“Only you can save my life”
Saudi women and public protest on Twitter
A Critical Discourse Analysis of emergency calls for protection or protest and the users’ responses in return.

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Abstract

Since the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011, Twitter has proven to be a useful mobilization tool for citizens within the relatively closed societies of the Arab world. Twitter affirms that unheard voices can now be heard and the claims on social and political practices are being exposed to public discussion. Within this debate, women’s right’s issues have floated to the surface. In societies like Saudi Arabia, a culture of modesty and conservatism exists, and the implication of male guardianship law restricts the ways in which women can participate in the public sphere. Twitter has provided a medium for challenging this culture. Here, the contradictions inherent in restrictions on Saudi women are being renegotiated, and there is a new landscape of social activism in the kingdom. This thesis sheds some light on these issues by studying tweets created by one online protester, Rahaf Mohammed Al-Qunun, as a case study. Her use of Twitter during the whole experience of fleeing from her family stimulated many responses from the Twitter community, and some users helped to facilitate her escape. Focusing on a selection of Al-Qunun’s tweets and responses to them by Twitter users, this thesis uses quantitative Content Analyses to address the large data sets, in combination with Critical Discourse Analysis. This is complemented by the feminist scholarship and theorization on publicness and privateness for Middle Eastern women.

Key words: Critical Discourse Analysis, Saudi Women, Twitter, Private and public Sphere, Online Protest, Saudi Arabia.
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1 Introduction

“I was not treated respectfully by my family and I was not allowed to be myself and who I want to be. As you know in Saudi Arabia, this is the case for all Saudi women except for those that is fortunate enough to have understanding parents, they can’t be independent and they need approval of their male guardian for everything, any woman who thinks of escaping or escapes will be at risk of persecution.”

-Rahaf Mohammed Al-Qunun, 2019

1.1 The background Story

In the evening of Saturday, 5th January 2019, a desperate situation began to unravel on a newly created Twitter account. Fleeing her Saudi family in Kuwait, 19-year-old Rahaf Mohammed Al-Qunun sent out a series of tweets pleading for help from an airport hotel room in Bangkok. She claimed that she ran away from her family, who consistently was abusing her. At the time she had 24 followers. The fear and desperation she conveyed through the tweets drew sympathy and support from the Twitter community. Tweets carrying the #SaveRahaf hashtag gained momentum, and by mid-Sunday afternoon, it was in more than half a million tweets, according to Twitter. An unknown teenager from Saudi Arabia that no-one had ever heard of had gone from 24 followers to more than 27,000 in less than 24 hours (Chen& Lin, 2019). Her calls for help on Twitter reached Human rights organizations and also attracted the attention of The Canadian legal authorities who took action to help the girl in defending her right to live with free will.

The Twitter community began to engage more closely with Rahaf’s account after mainstream live news broadcasted about her entire story. This news coverage gave credibility to her calls for help. At a critical point during her escape, Rahaf locked herself in the airport hotel and refused all attempts made by the Thai police to capture her, under pressure by the Saudi authorities who demanded she is sent back to her family in Saudi Arabia. The tweets she sent during this experience were the only way for her to communicate with the outside world. Her calls for help were spread by Twitter users either by launching the hashtag #Saverahaf, retweeting her tweets or tagging the UNHCR Twitter accounts, asking them to find solutions to save her life. A few hours later that tweet caught the attention of Human Rights Watch, Asia deputy director, Phil Robertson, who eventually demanded through his Twitter account for quick action.

Rahaf was able to take things into her own hands by successfully mobilizing a solid online campaign to protect herself. She has utilized from the platform’s socio-technical characteristics to construct online interaction that would help to deploy her messages. After she was granted asylum in Canada, she continued with the same Twitter account to send protest calls now on behalf of other Saudi women. Now she is taking the role of an online feminist activist trying to raise awareness for Saudi women’s rights. Driven by this news story and considering the perspective of media and communication studies, the focus of this
thesis will be on tweets that have protesting features on Twitter. Such tweets are understood here as “calls” for help, recognition, action, or support.

1.2 Research Questions and Contribution to the field

In this thesis, I will work on identifying the discursive tools, emotional registers, and choice of language that were used in Rahaf Mohammed Al-Qunun’s tweets to stimulate responses from the public sphere. Then I will work on tracing the responses according to the dominant context of the calls. The messages will be analyzed using the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis as proposed by Fairclough, in combination with feminist theory specific to the context of the Middle East.

My research questions are:

1. What discourse themes emerge from the corpus of a Saudi teen’s emergency calls on Twitter?
2. What do the response tweets reveal about different perspectives on Saudi women’s rights?

The posed study presents an in-depth examination in the fields of CDA, which can have broader implications for media and communication studies. Moreover, it provides a basis for the social significance of Twitter as an (inter)discursive tool for social activism. Furthermore, the study demonstrates the extent to which the platform has helped to cover the discussion of such social phenomena in Saudi Arabia represented in multiple voices and positions.

The uniqueness of Saudi women’s situation presents a very interesting case study, derived from their presence and yet non-presence in the public sphere (Hamdan, 2005:45). Thus, I argue that as long the Saudi women continue to organize for social change, scholars should examine how their messages are constructed and interpreted in public. Besides, it is crucial to explore how women’s issues are discussed against the conservative background, where a fast-developing country like Saudi Arabia is trying to assert its place on the global map and yet maintain its Islamic and cultural values.

1.3 Overview

Dichotomous conceptions of the public and private sphere, which emerged out of colonial encounters, have combined with older repertoires to create a volatile and complex reality for Middle Eastern women today (Thompson, 2003:53). Women’s inequality in the Arab world is associated with culture in those societies, subjugating them to second-class citizens based on gender and dictates of the patriarchal establishment (Odine, 2013:167). The gender ideologies articulated in Saudi society can be attributed to traditional and socio-economic values gained legal force by being associated with Islamic teaching (Hamdan, 2005:45). Moreover, The Saudi government has historically used aspects of religion to justify the unequal treatment of women. “One of the main reasons given for why women need ‘extra’ rules of governance deals with aspects of modesty and protecting the image of women as chaste and obedient” (Chaudhry, 2014:950).

A quiet revolution is slowly empowering women to demand more rights and inclusion in social and political life. Internet use empowers people by increasing their feelings of security,
personal freedom, and influence. This effect is particularly positive for women (Castells, 2012). Women in the Arab region have taken advantage of the proliferation of media activities to serve their many causes. “Blogs are part of media strategy adopted by women to portray their abilities and narrow the inequality heaped on them” (Odine, 2013:177). As pointed out by (Guta & Karolak, 2015), approximately half of Saudi blogs are written by women aged between 18 and 30 years old. Given the shield of anonymity, Saudi women have also found social media a perfect place to express themselves, which would have been disallowed in the public spheres (116).

Overall, the emergence of the social media has enabled increasing numbers of women to share their stories and analysis, raise awareness and organize collective actions, and discuss difficult issues across cultural, geographical, and generational lines (Martin & Valenti, 2012:6). This has also enabled a new wave of feminists to communicate with a wider audience and draw attention to women’s causes, as well as engage in and influence the public sphere (Alsahi, 2018:298). For Saudi women’s issues, in particular, some researchers have argued that without the existence of Twitter, the small but notable improvements to women’s inclusion in Saudi society may not have emerged (Chaudhry, 2014:957). The online world has become an area of choice for Saudi women to experience a nonrestrictive lifestyle.

The starting point for Twitter’s potentials to host online protest activities followed the Arab Uprisings of 2011. Some media critics even went so far as to describe Arab Spring events as the “‘Twitter Revolutions’ or ‘Facebook Revolutions’ because of the role that social media played in ‘the coordination of mass protests, communication of real-time images and up-to-date information, or processes of contagion across the Arab region’” (Al-Jenaibi, 2016: 65). Also, since the beginning of the Arab Spring, waves of democratizing movements in the Arab World have brought Muslim women to the focus of Western news media again (Dastgeer & Gade, 2016:433). In light of that, a growing number of Saudi women have reclaimed the use of social networking platforms such as Twitter for disseminating their gender-focused claims and demanding social reforms via dedicated hashtags over Twitter and media outreach campaigns (Alsahi, 2018:299).

Many Twitter protest activities preceded the incident of Rahaf Mohammed on Twitter for the sake of women’s rights issues. In particular the male guardianship law, which refers to “a set of social and legal restrictions that legally binds every Saudi woman, regardless of her age, to the authority of a male relative — normally a father or husband — who is effectively her legal guardian” (Alsahi, 2018:303). For instance, in 2011, Twitter hashtag #women2drive gained significant momentum within Saudi Arabia within the context of male guardianship, where women were banned from driving (Choudary, 2014: 953, Guta & Karolak, 2015:117). In 2012, #SaudiWomenRevolution (Al-Jenaibi, 2016: 67). In 2016, #TogetherToEndMaleGuardianship, #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen, #IAMMyOwnGuardian. In 2017 the account @FreeKsaWomen (Alsahi, 2018:303,304). In sum, the cyber protests signify a window of change in Saudi society thanks to the different tools provided by new media (Khondker, 2011: 678).
2 Literature Review

Previous researches have discussed the use of social media by Saudi women in order to advance their personal and political causes, and explored the role of Twitter in delivering these causes to the broader public. Many analytical methods have been employed to understand the implications of social media communications, on both societal changes and governmental policies. Several types of research highlighted the pervasiveness of Twitter in the Saudi digital sphere (Al-Rawi, 2014), its impact on public discourse and questioned whether it could affect the current regimes in the Arabian Gulf (Al-Jenaibi, 2016). Others have discussed the possibility for the platform to enable and sustain the feminist movement activities and if Twitter promotes any social progress (Chaudhry, 2014). Moreover, one of the articles has studied the use of social media by Saudi women for negotiating and expressing their identity (Guta & Karolak, 2015).

This thesis draws on such interdisciplinary scholarship to gain insight into the ways Saudi women have utilized social media platforms and navigated their affordances; specifically for debating their gendered issues in public. The following discussion examines the way users position themselves within the discourses they invoke in these debates. Through an examination of relevant scholarship, I will explore how Twitter has become implicated as a political tool in Saudi Arabia, and the ways Saudi women are participating in new public spheres by way of social media platforms.

2.1 Social media & Twitter in the Arab Region

Radical use of social media during the Arab spring in 2011 has been widely discussed in media scholarship. Social media had a pivotal role in the uprisings “but were not a consequence of, social media” (Rane & Salem 2012:109). The social media facilitated quick communication and the transfer of information. Moreover, it raised the awareness of the ongoing events to the local and global audience. Rane and Salem (2012) state that the protesters used the platforms to organize the demonstrations, “Social media also enabled protesters to function as citizen journalists by disseminating information about the protests and the responses of police and security forces and transmitting news, photos, and videos to mainstream media for wider dissemination” (ibid.,103).

In her article, “The Twitter Revolution in the Gulf Countries,” Badreya Al-Jenaibi discusses the impact social media has on public discourse in Arab nations and how it affects regimes in the Arabian Gulf. She highlights the fact that “although there were no staged protests in these very conservative contexts, social media has been revolutionary in society” (2016, 62). She further states that even though Saudi Arabia now has the largest growing Twitter community of all the nations in the Arabian Gulf (ibid., 65), the new censorship roles in the country can restrict the use of the platform, “People should not make the mistake that the new communication freedoms are without costs. People who blog or post on Twitter are still taking risks if they go too far in their social criticism” (ibid., 66).

Al-Jenaibi credits social media role in the Gulf countries, asserting that “the social media, specially Twitter, became a main media role that delivers the public needs and discourses in the Arab countries. It breaks the limited public freedom in the Arab world” (ibid., 70). Her empirical data present that the social media in Saudi Arabia has allowed certain issues to be highlighted that would have never been discussed in traditional mainstream media. She
Ahmed Al-Rawi (2014) argues that the events of the Arab Spring led to several reforms in the Arab world and facilitated the creation of feminist movements which create a collective secular identity for the members of these movements (1147). In his study, he investigates three online feminist movements which published on Facebook and Twitter that are focused on Women’s freedom and supporting gender equality in the Arab world. All three movements are representative of how online social activism can attract wide public attention, gather support, and possibly lead to “offline” protests. Al-Rawi usefully frames this digital space of interaction as a “networked public sphere” that allows activists and others involved or opposed to these feminist movements to meet and interact (ibid., 1153). The results of his study also show that these movements sometimes face fierce resistance from Islamists who believe that their religion is under attack.

### 2.2 Saudi women on Twitter

Among those who are most vocal in sharing their experiences and networking their desires online are Saudi women, “who, for the first time in the history of the country, have a vehicle to voice their opinion on various issues” (Chaudhry, 2014:950). She also argues that some of the social advances for women are an indirect result of a number of online protests that emerged on Twitter, “placing local and global pressure on the Saudi Arabian government to reevaluate the treatment of women” (952). Chaudhry demonstrates an example of Twitter protest campaign #Women2Drive; granting women the right to drive was at the centre of the protest campaign and the trending topic. She further states that this campaign was symbolic of the general problems faced by Saudi women, such as the implication of the male guardianship law. This online campaign generated both local and global interest in the status of women in Saudi Arabia (ibid.).

Huda Alsahi argues that “Twitter provides alternative structures to absorb women’s mobilization efforts and claims that circulate through it” (2018:304). In the same article, she talks about the Twitter campaign that was launched in July 2016, which demanded the end of the persistent male guardianship system. Alsahi also maintains that Twitter could play a
critical role in the emergence and maintenance of women’s movements, including those that are in a state of abeyance;

“Twitter-based ad-hoc abeyance networks could be used to mimic certain bureaucratic organizing functions, while serving as the connective tissue, binding multiple social actors who may or may not know each other in person […] nevertheless, they agree to circulate content and adopt discourses related to the issue at stake” (ibid., 316).

Guta and Karolak (2015) have investigated how Saudi women employed social media to negotiate and express their identities and granting their voice and agency. They argue,

The internet creates a space where women have equal access, and they are able to contribute to the public sphere in ways that are not possible outside of the virtual world where they are always regarded as women, beings subordinate to men […] new technologies and new media brought new realities to women lives, especially in patriarchal societies (117).

Guta and Karolak’s study reveals that the freedom this platform gives to women can also be limited, “as this custom, which is applicable to virtually every aspect of public life, is also valid online” (ibid., 120). They further state that Saudi women utilize from the autonomy the platform gives to its users, the absence of gatekeepers/administrators and with Twitter protection of individual privacy, to negotiate the boundaries imposed on them by cultural and societal rules. Guta and Karolak state that Saudi women are able to make their choices and employ “tactics” to express themselves and negotiate their identity such as: using nicknames, concealing their personal images, using first names only and using multiple accounts is also popular among participants in order not to be identified by their family names (ibid., 115-120).

Although scholarship discussing the spread of the new media technology insists that it has created a new public sphere for women’s deliberation, Philip Tschirhart (2014) further argues that it also provided insight into the emergence of what he terms “Saudi-Islamic feminism.” He introduces three vastly different forms of emerging Islamic feminist scholarship in the region: (a) secular feminists “contend that religion has no place in public life. Their struggle is mainly defined in political terms and the access to basic freedoms is a must” (4). (b) Islamist feminists “seek to redefine religious texts claim that feminism and Islam are redundant concepts within the 'true' Islamic paradigm. They believe that authentic interpretations of the Qur'an justify the fair treatment of women in society” (ibid.). (c) The Islamic feminists “are located between the leftist secular feminists and the conservative Islamists” (ibid.). Tschirhart highlights the fact that unlike feminist movements elsewhere, Saudi-Islamic feminism calls are not revolutionary, but are instead rooted in discourses of religious righteousness (ibid., 7).

Scholars claim that social media platforms can alter national and international political structures. They have long debated the effectiveness of the platforms to rise, transform, influence, and shape activism and movements across the Arab societies. Twitter, in particular, has allowed direct engagement of women in the Saudi public sphere. They have the tool to
advocate gender-equality and broader human rights. Accordingly, Twitter enables Saudi women to rework feminist discourses according to their own cultural and religious principles.

3 Theoretical Frame Work

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

This thesis will be studying emergency protest messages sent by a Saudi young woman on Twitter, and a selection of responses to them by other users of the platform. It, therefore, draws on Critical Discourse Analysis as both a theoretical framework and a method. This area of applied linguistics, which has variously been taken to be a paradigm, a method, and an analytical technique, was originally known as Critical Language Studies (Billig, 2003). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is “a problem-oriented interdisciplinary research program, subsuming a variety of approaches, each with different theoretical models, research methods and agendas” (Wodak, 2011: 38). CDA has become one of the most influential and visible branches of discourse analysis since its emergence in the 1980s (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). It is considered a social approach to analysis, as it is used exclusively to uncover patterns and messages in the discourse, which can thus lead to influencing human behavior (Pafford & Matusitz, 2017: 276). CDA became an important form of communicative analysis after the 1989 publishing of Norman Fairclough's *Language and Power*. Because of that, I derive my understanding of CDA mostly from the work of Fairclough, In particular, I take up and adapt his definition of Critical Discourse Analysis as “systematic transdisciplinary analysis of relations between discourse and other elements of the social process” (Fairclough, 2013: 10).

CDA has its origins in textual and linguistic analysis, and it necessitates a close and detailed analysis of texts. Fairclough defined the written form of the language “texts” as social spaces in which two fundamental social processes simultaneously occur: cognition and representation of the world, and social interaction (1995:6). Moreover, he also states that “Language use – in any text – is always simultaneously constitutive of (1) social identities (2) social relations and (3) systems of knowledge and belief” (1995b:55). This means that “any interpretation of discourse should be based on the text’s lexical and grammatical choices, which are placed and considered in the pragmatic context of the text. CDA aims to reveal the social, societal, political and economic assumptions in discourses and texts” (Vaara, Sorsa, & Pälli, 2010:688). CDA takes an interest in the ways in which linguistic forms are used in various expressions and manipulations of power. Wodak & Meyer (2001) argues that “Power is signalled not only by grammatical forms within a text, but also by a person's control of a social occasion by means of the genre of a text” (11).

Furthermore, CDA offers interpretations of the meaning of texts rather than just quantifying textual features and deriving meaning from this. It, therefore, situates what is said or written in the context in which it occurs, and argues that textual meaning is constructed through an interaction between producer, text, and consumer rather than simply being “read off” the page by all readers in precisely the same way (Richardson, 2007:15). Additionally, CDA explicates how linguistic features of texts, political and media, on a micro-level propagate a certain worldview as common sense on a macro-level (van Dijk, 1998); or using Fairclough words, “the critical approach has its theoretical underpinnings in views of the relationship
between ‘micro’ events and ‘macro’ structures which see the latter as both the conditions for and products of the former, and which therefore reject rigid barriers between the study of the ‘micro’ and the study of the ‘macro’” (2010: 31).

CDA consists of the terms “‘discourse’” and “‘critical.’” I will start by introducing what the concept of “‘discourse’” means. From Widdowson’s perspective, texts can be written or spoken and must be described in linguistic terms and terms of their intended meaning. Discourse, as text in context, is defined by its effect. He argues that discourse “is the pragmatic process of meaning negotiation, and text, its product” (2004: 8). Fairclough defines discourse as “‘semiotic ways of constructing aspects of the world (physical, social or mental) which can generally be identified with different positions or perspectives of different group of social actors’” (2010: 232). He further states that,

Discourse is commonly used in various senses including (a) meaning-making as an element of the social process, (b) the language associated with a particular social field or practice (e.g., ‘political discourse’), and (c) a way of construing aspects of the world associated with a particular social perspective (e.g., ‘neo-liberal discourse of globalization’) (ibid., 230).

3.1.1 The notions of critical, ideology and power

In what sense is CDA critical? CDA is naturally rooted within Critical Theory, a paradigm developed in the last three decades, “whose critical impetus originates in the Frankfurt School, especially Habermas” (Tenorio, 2011:187). Scholars who situate themselves within the CDA traditions often separate their work from other forms of “non-critical” discourses analyses by arguing that “‘their analyses move beyond description and interpretation of the role of language in the social world, toward explaining why and how language does the work that it does’” (Rogers et al., 2005:369). Tenorio (2011) also states that the scope of CDA is not only language-based. Affirming that its “‘critical perspective’” attracts scholars and activists whose concern lies with “‘unveiling patterned mechanisms of the reproduction of power asymmetries’” (187). From the same regard, Fairclough asserts,

It is moreover a “‘critical’” approach to discourse analysis in the sense that it sets out to make visible through analysis, and to criticize, connections between properties of texts and social processes and relations (ideologies, power relations) which generally not obvious to people who produce and interpret those texts, and whose effectiveness depends upon this opacity (2010, 131).

As noted, the relation between language, ideology, and power is quite significant. For CDA, “‘language is not powerful on its own, but it gains power by the use powerful people make of it’” (Wodak & Meyer, 2001:10). This explains why critical linguistics often choose the perspective of those who suffer, and critically analyze the language use of those in power, who are responsible for the existence of inequalities and who also have the means to improve conditions (ibid.). This also corresponds with what Fairclough states,

Critical social research aims contribute to addressing the social “‘wrong’” of the day (in a broad sense - injustice, inequality, lack of freedom, etc.) by analyzing
their sources and causes, resistance to them and possibilities of overcoming them” (2010: 231).

In the case of this thesis and its research questions, the analysis of power relationships and the interconnectedness between language, culture, and religion present in discourse play an important role. The language use provides pieces of evidence to show identity, power, and social status. Accordingly, Wodak & Meyer (2001) provide their elaborations on the concept of power and language. They argue,

Power is about relations of differences, and particularly about the effects of differences in social structures. The constant unity of language and other social matters ensures that language is entwined in social power in a number of ways: language indexes power, expresses power, is involved where there is contention over and a challenge to power. Power does not derive from language, but language can be used to challenge power, to subvert it, to alter distributions of power in the short and long term (11)

Against this backdrop, ideology can also appear as closely related to power since power relations determine the nature of ideological assumptions. According to Burr (1995), the social practice is reflecting the attitudes and value systems of people and employed by them to promote a certain version of reality or ideology (2). Furthermore, ideology is also a “discursive or semiotic phenomenon” (Eagleton, 1991: 194); so discourses do ideological work (Fairclough et al., 2011). Fairclough (2010) argued that ideology continues to be a significant theme and category for CDA, “it is significant element of processes through which relations of power are established, maintained, enacted and transformed” (26). As well as, for CDA ideology is seen as “an important aspect of establishing and maintaining unequal power relations. Critical linguistics takes a particular interest in the ways in which language mediates ideology in a variety of social institutions” (Wodak & Meyer, 2001:10).

3.1.2 CDA in new media & Public Sphere

The thesis presents that Saudi women have harnessed the true potential of social media platforms to enhance their role in society and participate in the public debate. The platforms enable them to contribute to the public sphere (Guta & Karolak, 2015; Alsahi, 2018; Chaudhry, 2014). The concept of the public sphere remains a central analytical tool in modern society as it helps us to make sense of the relationship between the media and democracy (Iosifidis, 2011: 620). The functioning of the public sphere is understood as “a constellation of communicative spaces in society that permit the circulation of information, ideas, […] and also the formation of political will (i.e., public opinion)” (Dahlgren, 2005: 148). Fairclough definition of the public sphere is quoted here at length:

Public sphere is defined by on the one hand being based in a shared world, “a world in common,” and on the other hand by the emergence of “spaces of appearance” understood as both shared spaces and shared practices “whenever men are together in the manner of speech and action” (2010:397).
The importance of the public sphere relies on the fact that it centers on the idea of participatory democracy. Accordingly, Fairclough argues that “the reconstruction of democracy as hinging upon the reconstruction of the public sphere.” From this regard, he asserts that the question of the public sphere is located at the center for critical social researches on politics (2010:394). Fairclough further states,

What CDA can contribute to these researches, is linguistically and semiotically sophisticated but still socially framed understanding of the properties of practices of public dialogue. This can help in evaluating existing practices and discerning potential alternatives from the perspective of the public sphere (ibid.).

3.1.3 Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

Michelle M. Lazar (2007) combined Feminist Linguistics with CDA to form Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA). It introduces a nuanced analysis of the discourses that uphold a patriarchal social order that privileges men and disempowers women as social groups. As we have noted that the intention of CDA that it aims to “unravel different facets of power, social order, and its effects through text” (Caldas-Coulthard & Coulthard, 1995:15). Thus, the aim of feminist critical discourse studies, as Lazar states, is

...to show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities (ibid.,142).

In light of the research topic, this thesis has been viewed with the lens of CDA and feminist theory. Accordingly, introducing the feminist critical discourse analysis will be relevant as it will also be taken into consideration throughout the process of data analyzing. The discursive practices appear in the responses to the tweets reveal more about the binary power relations (males/females, public/private). From this regard, the task then of feminist CDA is to:

...Examine how power and dominance are discursively produced and/or (counter-) resisted in a variety of ways through textual representations of gendered social practices, and through interactional strategies of talk. Also of concern are issues of access to forms of discourse, such as particular communicative events and culturally valued genres [...] that can be empowering for women’s participation in public domains (Lazar, 2007:149).

3.1.4 CDA Analytical framework

According to the model of CDA proposed by Fairclough, processes of analysis are tied to three interrelated dimensions of discourse: integrating analysis of a text, analysis of processes of text production, consumption, and distribution, and sociocultural analysis of the discursive event (1995:23). Each of these dimensions requires a different kind of analysis, “text analysis (description); processing analysis (interpretation); social analysis (explanation)” (Fairclough As cited, Janks, 1997:329). The first textual level implies a close analysis of linguistic structures. While the interpretation in the second level brings the community and its behavior into play; “analysis of discourse in this respect is an analysis of what people do with texts.” Furthermore, the social analysis in the third level focuses on the broader context,
“how texts and discourses are used in situational and institutional contexts that they both index and construct” (Vaara et al., 2010:688).

Figure 1. Dimensions of discourse analysis. (Fairclough 2010:133)

The theoretical insights gained from the preceding sections provide the opportunity to examine the texts of tweets through the lens of CDA. In a patriarchal society like the Saudi one, the analysis of gender and power relation requires the category of ideology as it is the relation between thoughts and believes with the social reality. Then “the analysis of ideology requires analysis of discourse” (Fairclough, 2010:26). Considering the three-dimensional framework that Fairclough introduced, the first step to CDA is the production of the text found on the tweets. I will start by zooming in to the text level and examine the linguistic choices that are made do describe the person or the action in both the calls and the responses.

At the level of discursive practices, I will analyze the nature of these calls and the perception and social expectation attached to them which were exemplified in the responses. Given the historical background, cultural and social context of Saudi women, tweets reveal more than just a message being sent to a social network it can reflect ideology, dominance, social power abuse presented in the texts and found on the tweets. Accordingly, what makes CDA suitable for this study is that “it foregrounds links between social practice and language and the systematic investigation of the connection between the nature of social processes and the properties of language texts” (Fairclough, 2010:131).

3.2 Conceptual framework of public and private spheres

Different claims concerning the relationship between public and private realms are central to feminist theory as a whole. This debate has intensely preoccupied the women’s movement and feminist research (Wischermann & Mueller, 2004: 184). In the popular imagination the concept of the private is marked by “particularity” as it is associated with the home, the family, the indoor, being thought of as a space that is personal, exclusive, selective and not open to all. In contrast to this, the public characterized by “universal norms”, as it is linked to the outdoor, and in particular to the state, conceived of as a collective body of citizens (Mahajan, 2009:134). Furthermore, the public domain has been taken to include the
“political” while the private domain which is associated with the “personal”; “This omission has motivated feminists to highlight and challenge the assumed divide between the public and the private” (Pepper, 2014:57).

Within the framework of this distinction, women were placed in the realm of the private, while men as citizens were seen as members of the public sphere (Mahajan, 2009:138). These are defined as political–apolitical, public-private, and male-female. Such dichotomies construct the abstract public citizen as male in the sense that he performs traditionally masculine roles and has male characteristics. He is universal, rational, and is concerned with the public interest. In contrast, the female, non-citizen’s concerns are private and domestic and she is emotional, irrational, and weak (Lister, 1997).

From this regard, the contradiction between the two spheres has served to entrench the patriarchal system. Moreover, the separation of the public and private promotes a set of dichotomies which disadvantage women. As they are assigned to the private sphere, their lives and work are, to a large degree, made invisible, while their experiences, interests, forms of organization, and action are excluded as not worthy of politics (Wischermann & Mueller 2004:185); The political process is biased towards the public sphere whilst largely ignoring the private realm (Harmer, 2016:853). From this regard, Pepper (2014) states that “assuming the public/private divide, and taking the family to be a purely private institution, has the consequence of shielding familial relationships, including those characterized by violence and domination” (Pepper, 2014:57).

In her essay on public and private in Middle Eastern women’s history, Elisabeth Thompson presents several interpretations from feminist scholars about the dichotomous conceptions of public and private in the local historical context. One of the interesting interpretations, the scholar uses the term “segregation” instead of “seclusion” to emphasize the nature of the male-female divide as a spatial separation rather than a dichotomy of public/private sphere (2003:54). Other scholar states that the prominent religious scholars sought to ward off social anarchy by urging Muslims to maintain a “clear division between the public domain of men and private domain of women” since women were perceived as a sexual threat to male authority and social order (ibid., 55). Thompson concludes that the scholarship reviewed in her essay clearly demonstrated how public and private gender boundaries in today’s Middle East are as much products of transnational discourses, politics, and economies as they are of internal crises in state formation or class identity (ibid., 65).

Other researchers argue that the concept of the private and public sphere is one of the dissimilarities between the Western and Arab feminism. Treacher and Shukrallah (2005) have sought to open out a space for reflection on feminist thinking and Arab women. In their article, they present some aspects of Arab women’s lives that are related to the variation of the concept. They state that there is a difference in Arab feminists’ preoccupations on the politic concern while in analyzing and engaging with the public slides into personal matters “for example, democratic elections, or the necessary conditions for health and welfare” (ibid.,154).

Among the examples presented in the article, Treacher and Shukrallah (2005) argue that the notion of “family” to Arab feminists and women is considered to be necessary. Their participation in the public sphere should not contradict with that notion in a way that their activities should not interfere with their family duties,
“the Arab feminists and women are struggling to forge a space outside of the private sphere have to reinforce the importance of the family continually. Arab society demands affirmation that the traditional role for women as wives and mothers will not be jettisoned. Women negotiate this injunction by asserting their roles as wives and mothers to legitimize their claims” (ibid. 154).

Furthermore, Treacher and Shukrallah argue that from this perspective, the Arab women relationships to family and masculinity cannot be challenged explicitly nor conflict with them, "To challenge publicly such essential notions is to disturb the social order" (ibid., 155).

The inclusion of women into the formal public sphere, as politicians and voters, has also meant that the boundaries between the public and the private, and the political and the personal, have become blurred (Harmer, 2016:853). Among other reason that allowed the topics from the private to appear on the public is the Internet. Over the last decade a number of media researchers have pointed to the possibility that the Internet's decentralized communications can enhance the public sphere (Dahlberg, 2001:1). The Internet does not only play an important role in bringing private topics into the public sphere, but it also leads to new communicative settings in which private individuals can make their voices heard much faster and with less editorial control than in print and electronic media (Landert & Jucker, 2010:1423), especially in light of the absence of an open media and civil society (Khondker, 2011:675). Moreover, Petros Iosifidis (2011) argues that this new technology has allowed the formation of a transnational or global public sphere, "the space for public discourse and the formation of public opinion increasingly take place at a transnational context that crosses national boundaries" (623).

As discussed earlier in this article, Saudi women utilize social media as a medium to participate in the public sphere, particularly in the instances where their physical involvement can be restricted due to the religious element of segregation and power limitation to the males in a so-called public arena; "In the Saudi kingdom, a limited women’s presence indicates the nation’s obedience to Islamic law" (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Social media platforms became avenues for Saudi women to gain public visibility and to network amongst themselves (Jarbou, 2018:323). For them, the unequal status is no longer an option. "they have, therefore, turned to the media to address socio-economic, cultural and political inequality" (Odine, 2013:168). Accordingly, this thesis provides an example of the Saudi women participation in the public sphere (with all the restrictions and limitation) through the social media platform, Twitter.

4 Methodology

This thesis will analyze tweets written and broadcast by the Saudi teen, Rahaf Mohammad, who used Twitter as an emergency protest tool to reach the public audience. These tweets and the message of the response sent to them, represent my core data set. The data is approached by conducting Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) coupled with quantitative Content Analysis, “methods triangulation,” to increase the relevance and validity of research findings (Layder, 2013).
Critical Discourse Analysis is carried out by following Fairclough’s framework that describes the method as “systematic transdisciplinary analysis of relations between discourse and other elements of the social process” (Fairclough, 2013: 10). Discourse is underlined by how particular cultures and people define meaning for their social existence. Understanding discourse is “a culture-specific exercise that attempts to unlayer the hierarchies of power that are invariably represented in how meaning is constructed” (Nagar, 2016:259). From this regard, the data has been analyzed pragmatically; the interpretation of the tweets is determined by their context: time, place and manner. Practically speaking, analyzing the linguistic pattern in Rahaf’s tweet will depend on her social situation while sending the tweets. At the beginning of the incident, the calls were for seeking protection for a life-threatening situation. Then later on, after she was granted the asylum in Canada, the calls were to seek social progress for the issues of Saudi women.

Content Analysis is one of the most important research techniques in social science. It acknowledges that society is enacted in the talk, texts and other modalities of communication and that understanding social phenomena cannot be achieved without understanding how language operates in the social world (Krippendorff, 2018: xii). Interpreting communication as texts in the contexts of their social uses distinguishes content analysis from other empirical methods of inquiry (ibid.). Accordingly, the method serves this thesis as it “uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text” (Weber, 1990). Hence, it can incorporate into this research design in conjunction with Critical Discourse Analysis that has the interest to offer interpretations of the meaning of texts. From this regard, combining the two methods helps to explore the influences on content, as well as to discover the content effects (Riff et al., 2013:33).

Content Analysis is an established social science methodology concerned broadly with “the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the content of communication” (Baran, 2002:410). From this regard, Riff, Lacy & Fico, define Content Analysis as “the systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those categories using statistical methods” (2013:3). Furthermore, it has been argued that approaching Content Analysis generates observations that are valid, rigorous, reliable, and replicable (Wright, 1986:125).

The method has the attractive features of being unobtrusive and being useful in dealing with large volumes of data. Considering the amount of material available on Twitter and would be used in this thesis, Content Analysis can provide an effective way to describe and summarize the content, since it remains an essential means of categorizing all forms of content (Riff et al., 2013:7). The goal of any quantitative analysis is to produce counts of key categories with a numerical process; a quantitative Content Analysis has as its goal a numerically based summary of a chosen message set (Neuendorf, 2017: 21). As well as, compressing many words of text, which have similar meaning or connotations, into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding (Stemler, 2001:8). Furthermore, the method involves a set of procedures that can be summarized in five steps drawing on Klaus Krippendorff book on Content Analysis (1980), which are followed in this thesis and can be seen in the following sections:

1) The researcher formulates a research question and/or hypotheses.
2) The researcher selects a sample.
3) Categories are defined for coding.
4) Coders are trained, code the content, and the reliability of their coding is checked.
5) The data collected during the coding process are analyzed and interpreted.

### 4.1 Data Collection

For the type of data at hand, the unit of analysis most suitable for classification is the tweet, as it is directly related to the initial choice of topic and problem focus (Layder, 2013). Twitter allows users to engage in the exchange of 140-character messages known as tweets. The tweet can include images, videos, and texts, exchanging messages on Twitter includes the use of actions known as mentions, hashtags, and retweets. Users can also share the messages of other users in their account through an action known as a retweet. Users may also choose to follow users whose tweets will be delivered directly to their timeline. Providing Twitter characteristics in this stage is essential to understand the process of choosing the sample needed for this thesis.

The sample period starts from the 5th of January 2019 and ends on 11th of April 2019; this period covers all the aspects of the Saudi teen story from the first call for help until she was settled in Canada. The corpus of data consists of, randomly selected, 24 tweets of Rahaf Mohammad’s Twitter account, and the last 20 consecutive replies from each Tweet. After excluding retweets, tweets which have no texts (only images or emoji’s) and repeated tweets. All that is considered as a sample for analyzing; ‘‘researchers use representative subsets or samples of the population rather than examining all the members’’ (Riff, Lacy & Fico, 2013:46). The data is collected using the screenshots capture feature; I have extracted 504 texts from the Twitter account, which I compiled into an Excel document, each Excel sheet is organized accordingly to extract the needed data.

### 4.2 Preparing the data

#### 4.2.1 Main Tweets:

The sample of data collected in this thesis covers the period between the 5th of January 2019 till the 11th of April 2019. The total number of the sampled tweets is 24 texts. The collected data covers the incident from day one from the story until she reached Canada and has granted the asylum and continued publishing in the account. All data extracted is registered in excel sheet that includes: (a) a column for the tweet (b) a column for the tweet number (c) a column for the datum and time (d) a column for linguistic terms and (e) a column for the tweet theme. In this thesis, the main tweets are identified by using the term “calls.” Furthermore, in the data analysis section, the tweets are referred to by giving sequence numbers based on their appearance on the appendix.

#### 4.2.2 Tweet Replies:

The sampled 480 replies selected for analysis are only the texts written either in Arabic or English. I have excluded the replies written in other languages, replies with only images, any repeated text from the same user, the replies with only emoji’s, and the replies with only tagging. The replies texts have been extracted manually then compiled into an Excel document. Columns on the Excel sheet include: (a) a column for the main tweet, (b) a column for reply, (c) a column for reply number, (d) a column for the user name and ID; (e) a column for the datum and time (f) a column for the user’s gender (g) a column for user’s stance (h) a
column for linguistic pattern. For column (f) the gender of the users is identified according to the user’s name. In doing this, I checked how the Twitter users presented themselves in their accounts by looking at the names or ID, and bio. The accounts whose gender could not be identified are labeled as unknown. For column (g) the user’s stance is identified in responding to the main tweet by opposing it, supporting it, or neutral (unbiased). In this thesis, the tweet replies are identified by using the term “responses.” Furthermore, the users’ names are not mentioned in this thesis; they are referred to by numbers based on their appearance on the appendix.

5 Ethical considerations

All the data introduced in this thesis is approached objectively, trying to present the facts as they are without any personal intervention from the researcher or sympathy with any party. According to Collins (2010), “the researcher feelings and personal view of the world should not enter into the research” (42). Moreover, describing the methodology and the process of the analytical framework confirms the validity of the findings. The familiarity of the political and ideological discourse in the Arab region initiated from my ethnic and cultural background, which is along with being a native Arabic language speaker, have allowed tracing and understanding the detailed, in-depth textual analysis. Additionally, all these have simplified selecting the appropriate conceptual framework that corresponds with the Middle Eastern context approached in the thesis. From this regard, this proficient involvement with the research gives me the role of expert that Bliakie (2009) describes as the researcher who approaches the problem armed with the relevant related knowledge from previous research findings; add to that being familiar with the proposed causes. All these social scientific concepts and ideas influence the way the research problem and research questions are formulated, and the ways in which answers are sought (11).

Dealing and collecting data from a social media platform like Twitter present several ethical pointers. The platform has blurred the lines between personal and copyrighted content with the presence of social interactions that are going on, and content is being disseminated. According to Layder, all social research requires adherence to ethical principles that govern the conduct of researchers. He further states that those principles are instrumental in safeguarding the rights and well-being of research subjects (2013). Furthermore, in order for the research to result in a benefit, it must be conducted with the ethical practice that is often defined as “doing no harm” (Somekh & Lewin, 2004:56).

The sample of tweets collected for this research is captured from Rahaf Mohammad Twitter account, which is a public account (all published contents are accessible to the public). According to Twitter privacy policy (2018), Twitter is public, and Tweets are immediately viewable and searchable by anyone around the world. The policy also states,

Most activity on Twitter is public, including your profile information, your timezone and language, when you created your account, and your Tweets and certain information about your Tweets like the date, time [...] The lists you create, people you follow and who follow you, and Tweets you Like or Retweet are also public.

Therefore, based on these discussions and because of the public nature of Twitter, no informed consent is required.
Alongside with the tweets produced by Rahaf Mohammad, my random data sample includes the texts published by public users replying to original tweets. They are indicated in this paper by numbers, as I prefer to make participants anonymous for the protection of their identity. The principle “doing no harm” is applied in this paper by acting and writing in a way that does not expose users for criticism, prosecution or mockery —Taking into consideration that the interpretations of what constitutes harm vary among the researchers and contexts.

6 Data Analysis

As stated earlier in this thesis, Fairclough (1995) argues that discourses should be simultaneously analyzed at three levels: textual (micro-level textual elements), discursive practices (the production and interpretation of texts) and social practice (the situational and institutional context) (23). Accordingly, all the collected data in the thesis is investigated at the level of textual analysis and discursive practice. Likewise, what is useful about CDA is that it enables the analyst to focus on the signifiers that make up the text, the specific linguistic selections, their juxtapositioning, their sequencing, and their layout (Janks, 1997:329). From this regard, the tweets and the replies are explored using three elements: (a) Stance taking, (b) Referential & Nominalization Strategies, (c) Predicational strategies.

Linguistically, digital media users use a variety of approaches to engage with readers/followers and to mobilize them to act. Accordingly, the proposed elements will help in detecting those approaches. Both Referential & Nominalization, and Predicational strategies will help to reveal the different perspectives found in the responses to the Saudi teen’s calls. The stance taking tool will assist in identifying the themes that emerged in those calls. To sum up, a grand analysis of all significant findings collected can help to focus on the role that discourses play, both locally and globally, in society (Fairclough et al., 2011).

Stance-Taking:

It is a linguistic tool used to convey emotion, reinforce validity, or evaluate knowledge, categorized respectively as effective, evaluative/judgment, and epistemic (Strauss & Feiz, 2014). The use of language in any single tweet leads to dialogic interaction between the participants. Any tweet creates a dialogue to present temporary stance, and the change of the stance leads to change in the reader’s perception and reaction. A stance, as defined by DuBois (2007) is “a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects, and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimensions of the sociocultural field” (220). Exploring the use of stance in the main tweet can provide a perspective on how the language is used to create emotional responses from users and assert the validity of claims.

Referential &Nominalization:

The referential strategy provides a basis for understanding the relationship between readers with other social actors who are referred to in the texts. Fairclough (2003) argues that the way that people named can have a significant impact on the way in which they are viewed. Referential strategies as part of discursive strategies identify “features or characteristics selected and foregrounded to represent the group and frequently involves negative
evaluation” (Blackledgeled, 2009). Practically speaking, this strategy enables me to know what lexical choices are used by users to refer to Rahaf, either as an individual, collectivized, as a generic type, objectivized, anonymized, or described by using new lexical terms.

**Predicational strategy:**

This strategy is an aspect of linguistics analysis, and it is used to know what traits, characteristics, qualities, and features are attributed to the social actor. Predicational strategy concerns with how a discourse producer uses “predications” to construct a positive-self or negative other-representation. This may be realized as stereotypical, evaluative attributions of negative and positive traits in the linguistic form of implicit or explicit predicates (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001: 45). Mainly, Predicational strategy realized by a specific form of reference, by attributes, by predicates or predicative nouns/ adjectives/pronouns, similes, metaphors and other rhetorical figures, by collocations, by explicit comparisons, by allusion, evocation, and presupposition/implication (ibid., 54).

6.1 The calls

The Twitter account for Rahaf Mohammad is still active until the date of preparing the thesis. Rahaf continues publishing in the account even after she was granted the asylum in Canada. From this regard, the current motivations for publishing in the account differ from the beginning of the incident when the calls were for the need for protection. Accordingly, I have decided to divide the 24 sampled tweets into two categories: the first category includes the tweets she posted before the asylum. The second category includes tweets after the asylum in Canada. Each of these categories includes 12 tweets. Dividing the tweets into two categories will help me to find the similarities in the texts, the lexical terms used in each category, and the stance applied in the tweets. With the help of the stance-taking tool, I identify the themes that have emerged from these calls. Later on in the thesis, I present how users are interacting with each theme.

6.1.1 Pre Asylum Calls,

This category includes 12 tweets that the Saudi teen posted before she was granted asylum. These texts cover the period between the 5th of January 2019 until the 8th of January 2019. The sampled data has been analyzed to identify the language used in this category. This can be interpreted in light of Fairclough’s idea that the language use provides pieces of evidence to show identity, social relation, and a system of knowledge and belief (1995b:55). Accordingly, the use of language in this category has been noted to be used by Rahaf to (a) describe her current status after escaping from her family, (b) reveal the consequences of the escape and (c) propose the solutions to save her life.

Examples of the tweets in pre asylum calls:

Tweet 2:

based on the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, I'm rahaf mohmed, formally seeking a refugee status to any country that would protect me from getting harmed or killed due to leaving my religion and torture from my family.
Tweet 8:
Hey I'm Rahaf. My father just arrived as I heard witch worried and scared me a lot and I want to go to another country that I seek asylum in. But at least I feel save now under UNHCR protection with the agreement of Thailand authorities. And I finally got my passport back🙏❤️

Tweet 9:
For all countries that can help, we ask for urgent protection, only you can save my life. #saverahaf

Rahaf has used a set of linguistic terms in order to identify herself or to describe the emotional statement she is going through like “scared,” “forced” and “worried”. The calls also show the repetition of using terms like “harmed,” “killed,” “tortured,” and “disappear” which are used to describe the consequences of her action and what would happen if she would be sent back to her family to Saudi Arabia. Moreover, to reinforce the veracity of these calls, Rahaf has stated that the only solution for her to escape this life threatening situation is to be granted asylum. Accordingly, lexical terms like “Save my life,” “Asylum,” “protection,” “help,” and “UNHCR” can be seen 12 times in the tweets in this category. Rahaf, in this context, describes the reality of Saudi women when challenging the traditional “patriarchal social order” in the kingdom. This dialogue corresponds to Burr’s (1995) idea about the social practice that reflects the value system of people employed by them to promote a certain version of reality or ideology.

Moreover, in the tweets there were no direct mentioning of the status of Saudi women in general, giving an immediate declaration of her status in Saudi Arabia or stating what happened to her that prompted her to send these calls. In that way, she kept all the calls on an immediate and personal level, focusing on her own danger at the moment. Furthermore, the linguistic choice found on the calls has conveyed emotion and reinforced validity, and this leads to what Strauss & Feiz (2014) define as “the stance”. From this point, I found that Rahaf took the self-defender stance. Besides, the theme that can be identified in the tweets is that the calls are considered for emergency protection and asylum. It is noteworthy here that Twitter community have reacted to the tweets in this theme and deploy the calls. This gives a proof about the role of the social media platform to bring the private topic into the public sphere and get them to be heard as it has been argued by Landert and Jucker (2010:1423), Dahlberg (2001:1) and Iosifidis (2011:623).

6.1.2 Post-Asylum Calls,

This category includes 12 tweets that Rahaf Mohammad posted after she was granted the asylum in Canada. Out of 12 tweets sampled, there were three posts with a direct mentioning of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi women with the accusation to the Saudi government of suppression of freedom. As in tweet (16), she states about “brutality and repression of the government,” and in the tweet (24) she argued “men in Saudi Arabia use their authority to ruin women’s lives”. From this regard, she was also justifying her decision to leave her family like in tweets (18) and (20). These messages can be noted for the first time since she
made the Twitter account. Accordingly, Rahaf can be seen as representing the status of the Saudi woman who is oppressed under the applicability of the male guardianship law in Saudi Arabia. From CDA lenses, this discourse reflects the ideological assumption that is determined by power dominance, which also maintains the unequal power relations in the Saudi society, as seen by Wodak & Meyer (2001:10) and Lazar (2007:149) on the concept of power and language.

The rest of the tweets in this category indicate that the calls are sent to encourage the Saudi women to get their rights like using the words in tweet (14) “Fight and get your RIGHTS,” and in tweet (21) “You deserve to be happy. You deserve to live.” Moreover, in tweet (22), Rahaf has presented her support to the hashtag #Voting_with_their_feet, which was launched on Twitter to show rejection to the male guardianship law in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, in tweet (13), Rahaf has posted a response to one statement from the Saudi authorities about her where she has mocked that statement. The Saudi statement, found in the footage released by Thai immigration, shows Abdulilah al-Shouaibi, Saudi embassy charge d’affaires in Bangkok, complaining in a meeting with Surachate, Thailand’s immigration police chief, “When she arrived, she opened a new ‘Twitter’ account and her followers grew to 45,000 in one day,” he said in Arabic, “It would have been better if they had confiscated her mobile instead of her passport” (AFP., 2019). The use of language in these tweets and the choice of the lexical terms can be interpreted in light of Wodak & Meyer (2001:10) on how language is involved when there is contention over and a challenge to power, ensuring that language is entwined in social power.

Examples of the tweets in post-asylum calls:

Tweet 20:

“When injustice becomes a law, resistance becomes a duty”

Tweet 22:#Voting_with_their_feet

In this category, calls have a more robust language; by declaring the reasons for the escape and including a direct accusation to the Saudi government of suppression of freedom. Moreover, the tweets include messages to raise public awareness on the Saudi women status in the kingdom. In sum, the choice of language in this category indicates how the linguistic features of texts on this micro level (the tweets) propagate a certain worldview on the macro level (Saudi society), seeing this through the eyes of Van Dijk (1998) and Fairclough (2010:31). In the post-asylum tweets category, I can find that the Rahaf here is taking the stance of online activist, and the theme that has emerged from those tweets identifies that the
calls are for emergency protest. Later on in the thesis, I will present how the change of the stance leads to a change in the readers’ perception and reaction.

6.2 The Responses

The corpus of responses consists of 480 texts gathered from the 24 tweets. The reactions of the users appear to be either in a supportive position of the tweets, opposed position, or have a neutral position. The linguistic choice that has been found in the texts indicated these positions. At that point, the use of Content analysis method, following the procedure of Krippendorff (1980), has facilitated categorizing the collected data, in order to create statistical forms from the total number of results. This section presents the distribution of users according to their position and gender. The results have indicated the different perspectives that the responses reveal about the calls and then they will be interpreted later on in the thesis.

![Figure 2. Gendered Distribution](image)

![Figure 3. Users Position](image)

It can be seen in the diagram (Figure 2), the percentage of users’ participation in the 24 tweets that had been sampled. From the 480 texts, 41% are male participators, 30% are female participators and 29% are unknown gender. The diagram in (Figure 3) presents the position of the users: 55% of the users are supporting the tweets that Rahaf had tweeted, 28% of the users are against and opposing the tweets and only 17% of the users have a neutral position.

![Figure 4. Gendered position and distribution](image)

25
(Figure 4) shows more detail about the gendered position and distribution. It illustrates the percentage of the participation according to the position. From the 41% male users were 13% of them opposing the tweets and 22% were supporting the tweets and the rest were neutral. The female users were 30% of the entire participators, and 8% of them were opposing, 17% supporting and 5% neutral. Lastly, we can find the unknown gender that consists of 29% of the total participators were 7% opposing, 16% supporting and 5% have a neutral reaction to the tweets.

Later on in the thesis, I will trace the users’ position according to the theme categories found on the main tweets. I use the linguistic tools suggested earlier to analyze how the Twitter calls have been perceived by the users who responded.

6.2.1 Responses to the themes

As mentioned earlier, tweets that Rahaf posted have two themes; pre asylum theme (calls for emergency protection /self-defendant stance), and post-asylum theme (calls for emergency protest/on-line activist stance). In this section, I will demonstrate the users’ reaction to each theme according to the stance that Rahaf had taken. Each theme category includes 240 texts from the responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male Users</th>
<th>Female Users</th>
<th>Unknown Users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pre</td>
<td>post</td>
<td>pre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposing texts</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting texts</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral texts</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total texts</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Gendered position & distribution according to themes

(Table 1) illustrates the number of texts written by male, female, unidentified gender users in responding to the tweets that are posted in pre and post-asylum themes. The table also presents the total number of texts per gender in each theme.

For male users, it can be noted that they are more supportive of the pre asylum tweets, the total number of supporting texts are 62 texts then decreased to 45 texts. Moreover, they appear to be more opposing in the post-asylum theme, as the texts increased from 13 texts to 47 texts. The total participation for male users increased slightly in total participation. Also, male users participated more in post-asylum theme.

For the female users, the supporting texts decreased from 47 texts in pre asylum theme to 34 texts in post-asylum theme. What is interesting is that only three texts were opposing the tweets in pre asylum theme and then increased to 37 texts in the post-asylum theme. Female users participated more in post-asylum theme.

For the unknown category (unidentified gender), the supporting texts decreased from 58 texts in pre asylum theme to 19 texts in post-asylum theme. The opposing texts increased from 5 texts for the pre asylum tweets to 30 texts for the post-asylum tweets as well as the total participation decreased in the post-asylum theme.
(Table 2) shows how much each group constitutes from the total texts coded for this study (480 texts). Moreover, (Table 3) presents the same results but by using the number of texts instead of the percentages. It can be seen that the negative users constitute 4% of the total texts posted in the pre asylum theme, then increased to be 24% in the post-asylum theme. The supportive users were 35% of the total replies that posted in the pre asylum themes then decreased to 20% for the post-asylum theme. The same applied to the Neutral users who participated in 11% of the total replies and posted in the pre asylum themes then decreased to 6% for the post-asylum theme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stance-taking</th>
<th>Pre-asylum theme</th>
<th>Post-asylum theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opposing users</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive users</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral users</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Percentage of Users’ position & distribution according to calls theme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stance-taking</th>
<th>Pre-asylum theme</th>
<th>Post-asylum theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opposing texts</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive texts</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral texts</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Number of Texts position & distribution according to calls theme.

Comparing (Table 1), (Table 2) and (Table 3) with (Figure 3), I can conclude that even if the majority of the responses, in general, are supportive, but this is because the majority of the supporting replies are to the calls tweeted in pre asylum theme. Likewise, the results show that the opposing responses increased significantly towards the calls in post-asylum theme. In sum, the pre asylum theme gets more supporting responses, and the post-asylum theme gets more opposing responses.

6.2.2 Referential and Nominalization

The use of this strategy provides important elements in the study as they give a basis for understanding the relationship between the calls and the responses. The referential strategies are the way the people name or construct the target individuals and this way, following Fairclough’s idea, have an impact on how these individuals are viewed (2003). All this can expose the variations in the reaction that have taken up or negated the tweets. The findings reveal that the opponents have used negatives attributes when replying to the tweets, just as Blackledgeled (2009) has stated on referential strategy. Moreover, the reverse has happened in tweets from the tweets supporters.

The lexical terms found by the supportive group that are frequently used to refer to Rahaf Mohamad are: “strong,” “brave,” “warrior,” “heroine,” and “free”. These terms have been used to praise her courage in escaping and admire the determination found in her calls. While the negative language found by the opposing group shows the frequency of use of similar lexical terms from different users to express a negative stance towards the calls and criticize the action. In their way of responding to the tweets, they refer to Rahaf by using metaphors, sarcasm, derogation, and irony words. The most frequently used terms are “immature,” “pathetic,” “cheap,” “trash,” “naïve,” “atheist” and “prostitute”. In
analyzing these terms and looking at them from the FCDA viewpoint introduced by Lazar (2007), this referential language illustrates that these stereotypes as manifestations of the masculine hegemonic representation of women in Saudi society. Women are held responsible for the honor of their families. Family is considered as the central institution in society and a person’s social identity. Therefore, it is important for women to fulfill the expectations of the family in order to be accepted. And in simplest cases of non-compliance with the family rules and try to challenge them, women like Rahaf can be considered to be “cheap” “trash,” and “prostitute”. It is noteworthy here that the negative Referential terms are used just one time in one reply written by a female user and the rest are by male users. However, the supportive Referential terms are used with the same frequency of usage between male and female users.

Example from the opposing group:

Tweet 16, user 310:

أيتها الساذجة،
ببيعون لك وهم الكلام.
وبعت لأجل ذلك: عائلتك، وطنك، دينك.
أكثر صفقة خاسرة ممكن يدخلها أي إنسان في عمره.

Translation: You naïve.
They sell you words of illusion.
And you sold for that: your family, your country, your religion.
The most lost deal a man can have in the entire life.

Example from the supportive group:

Tweet 14, user 272:

You are the Heroine ♀ and a model for all those women trapped by tradition and religion from North-West Africa to the Persian Gulf and beyond.
Good Luck to You

6.2.3 Predicational strategy

Predication is considered as an important feature of textual analysis. To offer an analysis of this feature, each group has been analyzed separately. Following the idea of Reisigl & Wodak (2001:45) on the Predicational strategy, I have found that each group dealt with different themes that have been identified in the data and realized within the negative and positive traits found in the linguistic forms. This feature helped to see how the users have perceived the calls and described them. The Referential terms found earlier in the tweets facilitate the process of finding the predication messages in the tweets.

The opposing Group:

The study shows 135 texts with an opposing stance, 71 texts have assigned negative predication messages identified in three themes: Un-Saudi theme, non-religious (lack of faith) theme and conspiracy theme (see Table 4). The predication messages are used more by male users. Moreover, it can be noted that 61 of these texts posted in response to the post-asylum tweets.
The un-Saudi theme is the feature found by the opposing users to describe the act behind Rahaf’s calls. First, they define the claims that Rahaf sent about the oppression of women in the kingdom to be not accurate nor correct. Second, they consider the act of escaping the family and challenging them, like what Rahaf has done on public, to not commensurate with the Saudi tradition or religion. Therefore, they consider Rahaf as misrepresenting Saudi Arabia and Saudi women. Seeing this through the eyes of Fairclough (2010:232), these discourses reflect the traditional “patriarchal social order.” In which the Saudi women are expected to conform, keep the family together, and represent the country’s devotion to upholding traditional and religious values. Therefore, since independence means that an individual does not define themselves in relation to the group. Moreover, this theme also confirms the idea presented by Treacher and Shukrallah (2005:155) that “family” notion should not be challenged by women in the public sphere, as this can lead to disturbance of the social order.

Example of the predication message (Un-Saudi):

Tweet 16, user 303:

مفهومك للحريه من البدايه كان غلط كثير..توقفي عن انك تنشرين الكلام الكذب عن السعوديه حياتنا من افضل حياه الحمدللهم وامن غير عن كل الدول والاهم من ذا كله انهم دوله الاسلام وتقولين وحشيه انتي وتفكيرك هو الوحشيه اهربي واخرسي عن السعوديه لاترجعين بس لاتشوهين السمعه

Translation: From the beginning, you misunderstand the concept of freedom… Stop spreading lies about Saudi Arabia. Thanks god, we have the best life and more security than all other countries and the most important is that it is the Islam country. You are talking about brutality but the way you think is the brutality, Go away and shut up Saudi Arabia, don’t go back and don’t distort the reputation.

The second theme considers the calls to be contradicting with Islamic teaching. Twenty-seven texts from the 135 texts present the predication message as non-religious. For them, the protest calls are either non-religious act, have happened because lack of knowledge in religion or even can lead to sins. Some users explain their point of view that the alleged freedom is to escape decency and chastity applied by the religion to follow lust and desires. While others have seen that obeying the guardian is a religious duty and should not be challenged. Besides, verses from Qur’an found in some texts; this intertextuality is used to support their argument and give an authoritative voice to their position. From this regard, I see that the patriarchal patronizing tone was made clear in these texts, and it derives its masculine hegemony this time from the ideological religion system. The discourses surrounding the legitimization of guardianship law dictate certain power relations between men and women. I see that this can be understood in light of Wodak and Meyer (2010:10) idea about the ideology as an important aspect in maintaining the unequal power relations and that can be mediated in the language.
Example of the (Un-religious) predication messages:

Tweet 14, user 266:
للأسف أنتِ مكشوفة
وحقوق المرأة والمظلومة مجرد شماعة لتبرير هروبك
أنتِ هربتي من الدين أولاثم من المجتمع ثانياً من العائلة ثالثاً لأنهم وقفوا ضد هواك وشهوتك اللي
ماقدرتي تضبطينها
Translation: Unfortunately you are exposed
Women’s rights and injustice are just a ploy to justify your escape
You first want to escape from the religion, from the community, then from the family, because they stood against your desires and lust which you can’t control.

Tweet 14, user: 275

The third theme “conspiracy” found by the opposing group to cast doubts on the tweets legitimacy and intentions. They assume that the causes behind the calls on Twteeter are for inciting disruption and chaos in the country from the outside opposition that aims to destabilize the kingdom. The total number of texts with conspiracy theme is 22, and 18 texts of them were written in reply to the post-asylum tweets.

Example of the (Conspiracy) predication messages:
Tweet 24, user 470:
اتمنى من السعوديين والسعوديات يحظور هذا الحساب وينتهي الشيء اللي يحاولوا يوصلوا به إليه هو
لعب بعقل السعوديات
Translation: I hope that the Saudi men and Saudi women to block this account to stop them reaching to manipulate the Saudi women’s minds.

Tweet 23, user 441:
البنت راحت ضاحية خدعها اسمها الحرية.
أكد أني أجزم أنها تحت الوعي، والأقامة الجبرية ويتم استخدام حسابها من قبل الحكومة الكندية.
لماذا لا تكون للعالم وتقول هذا أنا ادريس حسابي الخاص بتوتيت البيت بعضاً وتحت غسيل مع بعضاً
والمؤكد أنها حاليًا تعيش أزمة نفسية صعبه لأن الأمور تكشفت لديها
Translation: The girl is a victim of a deception called freedom.
I am sure she is under surveillance and house arrest, the Canadian government uses her account.
Why doesn’t she come up and say that this is her Twitter account, she is brainwashed and for sure she is living a severe psychological crisis after discovering what had happened.

The supportive group:

The Predicational strategy has presented how the supporting group describes the calls by introducing two themes “inspirational act” and “negative Saudi society.” These themes were identified in 25 texts from the total supportive replies. For the supporter, Rahaf’s escape is an “inspirational act,” and she is seen as a heroine and should be considered as a role model for other women in Saudi society. As the Predicational strategy proposes “representing positive self and negative others” (Reisigel&Wodak, 2001:45). The supporting replies present Rahaf as brave, free, inspiring, and in the same time attacking the Saudi society for the inequality in their system or the way they treat the women there.

From this regard, I found that these progressive discourses focus on subverting the male-as privileged discourse, and on demystifying the traditional stereotypes of women that the conservative discourses perpetuate when representing women as powerless. Moreover, it can be seen that the patriarchal system was often negatively evaluated and portrayed as unfair and oppressive. The language in this context was mainly drawn upon to express a desire for changing the existing patriarchal practices. This confirms the idea of Wodak & Meyer (2001:11) on how language can be used to challenge power to subvert it.

Example of the predication messages found in the supportive replies:

Tweet 13, user 259:

This is horrible, but you’re bringing attention to the awful behavior of others and shedding light on it for the entire world to see. You’re making a difference not in your own life, but in the lives of other women. Stay safe.

Tweet 6, user 102:

Saudi Arabia should change it's name to (women's kidnappers) as that is what they mostly do

Tweet 13, user 252:

Why are Saudi men so afraid of Saudi women that they cannot free them?

7 Discussion:

The collected data were analyzed through CDA examination of social change and ideological struggles surrounding it. The numerical data has been coded, categorized, and analyzed with the use of Content Analysis to present the findings in the form of statics. The data analysis covered several contextualizing features, including the stance taking element found in the tweets, distribution of responses written by male and female, their choice of language, and their position toward the calls. The findings presented in the thesis propose that the patriarchal discourse can be considered as the center of the debates — many of the tweets and
several replies present Saudi Arabia as a masculine society. Within the central discourse of patriarchy, the discourses about the subordinated status for Saudi women represent the flip side of the coin of those about male-dominance. The linguistic terms embedded within these discourses constitute rich interdiscursive resources for ideological positioning.

Through these debates, the study finds that the majority of the users, whether they are females or males, to be supportive of the calls and praising Rahaf’s participation in the public sphere. This reflects that the community is undergoing a sort of ideological shifting that can lead to social change. Moreover, the findings presented in this thesis open up space for more discussions regarding the Saudi women’s rights issues to reveal more extensive ideological conversation about the change. Accordingly, I will present in the following sections: (1) the position of the male users within these patriarchal discourses. (2) The discussion about the accusation of the tweets to be related to a political conspiracy.

7.1 Patriarchy strikes back

The total participation of the male users reached up to 41% from the total replies, and also they were more supportive of the calls. What was significant is that in the post-asylum theme, the calls faced fierce resistance and in more frequent cases, comments would support patriarchal or fundamentalist Islamic ideology. Out from 114 opposing replies found in the post-asylum tweets, 47 texts were written by male users. Even the use of the referential language and negative predication messages were found more often in the texts posted by male users who have engaged in negotiating the social origins of discourses, considering them as non-religious or not representing the Saudi women.

To challenge the notion of family and masculinity in public means disturbing social order (Treacher & Shukrallah, 2005: 155). So, this leads to the fierce resistance from who owns social power (the males). It is seen that whereas the male category appeared to be more supportive of the calls, they have appeared to dabble with conflicting desires for social equality and anxiety about how it might disrupt the social conditions they are used to. This findings also support the conception that the patriarchal structure has an impact on Saudi women’s participation in the public spheres or What Chaudhry (2014) argue’s ‘seem to be limited steps toward the inclusion of women in Saudi society” (956). Moreover, it appears in the referential languages, and the Predicalational messages that individual men are also able to shape the development of feminist activism and they are also using the same social media platform to monitor and disrupt feminist activity online (Megarry, 2018:1070, 1071).

From this regard, a feminist approach to surveillance studies reveals how social media technologies can function as new weapons in men’s age-old war to control women. Given the continuing social and economic power of men, and their historical use of new technologies to coerce, frighten, violate, and ultimately control women as a social group, it follows that feminist activists who directly challenge male social power are also vulnerable to these tactics in social media space (ibid., 1077).

7.2 Hidden agenda

It can be seen in the findings a high frequency of the comments, despite being the minority, involve users trying to refute the existing Saudi religious and political infrastructure’s legitimacy. The data consisted of 11 replies with this Predicalational message from the
supportive group. On the other hand, the opposing group defends the Saudi structure, and they believe that the calls present a real conspiracy against the kingdom. The users keep referring to Rahaf by terms like ‘‘ruled’’ and ‘‘controlled.’’ To look at these replies from macro-perspective, the users assumed that it is hard to see what the calls are going to achieve other than some political point- scoring for Canada over Saudi Arabia.

On August 2, 2018, the Canadian minister of foreign affairs, Chrystia Freeland, stated via Twitter that ‘‘Canada is gravely concerned about additional arrests of civil society and women’s rights activists in #SaudiArabia, including Samar Badawi. We urge the Saudi authorities to immediately release them and all other peaceful #humanrights activists’’ (Freeland as cited in Law, 2018). In response to Canada’s criticism, Saudi Arabia expelled the Canadian ambassador and froze all new business with Ottawa considering the statement as ‘‘not be based in any accurate or true information,’’ and the kingdom went on to denounce the statements as ‘‘blatant interference in the Kingdom's domestic affairs ’’ (Saudi press agency, 2018).

Shortly after that, the story of Rahaf Mohammad emerged, pushing some of the users to link the incidents together. Rahaf arrived in Canada welcomed by Freeland who said ‘‘this is a very brave new Canadian’’ (Freeland as cited in Gillies, 2019). This statement caused some of the opposing responses to increase accusing the calls on Twitter to be based on fake demands. In the main while Canada’s prime minister, Justin Trudeau, brushed off a question as to whether Canada’s move might make it harder to repair ties with Saudi Arabia ‘‘Canada has been unequivocal that we will always stand up for human rights and women's rights around the world’’ (Trudeau as cited in Yuk, 2019).

7.3 Limitations of the Study & future research

This section presents the methodological limitations that were encountered after analyzing the data. All sampled texts cannot identify precisely the positions of the users from Saudi society, who are in direct involvement with the cause, in order to predict the obstacles hindering the Saudi women in obtaining their rights. Furthermore, the ability for the account owner to delete any reply from the tweet for any personal reason or consideration can affect the accuracy of results and the total percentage of supportive or opposing texts.

The findings of this thesis present a myriad of exciting options for future research of the same topic. There is potential for an ethnographic study that reaches out to the users with surveys and/or interviews to increase the relevance and validity of research findings. Thus, by selecting participants from Saudi society help to verify whether these findings hold out in their cognitive and behavioral day-to-day experiences. Furthermore, to gain insight into the motivation of using Twitter for sending protest calls then to check the motivation behind their responses. Another area for future research is the semiotic aspect of the tweets, which could not be tackled within the scope of the present thesis. It would be worthwhile to look at how memes, images, and videos may be employed to propagate a certain stance with the Saudi Twitter-sphere.

Furthermore, the study that has been carried out for this thesis calls attention to several subjects from a broader view on which further research would be beneficial. For instance, a study about the implications of Arab/Islamic feminist activism in social media platforms can
be approached. In this regard, a study about the development of Arab/Islamic feminism in the public field can also be applicable. Moreover, many studies have focused on Arab women’s rights issue discussing the ideological struggles in relation to power relation; this subject can also be approached under the theme of Islamic feminism. Additionally, comparative studies from the perspective of media and communication studies are also needed to discuss the differences between the Western and Arab feminism on the conceptualization of public and private spheres. Furthermore, the role of politic is vital in the development of social movement; therefore, it is recommended to study the effect of the political orientation of western feminism on the generalization of feminism in the Middle Eastern context.

8 Conclusion

In societies like Saudi Arabia where the culture of modesty and conservatism exists, alongside that, the patriarchy and devotion to religion are deeply rooted, can restrict the process for women to participate in the public sphere. Social media platforms open up space for a virtual escape from these restrictions. They proved the ability to facilitate the process of involving Arab women more in the public discussion. This thesis presents an example of how Saudi women using Twitter trying to gain control over the rules of cultural discourse in their society. The case of Rahaf Mohammad presents the way in which she has chosen to carve out a discourse of her own, adopting a form of resistance that is based more on the dialectic of protest and affirmation than on clear-cut opposition. In doing so, she poses a strong challenge to the dominant ideological forces in her society that can be seen in some of her tweets. Furthermore, the study also shows how Twitter has performed the role of a ‘‘bridge’’ between the virtual world and the real world, and that might even enable physical escape. So the virtual escape from the cultural conservatism becomes real in extreme situations.

The purpose of this thesis is to present the discourse themes which are seen throughout the corpus of the Saudi teen’s emergency protest calls on Twitter. As well as, the different perspectives revealed on their responses to Saudi women’s right. The study shows how Rahaf Mohammed has escaped the draconian punishments that she probably would have been threatened with at home. The emotional statements found on the first theme of her tweets ‘‘the pre asylum calls’’ have demonstrated the emergency need for protection. In the responses, Rahaf has received a wave of international solidarity in her bid for asylum. Moreover, the findings in the thesis verify that the majority of the responses to these calls were supportive of the cause than opposing it. These calls have drawn new global attention to Saudi Arabia’s strict social rules, including the male guardianship law. Also, they have shown that if any Saudi woman is caught running away from this system, she will be in a real danger that can even threaten her life. It worth mentioning that Rahaf’s quest for asylum comes as Saudi Arabia faces intense scrutiny over arresting of several women’s rights activists, which has renewed the criticism of the kingdom’s rights record.

After the asylum and the success of reaching the public sphere, Rahaf has taken advantage of the proliferation of her Twitter account. The calls she is sending after the asylum are to expose the systematic discrimination against Saudi women and even to encourage them to protest. The different stance Rahaf is taking now generates different reactions. In the main while, the world’s eyes have not stopped the conservative group from criticizing Rahaf’s calls. The replies to the calls in the post-asylum theme have appeared to receive more
opposing responses than supporting, as it has been noted in the first theme. The findings of the thesis show the fierce resistance to these tweets accusing them of being either not representing the Saudi women’s realities, contradicting with Islamic teaching or inciting disruption and chaos in the kingdom.

Rahaf’s plight is one that gives hope to other Saudi women with the same circumstances. In the time of writing this thesis, there is further news about two Saudi sisters who have taken to social media to plead for help securing asylum in a safe country. The pair posted photos of their passports using the Twitter handle @GeorgiaSisters. They claim to have been stopped in the small country of Georgia while attempting to escape the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. They allege that they were trapped in their own homes and suffered verbal and physical abuse from their male relatives. The sisters blame the Kingdom’s guardianship laws for enshrining their abuse and protecting their abusers, and say that local authorities were unable or unwilling to help (Sidhu&Abdelaziz, 2019).

Now they hope to generate the same attention - and eventual outcome - as a similar case of Rahaf Mohammed, Who has entered the public archive through Twitter. Where others with a similar fate can also return to and see what is possible. However, the question that can be raised here and remain unanswered is if these calls on Twitter can promote any social progress for the Saudi women in their country or if the supportive responses will be the best scenario that can happen to them? However, what is visible in Twitter now is that what the Saudi women continue to do during the present phase is keeping the conversation going to create alternative discourses about themselves at the same time trying to moderate traditional ones for a new era of gender equity.
9 References

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**9.1 Non-Academic References**


- Rahaf Mohammed. (2019). Statement: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFxX2O6uu0s

- Rahaf Mohamad. Twitter account: @rahaf84427714


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tweet number</th>
<th>Main post</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>User number</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Because I got nothing to lose</td>
<td>9:21 PM - 9 Jan 2019</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Be strong... you're amazing... we all love you...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Stay strong. You are a grown woman. You should have the right to choose your own path in life. I hope authorities around the world move quickly to help you. Thinking of you and your plight. This is unacceptable in a modern world.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Don't give up we all with you with my love 😊.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I just want you to know that everything will be alright. We are here to support and pray for you... just don't give up 💔.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>This is crazy. @UN @Refugees please save this girl. Her blood is on your hands if you do not stop these people trying to do her harm in the name of their religion.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Absolutely crazy. I am ashamed of religions doing these type of things, keeping people imprisoned. Disgusting.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Be strong! I wish You soon everything will be ok. !</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>you are super brave Rahaf... just do it we all with you✔️</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>This is a death or life case, PLEASE give it more recognition, please don't ignore #Saudi women's sufferings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Call or go to Israel embassy.  They will find a way to help you.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Based on the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, I'm rahaf mohmed, formally seeking a refugee status to any country that would protect me from getting harmed or killed due to leaving my religion and torture from my family.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>It's like saying HELP! I have nowhere to sleep, but could it please be a Marriott, Four Seasons, or Sheraton?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>You'll be safe promise</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>This is appaling. Bless you and keep you safe. Good luck X</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Don't even think about Turkey 😇</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Nobody has the guts all are funded by gulf money including liberal organizations which rise hue and cry when it suits their agenda.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>#nyc help this girl</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Don't lose your hope!🙏</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>You should be careful. People can misuse information. Not always best idea.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Try Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>And if love me. I will protect those who trust in my name. When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue and honor them. I will reward them with a long life and give them my salvation.” (Psalm 91:14-16)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>This is a death or life case, PLEASE give it more recognition, please don't ignore #Saudi women's sufferings as usual! #SaveRahaf #GoldenGlobes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Stay strong, keep reporting, someone somewhere has got to step in and help surely, 🤔.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Nobody has the guts all are funded by gulf money including liberal organizations which rise hue and cry when it suits their agenda.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>The LORD says, “I will rescue those who love me, I will protect those who trust in my name. When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue and honor them. I will reward them with a long life and give them my salvation.” (Psalm 91:14-16)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Brave woman! I wish you all the best!</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>I wish you all the best!</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>God bless you keep safe dear! 😇❤️</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Your best bet at present happens to be #Qatar.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Praying for your safety❤️</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Come pakistan we already hv 20 lac afghanis and couldless bangladeshis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>May Allah help u in this endeavour</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Come to India</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>The world is watching. The world had enough of Saudi Arabia with Jamal Khoshoggis case.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>I wish that you can try for asylum in Canada. I would love to offer you a home with my dad and me. We do not have much but you would be safe.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Pray for her safety❤️</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Based on the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, I'm rahaf mohmed, formally seeking a refugee status to any country that would protect me from getting harmed or killed due to leaving my religion and torture from my family.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>This is a death or life case, PLEASE give it more recognition, please don't ignore #Saudi women's sufferings as usual! #SaveRahaf #GoldenGlobes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Don't lose your hope!🙏</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>You should be careful. People can misuse information. Not always best idea.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>This is a death or life case, PLEASE give it more recognition, please don't ignore #Saudi women's sufferings as usual! #SaveRahaf #GoldenGlobes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Don't even think about Turkey 😇</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>You should be careful. People can misuse information. Not always best idea.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stay strong world and people will support you...

In terms of the 1951 Convention for Refugees articles Thailand’s duties to #Rahaf844277 are:
1. provide her with identity papers if needed
2. issue her travel documents if needed
3. not forcibly return or “refoul” her to the country she fled from

Rahaf tells Thai officials that she wants to apply for asylum. Tell them you do not want to talk to people from the Saudi Arabia embassy. Tell them you want your passport back. Pick up the phone now, phone reception and ask to speak to Thai officials.

Someone please from Bangkok. Get to that door with camera/s and start a live show from there, let @rahaf84427714 speak from the inside, stay there as much as you can, get her something to eat.

Come back to Twitter, front of your camera ask @UNHCR Thailand for the asylum and a lawyer. Would is watching!

I hope you will avoid this. crossing fingers. Do not give up!

Plane will not leave if ANY PASSENGER is standing&seated according to saf.regulations. Beg all passengers loudly 4 help in not sitting, since it is going to Kuwait and not SA there may be passengers willing. Then the captains most likely option is 2 take you off. Buys u time.

You have to escape and hide long enough until the plane has left

set up a livestream where camera wont be immediately obvious. Drink water. Just breathe.

Are you still blacked in the room???? What’s going on?

@Sachsmallawar: India will help her.

They can direct where you should go...there are dozen of countries where you can go to as a Saudi without a visa...

stay strong. You are all over the news. #FreeRahaf #SaveRahaf

No developments at all??? No help for you???

Perhaps http://Alarmphone.org can help. It’s an emergency call for asylum seekers. Normally for boat people but it is 24h on and perhaps they have contacts in Thailand or an idea. Try to call +33 66 51 71 61

#SaveRahaf

Kuwait Airways: this lady is being forced onto your fight against will.

For tomorrow’s Kuwait Airways flight KU412 (departure BK 11:15 a.m.): “If a passenger refuses to sit down, the plane is not allowed to leave.” #SaveRahaf http://www.gettingthevoiceout.org/how-to-stop-a-deportation/

#SaveRahaf Apostasy is no crime. Detained in transit. Thinks she’s family intend to kill her if she’s returned to Thailand. #SaveRahaf

Put mattresses in front of the door... anything to stop them

It’s good that you left that evil religion.

I wonder if any of the passengers can help delay the flight please and anyone in the airport keeps an eye on it please.

Kuwaiti Airways: this lady is being forced onto your flight against her will.

For tomorrow’s Kuwait Airways flight KU412 (departure BK 11:15 a.m.): “If a passenger refuses to sit down, the plane is not allowed to leave.” #SaveRahaf http://www.gettingthevoiceout.org/how-to-stop-a-deportation/

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#SaveRahaf
6

43

Because I was very afraid before, I forgot to mention that the Saudi Arabia’s embassy also said to the Bangkok airport if they don’t free me back to Kuwait they will literally KIDNAP me.

Dear Rahaf, good luck and fight for your right and do not forget that the whole world sees and supports you, stand by your word.

Your story is #trending! Stay strong ! You should try to Apply in Canada as refugee. Wish you the best for the future !

Your story is #trending! Keep strong. The world is watching.

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Hey I'm Rahaf. My father just arrived as I heard with worried and scared me a lot and I want to go to another country that I seek asylum in for all countries that can help, we ask for urgent protection, only you can save my life. #SavaRahaf

I want UNHCR
https://twitter.com/raha84427714/status/1082275701330345982

1:23 AM - 7 Jan 2019
I swear I'm gods own sitcom

Hey I'm Rahaf. My father just arrived as I heard with worried and scared me a lot and I want to go to another country that I seek asylum in. But at least I feel save now under UNHCR protection with the agreement of Thailand authorities. And I finally got my passport back❤️.

https://twitter.com/raha84427714/status/108220603603808256

6:00 AM - 7 Jan 2019
I have contacted my friend who work for UNHCR, and he contacted his colleagues in BKK, I followed your case since yesterday 1 am .. be strong and be patient..

138. Open tomorrow from 8:30 to 12:00 (your time).
137. If you have a day, try the Czech embassy at 71/6 Ruam Rudee Soi 2, Ploenchit Rd., Lumpini, Pathumwan, Bangkok 10330.
136. If you think it will not happen to you ... I am the female writer who gave a book to His Majesty the King of Thailand ... so I'm on your side Rahaf. Good Luck to you.
135. Sending you so much support from central Queensland Australia x
134. Could New Zealand provide asylum to this woman?
133. #SavaRahaf
132. We all with you stay strong
131. #SavaRahaf Rupner Refuges
130. @UNHCRThailand rapid.
129. Rahaf, I can't imagine what you are going through. Stay strong. Stay calm. I read UNHCR is coming to talk to you at 5 pm. Good luck sister. I'm rooting for you.
128. We're with all the time, don't give up.
127. Be brave and strong, try to stay positive @raha84427714 the world is watching on and making noise for you❤️️
126. If you have a day, try the Czech embassy at 71/6 Ruam Rudee Soi 2, Ploenchit Rd., Lumpini, Pathumwan, Bangkok 10330. Open tomorrow from 8:30 to 12:00 (your time).
125. I'm sure more than 90% of Thai is on your side #Savera fix is trending in Thailand and most of Thai comment is support you
124. Fortunately, now Rahaf's case is on top of the world's biggest news agency, and world is watching! Hopefully, Saudi's money temptation doesn't work this time for That's government !!!
123. #saverahaf
122. A 18 Year Old fearing for her life. Please support to end this violation of her human rights and Rahaf basic human Right for personal safety from oppression.
121. Dear Rahaf, my @refugees colleagues are at the airport now and are seeking access to you!
You are the real power help me to send my message, I need PROTECTION.

https://twitter.com/rahaf84427714/status/1082517749300002816

You didn't need protection you need a real man to marry him

181

wheres the UN protection?

182

Stay in that hotel with the UN

183

Your story is global. I have my fingers crossed for you here in New Zealand.

184

I urge the @CanadaThailand to provide assistance to @rahaf84427714 will our PM @JustinTrudeau help? She is in need of protection. SHE is in immediate danger. @JustinTrudeau must now A LOT is at stake for this brave woman #kpop4Rahaf

185

The world is watching @CanadaThailand @JustinTrudeau @Refugees @UNHCRThailand #RahafRahaf @GermanAmbTh @Refugees

186

@ScottMorrisonMP do something!!!!!!

187

Nobody on Twitter has any need at all to know where you are. Anybody who asks is committing an error. There is no need to respond to such a request. I'm sure you know that. I think you have handled everything brilliantly. I believe in you. Thank you for your tweets on Twitter.

188

I'm so fan, u r warrior

189

Stay Calm Mam - CALL these!! Ask for their Ambassador and give no info until you speak to them!

190

Stay safe I have seen on Twitter that as a citizen of Saudi Arabia you can travel to New Zealand for up to 3 months without a visa, and then apply for a visa. Having travelled to New Zealand numerous times please also consider that as an option to explore! #SaveRahaf

191

Believe you are already safe and the rest will come... Stay strong and stay positive. The world has a way of making things happen.

192

Where are you @rahaf84427714

193

Stay strong. The world is watching.

194

We love you. Stay strong 😊

195

You will be free

196

197

You are wonderful and courageous, I am so proud of you

198

Thank you for your tweets on Twitter.

199

I was thinking, that you need to seek asylum in a country which does not buy saudi oil, which does not sell guns to saudi, which is "close" to Australia...

200

as much as I want to suggest you to come into our country, I dont think it's safe. it's so near to thailand in case ur dad comes here.girls our government does business with saudi anyway like many other muslim majority country. its best as much as i want to suggest you to come into our country, I dont think it's safe. it's so near to thailand in case ur dad comes here.girls our government does business with saudi anyway like many other muslim majority country. its best

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Thank you for your tweets on Twitter.

212
As citizens, we will do our very best to urge our government to bring you to Canada.

It's so sad to see you like this and none of world leaders have come forward to help...they get elected promising great things for world peace and humanity...my foot!!!!

Please @Canada Thailand show your great humanity and save @rahaf84427714 @saverahaf

You don't need passport to seek a asylum

Canada loves you!! Your life will be amazing here.

I hope they do. It's the best country I've ever been in & I'd be happy to sponsor you xx

If you make it to Australia, you can live with me...I have room & think you deserve the protection of our Australian government. Please help, Rahaf 🙏

Canada is good choice but dont go in usa, they deliver you back saudi.

Diversity is our strength #WelcomeToCanada

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i want Canada to give me asylum!

Canada our government, if you can hear us. Be good/kind hearted.

Let this girl come to our country, Canada!

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This is horrible, but you're bringing attention to the awful behavior of others and shedding light on it for the entire world to see. You're making a difference not in your own life, but in the lives of other women. Stay safe.

Rahaf
Remember why you had to run away. We do not know any of the details, but you do. You know that physical and mental pain that you have suffered. Men will tell any lies to pretend it didn't happen, but you know it did - and we know you are telling the truth.

#SaveRahaf

You just broke your wings by your own hands. Getting your RIGHTS does not necessarily getting your best interest.

Use your voice to help others. (@FreeAtifa)

Wings are only there so you can fly. Always believe in your RIGHTS! You are the hope for many voiceless.

You are the heroine and a model for all those women trapped by tradition and religion from North-West Africa to the Persian Gulf and beyond. Good luck to you. Via (@Rahaf84427714)

Because Of INDEPENDENCE OF FREEDOM Is Fundamental Right For All Nations! #SaveRahaf

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This is so wild. We are all following an 18 year old person who none of us knew 3 days ago. And when she says "I'm happy for you. Stay strong, do not l" we're not finished yet, let's make Rahaf's smile even bigger and

Keep supporting her by following her account @rahaf84427714 and inviting all others to do so too.

Come on everyone where ever we are around the world - we're not finished yet let's make Rahaf's smile even bigger and warmer. Keep supporting her by following her account @rahaf84427714 and inviting all others to do so too.

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I would like to thank you people for supporting me and my life. Truly I have never dreamed of this love and support. You are the spark that would motivate me to be a better person.

March 11, 2019
أنتم تستطيعون أن تمنحوهم محبتكم، ولكنكم الحياة المشتاقه إلى نفسها. بكم هذا قراري. معي نفسي واستقلاليتي وقوتي
لا تقدرون أن تغرسوا فيهم بذور أفكاركم، ومع أنهم يعيشون معكم فهم ليسوا ملكاً لكم
وانهم ليسوا لنا
وإن كان همك الدفاع عن الدين فاعلم بأنك أكثر من أساء إليه منقول للفائدة
لتنال على حقوق ا
وهل تعرف أن ذات_day
لا تستطيع شراء ملابس. رهف نضجت فكريا وتريد شخصية مختلفه هذا حق ولكن لا تنس حقوق عائلتك وبلدك والإسلام.
أنا وأولادي وما أملك لأبي وأمي الغالية
ويجلي الله من عندي مااعرفه وابتغي من السماء استغلاله وانعم الله عليكي
اذا فرصك واتخذتي من مطالباتهم ذريعه لك
وقال تعالى: ﴿ يُوصِيكُمُ اللهاُ فِي أَوْلاَدِكُمْ ﴾
وقال تعالى: ﴿ وَقِفُوهُمْ إِناهُمْ مَسْئُولُونَ ﴾
وقال تعالى: ﴿ وَأْمُرْ أَهْلَكَ بِالصَّالَاةِ وَاصْتَبِرْ عَلَيْهَا لاَ نَسْأَلُكَ رِزْقًا نَحْنُ نَرْزُقُكَ وَالْعَاقِبَةُ لِلتا
ثَوَابًا وَخَيْرٌ أَمَلاً ﴿
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When injustice becomes a law, resistance becomes a duty.

"You deserve to be happy. You deserve to live a life you're excited about. Don't let others..."

Have faith in yourself. You will be absolutely fine.

A good life and a happy luxury for you in your new Canada country.

Marxism also oppressive and made many innocent victims, but your quote is good. Success and take care, cool Rahaf.

Yeah, Marxism is also oppressive and made many innocent victims, but so much truth in the quote!

Absolutely true.

Exally.

They watch you...
From Sudan and I am following your trip I hope my country enjoys peace... 😃

Rahaf Mohammed
@rahaf84427714
Following Following
@rahaf84427714
More
#Voting_with_their_feet
9:26 AM - 16 Feb 2019

Enjoy the life sweet rahaf❤️"
Why do men in Saudi Arabia use their authority to ruin women's lives? I hope nothing can stop them!!!

5:05 PM - 11 Apr 2019

Every country in the world has Positive things and negatives. Why do you not show the beautiful side of the women of #SaudiArabia?

I'm a student from Toronto and I want to say welcome to Canada! I'm so happy for you and will pray for you! Much love from one free woman to another!!!

First birthday being free of principles, responsibilities, ethics, belongingness and family, just eating and drinking with fake and materialistic people. I hope that there will be somebody who can wash your body and bury it and pray for you when you pass away one day!!.

@rahaf84427714 Miss rahaf you opened the way for millions women in the world to be free. Thank you for that.

My happy returns of the day Rahaf. I hope Canada is taking very good care of you.

Happy Birthday Rahaf! Stay free and live free every single birthday for a hundred years. "(may you live a) hundred years" is the traditional birthday wish where I live, hence the number :) Happy Birthday to you! Have a great year ahead.

Wish you Independence #HappyBirthday

Good luck, always.

I'm a student from Toronto and I want to say welcome to Canada! I'm so happy for you and will pray for you! Much love from one free woman to another!!!

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Good luck, always.
كلنا بخير دامك طلعتي من السعودية الحمدلله اذا ارخصتي نفسك لا تفكرين الكل مثلك خلك عندك وفكينا منك لا تسوين فيها انك المتحررة من القيود ترا الجنة تبغى والنار تبغى 🤣🤣🤣