, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 215-245), such critical discourses reconstruct social order against sedition by redefining gender roles.

The ideology of Sermon 80 is a combination of Islamic justice, piety, and complementary gender roles. The description of women with "Deficiency in intellect, faith, and shares" reflects the social norms of early Islam, but explaining these deficiencies, such as a legal excuse or men's responsibilities, transforms them from discrimination to natural differences (Makarem Shirazi, 1996 AD/1375 SH: 3, 290). Referring to Qur'anic verses to explain religious rulings legitimizes the discourse within a religious framework. This ideology conflicts with the seditious discourse of the opponents (based on tribal influence) and promotes an order based on piety. Emphasizing men's responsibility challenges the patriarchal discourse and prioritizes ethics over law. This discourse reforms the pre-Islamic culture (discrimination against women) and elevates the status of women within the framework of Islamic justice.

In terms of identity elements, the identity of women is not

represented as deficient, but as a group whose status needs to be redefined, and biological differences like menstruation are mentioned to recognize women's conditions. From a cultural perspective, this sermon critiques unequal legal and social norms in a patriarchal context and, by explaining inheritance and testimony laws, aims to raise awareness for reform. Ethical recommendations, such as avoiding blind obedience, are for promoting respectful and responsible interactions between men and women. In sum, Imam Ali (AS), using the common language of his time, seeks to weaken cultural presuppositions and prepare the ground for improving the conditions of women in society, so as to gradually promote social and legal changes without directly facing cultural resistance. The discourse of Sermon 80, by representing women as complementary subjects, establishes the hegemony of the divine government in opposition to the caliphate's discourse and reforms the pre-Islamic culture with Islamic values. This discourse, while reproducing gender roles, promotes justice and accountability.

7-3. Explanation of Letter 14

Letter 14 shapes the representation of women as *Ḍaʿīfāt* ("Weak ones") within the context of multi-layered power relations. The religious and military power of Imam Ali (AS) as a leader and commander turns the discourse into a tool for legitimizing the divine government. Decisive orders like *Lā Tahījū al-Nisāʾa bi Adhan* ("Do not provoke/harm women") with verbal authority establish the hegemony of a protective discourse against *Muʿāwīyah*'s violence-

centric discourse. The tribal and political structure attributed to the Umayyads, which saw women as inferior, reinforced their representation as a vulnerable group, but the emphasis on women's human dignity moderates this structure. According to Fairclough's approach (Fairclough, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 215-245), such discourses establish moral order in war conditions by controlling the minds of the audience.

The ruling ideology in Letter 14 is based on Islamic (justice, mercy, human dignity) and supra-tribal values. The description of women as *Ḍa'īfāt* reflects tribal gender norms, but the protective orders critique these norms by emphasizing the human rights of women (even the enemy). Reference to Qur'anic verses and the Prophetic tradition (prohibition of killing women) places the discourse within the framework of Islamic equality (Makarem Shirazi, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 9, 182). This ideology conflicts with *Mu'āwīyah*'s discourse, which was indifferent to violence against non-combatants, and strengthens the moral legitimacy of the divine government in opposition to the discourse of the Umayyad caliphate.

Reference to *Bi Ḥamdillāh* ("Praise be to God") and *Bi Idhnillāh* ("By the permission of God") indicates a religious discourse that links the legitimacy of actions to the divine will. This identity element represents a society whose identity is defined based on Islamic faith and commitment to religious rulings. The reference to behaviors in *Jahiliyyah* (the pre-Islamic period) and its comparison with Islamic commands shows a cultural-identity contrast.

Jahiliyyah is introduced as a period of ignorance and violence, and in contrast, Islam is depicted as a period of ethics, self-restraint, and justice. This distinction establishes Islamic identity as a superior and civilized identity. The use of plural pronouns likes *Tuqātilūhum* and *Lakum* (for you [pl.]) indicates a collective identity that addresses the audience as a united group (the Islamic Ummah). This group-ness reinforces the sense of belonging to a religious community. The text emphasizes ethical principles in war, such as not killing fugitives, the wounded or harming non-combatants and women. These values introduce Islamic identity as one based on justice, mercy, and self-restraint. Self-restraint towards women, emphasizing not harming women even if they insult, indicates a cultural identity that sees women as a vulnerable group in need of protection.

The identity and cultural elements of this text include the collective identity of believers, Islamic ethical values (justice, mercy, and self-restraint), and the contrast between *Jahiliyyah* and Islam, and legitimization through religion. From the perspective of critical discourse analysis, the text reflects power relations (gender, religious, and military) and the effort to establish a distinct collective identity. The discourse of Letter 14 helps to change gender and tribal norms. By prohibiting harm to women, this discourse marginalizes violent pre-Islamic behaviors and elevates the status of women as subjects with human dignity. This transformation paves the way for the gradual improvement of women's rights in Islamic society.

7-4. Explanation of Letter 31

In Letter 31, the religious and paternal power of Imam Ali (AS) turns

the discourse into a tool for establishing family and social order. Imperative phrases like *Shiddat al-Ḥijāb* ("Strictness of the veil") and *Lā Tumallik al-Marʾah* ("Do not entrust a woman") reproduce gender roles. According to Fairclough's approach, such discourses establish the hegemony of the Islamic system against materialistic and anti-ethical discourses by controlling family behaviors. Religious and social institutions support this hegemony by promoting Islamic values.

The ideology of Letter 31 is based on Islamic values (piety, justice, protection) and Arabic culture (women's delicacy). The description of women as *Rayḥānah* and the emphasis on the hijab establish gender roles within the framework of Islamic ethics. Reference to Qur'anic verses legitimizes the discourse. This ideology conflicts with non-Islamic discourses that tended towards violating women's honor and strengthens the religious identity of the society. The recommendation to avoid consulting with women, although reflective of the social limitations of early Islam, helps maintain family order in its historical context.

The identity of women is defined as delicate beings in need of protection, *Rayḥānah*. The identity of men as protectors of chastity and social observers is highlighted with emphasis on concepts like *Ḥijāb* and *Ghayrat* (honor). Cultural values such as preserving dignity, limiting women's social interactions, and regulating behavior through normative language are promoted. In summary, the discourse of Letter 31, by representing women as delicate beings, establishes family order and Islamic hegemony. This discourse, while reproducing gender roles, contributes to improving their status in society by promoting respect and protection for women.

Conclusion

A critical discourse analysis of these texts with Fairclough's (2010) approach shows that the Alawite discourses, in the context of early Islam, moderate the violence-centric norms of the rival discourse against women and promote women's human dignity beyond tribal and religious boundaries. The human dignity and civil rights of women, as a group with a higher probability of vulnerability, are considered. Imam Ali (AS) redefines the collective identity of believers based on the specific functions of men and women, and the necessity of observing Islamic ethical values such as mercy and self-restraint in dealing with, supporting, and protecting women. The Imam gives religious legitimacy to the ideology of respecting women's human dignity. By representing women as sublime and respected subjects, he establishes the hegemony of the divine government through an emphasis on justice and human dignity, and by emphasizing female limitations; he rejects their abuse and oppression. From the discourse analysis of the studied cases, we find that Imam Ali challenges the ruling ideology of that era's people about women, which manifested it in hidden power relations and was accompanied by disregard for women's rights. Through reform, he promotes a religious discourse that rejects the rival's violence-centric discourse about women and paves the way for a change in the existing social order and the gradual improvement of women's rights in Islamic society. The findings and reflections of this research can be used in policymaking regarding women's rights in Islamic societies.

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