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Negotiating Love, Family, Career and Spirituality in Contemporary Muslim Women's Fiction: An Analysis of Norhafsa Hamid's Novel *Will You Love Me?* from the Postfeminist Perspective

Melestari Kasih Sayang, Keluarga, Kerjaya dan Kerohanian dalam Fiksyen Wanita Muslim Kontemporari: Analisis Novel Will You Love Me? Karya Norhafsa Hamid daripada Perspektif Pascafeminisme

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ABSTRACT

Will You Love Me?, a novel by Norhafsa Hamid, is a post-feminist chick-lit narrative that centers on the protagonist, Zafira, who struggles with loneliness as a result of lifelong bullying. The main cause of her social isolation stems from her ability to "see what others cannot see." This internal conflict leads her to question not only her capacity to love but also her self-worth as an individual. The novel further highlights Zafira's ability to negotiate a balance between love, family, career, and spirituality, thus reflecting a post-feminist approach that is both holistic and spiritually grounded. This study is conducted with two primary objectives: (1) to identify the post-feminist elements present in the novel, and (2) to analyse how the protagonist navigates the demands of love, family, career, and spirituality. A qualitative research method is employed, with textual analysis as the main instrument for data collection. The findings reveal that the novel encompasses various post-feminist characteristics, including an emphasis on women's autonomy in making life choices within the framework of religious and social values. Zafira is portrayed as managing the various dimensions of her life by adhering to Islamic teachings, prioritizing the achievement of personal goals, and placing her full faith and trust in God.

Keywords: Post-feminism; Muslim chick-lit; novel

ABSTRAK

Novel Will You Love Me? karya Norhafsa Hamid merupakan sebuah novel chick-lit pasca-feminisme yang mengetengahkan naratif tentang watak utama, Zafira, yang berdepan dengan isu kesunyian akibat pengalaman dibuli sepanjang hidupnya. Punca utama kepada pengasingan sosial yang dialaminya adalah kebolehannya untuk "melihat perkara yang tidak dapat dilihat oleh orang lain". Konflik dalaman ini membawa kepada persoalan terhadap keupayaannya untuk menyayangi serta nilai dirinya sebagai seorang individu. Novel ini turut menyorot keupayaan Zafira untuk merundingkan keseimbangan antara elemen cinta, keluarga, kerjaya, dan kerohanian, sekali gus mencerminkan pendekatan pasca-feminisme yang lebih bersifat holistik dan spiritual. Kajian ini dijalankan dengan dua

objektif utama: (1) mengenal pasti elemen-elemen pasca-feminisme yang terkandung dalam novel, dan (2) menganalisis bagaimana watak utama merundingkan tuntutan antara cinta, keluarga, kerjaya, dan kerohanian. Kaedah kualitatif digunakan melalui pendekatan analisis teks sebagai instrumen utama pengumpulan data. Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa novel ini mengandungi pelbagai ciri pasca-feminisme, termasuk penekanan terhadap keupayaan wanita membuat pilihan autonomi dalam kerangka nilai agama dan sosial. Zafira dilihat merundingkan pelbagai aspek kehidupannya dengan berpedukan ajaran Islam, memberi keutamaan kepada pencapaian matlamat peribadi, serta meletakkan sepenuh kepercayaan dan tawakal kepada Tuhan.

Kata Kunci: pasca-feminisme; Muslim chick-lit; novel

1. Introduction

This study is an analysis of a novel by Norhafsa Hamid titled *Will You Love Me?* Which was published in 2023 by IMAN Publication. The novel belongs to the Muslim Chick-Lit or Chick-Literature genre.

The story follows Nieza, a Muslim woman who works as a cardiologist in Liverpool. Nieza was struggling with the feeling of loneliness as she was bullied all her life just because of her capabilities of “seeing the unseen”. Nieza is left questioning not only her worth as an individual but also her ability to love. As she battles with these inner conflicts, she is confronted by the expectations of her family, who believe in a very specific idea of what love and relationships should look like. The question at the heart of her journey is whether she will ever find someone who truly loves her for who she is, beyond societal expectations.

Conducting research on a Muslim chick literature, or chick lit, has proven to be mildly challenging due to the significant lack of available past studies in this specific genre. Since the genre is still new and underexplored, there are only few studies, works by Abdullah and Awan. (2017), Zaiyadi (2023), and Siti Hawa Muhammad et al. (2023) that help understand its themes and how it connects modern romance with Islamic culture.

The study of Muslim chick literature, or chick lit, should be important because it highlights the underrepresentation of Muslim women in contemporary fiction, particularly in genres like chick lit that explore love, relationships between friends and family, and personal growth in career. This gap provides an opportunity to challenge stereotypes and offer more diverse portrayals of Muslim women as independent and complex individuals navigating modern life while maintaining their cultural and religious values. Therefore, this study can hopefully be a contribution to future researchers that would like to do research on Muslim chick lit.

2. Chick-Lit or Chick-Literature

Chick-Lit or Chick-Literature is a form of popular fiction that can be traced back to the female-oriented novels of Charlotte Bronte and Jane Austen (Smith, 2007, as cited in Abdullah & Awan, 2017).



Meanwhile, Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1998) marks the beginning of the chick-lit tradition in the contemporary tradition (Ferris & Young, 2006, as cited in Abdullah & Awan, 2017). This genre of fiction exhibits characteristics that include humour, an urban heroine, love, marriage, dating, relationship, and a rebellious attitude towards convention (Abdullah & Awan, 2017).

Muslim chick-lit can be referred to as chick-lit written by Muslim women writers. According to Siti Hawa Muhamad (2021), chick-lit written by Muslim women in English is mostly produced in the diaspora or in the Indian subcontinent such as in India and Pakistan. One such example is Zahrah Janmohamed's memoir *Love in a Headscarf* (2009) which informs the readers about the actual experiences and thoughts of a young Muslim woman living in Britain.

3. Post-Feminism

According to Abdullah & Awan (2017) as cited in Zaiyadi (2023), post-feminism can be looked at from 2 aspects: 1) it is a mature form of feminism that has turned into a body of knowledge where it is appreciative of diversity within feminist circles and, 2) a feminist facet that is more relatable for modern, urban women of today.

While, others look at post-feminism as a reconnection of women to a pre-feminist stage, where they are concerned about domestic affairs, no less than their professional commitments and familial affairs (Modleski, 1991, and Whelehan, 2000, as cited in Abdullah and Awan, 2017).

Meanwhile, according to Faludi (1991) as cited in Abdullah and Awan (2017), post-feminism is in a sense a form of anti-feminism, where women who had won their way to political, economic, and social equality of genders, now wanted to rejoice in their beauty and bodily well-being.

4. Islamic Feminism

In Islamic feminism, Muslim women are reclaiming their rights through Islam and Quran and in effect liberating Islam and Muslim women from patriarchy. Islamic feminists work towards religious reformation and make efforts to address the concerns of Muslim women that remained neglected under the umbrella concept of feminism (Mir-Hosseni, 2011)

According to Badran (2009) as cited in Abdullah (2018), Nineteen-sixties are considered the first wave of Muslim feminism that was secular in its demeanour; it was the time when the globally second wave of feminism was flourishing around the world. An unbiased investigation of history reveals that Muslim women did not borrow the concept of feminism from the West. It was a product of their own independent mature gender thinking having roots in Muslim intellectual deliberations.

The lack of sense of association of Muslim youth, banality of the existing notions of feminism paved the way for Islamic feminism, or the second wave of Muslim feminism in the nineteen-eighties. The Quran to these young women was a resort to find answers to women's concerns. This gender awareness was religiously determined based on *ijtihad* and reasoning. Women belonging to this group did not call themselves feminists, as to them it was just Islam that they were relying on to work for rights of Muslim women.

5. Previous Studies

Some of the researches that studied contemporary Muslim women's fiction especially under the chic-lit genre include the following:

Zaiyadi (2023) analysed the novel *Will You Stay?* (2021) by Norhafsa Hamid in order to investigate the elements of post-feminism that are found in the novel and also to identify how the character in the novel preserves her Muslim identity in a non-Muslim environment. From the analysis, it is discovered that the female character in the story is not only concerned about her career, but she also acknowledges her femininity. As for the way she preserves her Muslim identity, even though she lives in a non-Muslim environment, she still observes Islamic laws and teachings.

Siti Hawa Muhamad et al. (2023) meanwhile focus their study on looking at Muslim women's problems in the West, particularly concerning Muslim women in hijab who are at risk of being labelled negatively especially in the media. Among the challenges faced by Muslim women in the West are dealing with the wrong perception about them, such as by donning hijab or head scarves they are seen as being oppressed rather than they are doing it out of their own choice. In addition to that, Muslim women in the West have to break the stereotypes that are attached to them. Besides having to deal with the challenges from outside, Muslim women too have to deal with challenges from within, such as they are subjected to clashes between pure, untainted Islamic practices and culturally enacted ones.

Abdullah and Awan (2017) in their analyses of two chick-lit novels *Beautiful from this Angle* (2010) by Maha Khan and *Karachi You're Killing Me* (2014) by Saba Imtiaz reveal the existence of carefree, smoking, drinking, dating, buoyant Muslim women who live their lives to their will.

In the novel *Karachi You're Killing Me* (2014), it looks into the life of the protagonist, Ayesha, a postmodern Pakistani Urban girl who makes personal freedom and pleasure as her top most priorities. Throughout the novel, appearance, beauty, body and self-care are emphasised as essential elements of a woman's life. In addition to that, sex and relationships outside marriage is one important theme that emerges out of the story.

Meanwhile, the novel *Beautiful from this Angle* (2010) is about three girls, Aynah, Mumtaz and Henna. Aynah is portrayed as a bold girl who dates men and has sexual relationships outside marriage. It is also told in the story that she writes about the hedonistic lifestyle that exists in her city (Karachi) and about the oppressed women in Pakistan.

Research on contemporary Muslim women's fiction, especially in the chick-lit genre, shows diverse portrayals of Muslim women. Zaiyadi (2023) finds that a female character can balance career, femininity, and strong Islamic identity even in a non-Muslim environment. Siti Hawa Muhamad et al. (2023) highlight challenges faced by Muslim women in the West, including stereotypes about hijab, negative media portrayals, and internal struggles between religious and cultural practices. Meanwhile, Abdullah and Awan (2017) show more liberal portrayals in novels like *Karachi You're Killing Me* and *Beautiful from this Angle*, where Muslim women are depicted as independent, pleasure-seeking, and sometimes engaging in non-traditional lifestyles.



6. Research Objectives

This research aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the elements of Islamic Post-feminism in the novel.
2. To investigate how the main character in the novel negotiates between love, family, career, and spirituality.

7. Research Methodology

This is a qualitative study that employs literary analysis in order to gather the data for the research.

For this study, the researcher did an in-depth reading of the text, which is the novel by Norhafsa Hamid titled *Will You Love Me?* (2023) in order to look for the post-feminist elements in the novel and also to investigate how the main character in the novel negotiates between love, family, career, and spirituality.

This novel was published by IMAN Publication in 2023.

8. Findings

8.1 Elements of Post-Feminism Found in the Novel

According to Abdullah & Awan (2017) as cited in Zaiyadi (2023), post-feminism is a body of knowledge where it is appreciative of diversity within feminist circles and, it is a feminist facet that is more relatable for modern, urban women of today. Post-feminism is also looked at as a reconnection of women to a pre-feminist stage, where they are concerned about domestic affairs, no less than their professional commitments and familial affairs.

In the novel, the main character, Nieza, is portrayed as an independent career woman. Even though she focuses her life on her career as she is training to become a specialist doctor, she still has the desire to have a life partner. In the story Nieza has a crush on a fellow doctor named Harris.

“Why are you in London? Or is that too personal to ask?” Nieza shook her head and smiled, “No. Not at all. Believe it or not, I had to attend a three-day course on cardiac life support. Why didn’t you stay on for another day? You could have done a little bit of sight-seeing.” Harris got up and bounded off to the buffet car... Oh God, if I’m dreaming, please don’t wake me up! Nieza prayed silently.

(page 67)

Even though Nieza desires to have her own life partner, she makes sure that she does this within the boundary that has been set by the religion.

“Whoa... Nieza, you really have an admirer! Way to go, girl!” Nieza rolled her eyes and sighed. “Yippee! I am sooo excited,” Nieza drawled sarcastically. Hassan chuckled. “Take it as a compliment. Someone actually likes you. Hocus pocus and all. You won’t die an old maid,”

Hassan joked. Nieza stuck her tongue out at him. “You know I don't date and the last thing I need is complication. This... is complication. Well, I'm not eating it. You can have this one as well.”

(page 91)

This is in line with what Allah SWT says in the Quran:

Also ‘forbidden are’ married women—except ‘female’ captives in your possession. This is Allah’s commandment to you. Lawful to you are all beyond these—as long as you seek them with your wealth in a legal marriage, not in fornication. Give those you have consummated marriage with their due dowries. It is permissible to be mutually gracious regarding the set dowry. Surely Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise. (An Nisa: 24)

In the pursuit of her career, Nieza still concerns about the feelings of her parents. She knows that her parents are getting old and need her to look after them. As much as she wants to achieve what she has set out for her career, she still feels the need to do her responsibility as a filial daughter.

Nieza remembered the conversation she had with her mom last week. Her mom told her that maybe it was time for her to come back to Malaysia. She said that both she and Nieza’s dad would like to see her settled down in Malaysia before they die. Her mom’s words unsettled Nieza for a bit. For years, her mom or dad had never asked her to come back so why now? They knew that she wanted to study as much as she could as well as to gain working experience. Nieza knew that her parents were getting old and that they would like to have their children nearby, or at least in the same country. Judging by her emotions now, perhaps her mom was right; maybe it was time for her to go back. Away from the dark clouds that were slowly gathering and threatening to block out all the lights from her life.

(page 62-63)

8.2 Negotiating Between Love, Family, Career, And Spirituality

8.2.1 Dealing with Love

In the novel, the main character, Nieza, is found to love romance films. She imagines herself being the heroine in a romantic scene.

Nieza loved black and white films where the hero dramatically chased after the train for the love of his life. Utterly romantic. She imagined herself, waving madly from the window of the train, at an unknown but handsome man running after her. Her muffler elegantly flapping in the air. The handsome hero called after her, “Nieza, don’t leave me. I can’t live without you!”

(page 58-59)

Other than that, Nieza develops a crush on Harris after many kind deeds that Harris has done for her. One of the main things he did was when Harris saved Nieza’s life which is referred to as that fateful day”.

Nieza thought it was very considerate of him. Some guys would probably have bragged about it for weeks but not Harris. Like Hassan said, Harris is a decent guy. Since that fateful day, Nieza had developed a crush on Harris but she dared not say anything to Amy for fear of being teased. Furthermore, Nieza was too shy to admit something like that to Amy or Hassan. To Nieza, it was just a harmless crush that would not lead to anything, so it was better for her to keep it hidden.

(page 66-67)

Nieza closed her eyes and inhaled deeply. She loves the smell of rain. Somehow she finds solace in the gloominess of the weather. She opened her eyes and found Harris staring at her. Thank god it was kind of dark. Else, Harris would have seen her turning beet red.

(page 75-76)

Later in the novel, Nieza is ecstatic when Harris confesses his feelings as well as proposing to her when they were meeting each other at a cafe.

“Harris, are you sure you want to marry me? You do know that people call me a freak,” asked Nieza earnestly. “If you’re a freak then I am one too. We are one of the same, Nieza. Two peas in the pod. Let us both be freaks, then. Two is better than one. Nieza, they can call you whatever they want. To me, you are never a freak but a beautiful soul. You are beautiful to me inside, out. You always see the goodness in others even if others are mean to you, I love you for the person that you are.”

(page 271)

8.2.2 Dealing with Familial Relationships

Nieza’s parents have always been understanding and supportive of her throughout her career journey. Even though Nieza loves her work and is very hardworking at the hospital in Liverpool, she still wants to keep a good relationship with her parents. Later in the novel, Nieza decides to go back to Malaysia to visit her parents.

Nieza remembered the conversation she had with her mom last week. Her mom told her that maybe it was time for her to come back to Malaysia. She said that both she and Nieza’s dad would like to see her settled down in Malaysia before they die. Her mom’s words unsettled Nieza for a bit. For years, her mom or dad had never asked her to come back so why now? They knew that she wanted to study as much as she could as well as to gain working experience. Nieza knew that her parents were getting old and that they would like to have their children nearby, or at least in the same country. Judging by her emotions now, perhaps her mom was right; maybe it was time for her to go back. Away from the dark clouds that were slowly gathering and threatening to block out all the lights from her life.

(page 62-63)

8.2.3 Dealing with Career



Despite her father, Dr. Ahmad, owns a clinic, Nieza wants to be independent from him as she wants to learn how to establish a clinic on her own and it is also one of her dreams.

Nieza's dad, Dr. Ahmad, is also a medical doctor and has his own clinic but Nieza has always wanted to have something of her own. Her dad never pressured her to take over his clinic as he knew of Nieza's dream. He wanted her to chart her own life journey and be happy.

(page 87)

Nieza is also very reliable and an ethical worker. She treats all her patients equally and makes sure they pay the exact amount according to their bills, no matter if they are friends and family. If there are any troubled patients who have questions, Nieza tries to communicate with them patiently.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Joyah. We don't have a group or family discount. Every patient pays the same full rate. Even Dr. Amy's dad paid the full bill. Our fees are not that high comparatively. How much is her bill, Sharon?"

(page 179)

8.2.4 Dealing with Spirituality

Even though Nieza is a modern independent career woman, she is found to be very spiritual. As a Muslim, Nieza is observant of Islamic teachings and values. One of the most basic teachings in Islam is for men and women to preserve their modesty i.e. to cover their *awrah*.

"Is your headscarf part of Islam also?" asked Alex. Nieza nodded. "Yes, it is. Women in Islam are to preserve their modesty and cover themselves from unworthy males," replied Nieza, her mouth twitched trying to control her smile.

(page 98-99)

"Yes, you're right, Alex. If I don't wear my headscarf, my parents won't know but God knows. I am a Muslim because I want to be. It's not just an inherited religion for me. I follow the teachings of Islam because I want to have a relationship with God. My choice. To cover myself is also my choice."

(page 100)

In the Quran, Allah SWT says the following about preserving one's modesty:

O children of Adam! We have provided for you clothing to cover your nakedness and as an adornment. However, the best clothing is righteousness. This is one of Allah's bounties, so perhaps you will be mindful. (Al-A'raf: 26)

O Prophet! Ask your wives, daughters, and believing women to draw their cloaks over their bodies. In this way it is more likely that they will be recognized 'as virtuous' and not be harassed. And Allah is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (Al-Ahzab: 59)

In the novel, Nieza also observes the prohibition of consuming food that is deemed unlawful in Islam.

Hassan knows that Nieza is very careful about her food intake. She makes sure that the food is completely halal and comes from reliable sources. She does not eat food comin from strangers. Some people might think of Nieza as fussy or petty but to Hassan and Amy, they both appreciate Nieza's strictness when it comes to food. The food that one takes in is very important as it forms part of the flesh and blood. Tainted food will taint the body, as well as the heart. To purify one's heart, it does not only require constant worship but also to ensure the food eaten is completely pure.

(page 93)

Allah SWT says in the Quran:

So eat from the good, lawful things which Allah has provided for you, and be grateful for Allah's favours, if you 'truly' worship Him 'alone'. (An-Nahl: 114)

In addition to that, to make sure that she prevents herself from committing something that is sinful especially with regard to her desire and feeling towards the opposite gender, she tries not to gaze at men.

She sighed as she watched Harris hailed a taxi. Now that she had a closer look at him, he does look like Clark Kent, thought Nieza. You are supposed to lower your gaze not ogled him, Nieza scolded herself.

(page 77)

Regarding this, Allah SWT says in the Quran:

And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity, and not to reveal their adornmentsI except what normally appears... (An-Nur: 31)

Nieza is also someone who has strong faith in God's plan and she puts her trust in what God has set for her in her life.

"Insha Allah, maybe you will, one day," replied Nieza. "What does that mean? Is it Latin or a Malaysian word?" asked Harris.

Nieza laughed, "It's neither. It's actually Arabic which means 'if Allah Wills it'. Basically, it means that God has decided for anything to happen, it will, regardless. As Muslims we are required to say that because although we can plan, God is the best Planner and He decides everything. So, everything will happen according to His Decree and Will."

"Mmm... I like that. I must try to learn that phrase." "Here's another one; 'kun fayaku' which means if God decides it then it will happen regardless, so nothing is impossible." Harris's eyes widened, "Wow! That's deep."

(page 72)

Concerning this, Allah SWT says in the Quran:

But if they turn away, then say, 'O Prophet,' "Allah is sufficient for me. There is no god 'worthy of worship' except Him. In Him I put my trust. And He is the Lord of the Mighty Throne." (At-Tawbah: 129)

In relation to that, Nieza also believes that God has in His plan what is best for her, especially in terms of the person who will one day become her life partner.

Whenever Nieza remembered the incident where Harris carried her into the Emergency Department when she collapsed outside the hospital, she would blush like a school girl. But the fact remained, God had saved her through him. God had arranged as such that it was him who was there. Not Hassan or Amy, or anyone else. It was him who saw her, and it was him who immediately helped her. It was fate.

(page 65)

Allah SWT says about this in the Quran:

and We created you in pairs, (An-Naba: 8)

Wicked women are for wicked men, and wicked men are for wicked women. And virtuous women are for virtuous men, and virtuous men are for virtuous women. The virtuous are innocent of what the wicked say. They will have forgiveness and an honourable provision. (An-Nur: 26)

Finally, from the novel, we learn that Nieza is not only an observant and faithful Muslim, and she also has a strong belief in the unseen. Nieza is portrayed in a novel as someone who has the capability to 'see' the unseen.

"Satan is one of the jinn but was thrown out of heaven because of its arrogance in refusing to prostrate to Prophet Adam. In the Quran, satan is known as ibles. So, jinn are part of the unseen. There's no ghost actually, because a ghost is jinn in the form of other beings," explained Nieza. "So, in actual fact, we could only see jinn in the form that they had taken, like dogs, cats, snake, silhouette etc."

(page 52)

"Every time we pray, we recite surah Al-Fatihah, asking God to guide us to the straight path. I believe our instincts are also guidance from God so we need to trust our instincts at times," said Hassan. "I agree," Nieza concurred. "So, in a nutshell, we should only seek protection from God Almighty as it is the only He Who has the power and authority to protect us from all kinds of evil and harm, correct?" "Correct! Clever girl," quipped Hassan. Amy simply glared at him. "He is Al-Muhaymin, the Protector," said Nieza.

(page 56)



“Unseen? What do you mean?”

“You know that I’m a Muslim, right?” Harris nodded. Well, in Islam, we do believe in the devil and jinn. Jinn is the unseen being. I believe most people call them ghosts. In the Quran, it explains very well about the creation of men, devil, and also jinn.”

“Quran is your book of guidance, isn’t it?”

“Correct.”

“Wow, I didn’t know that. Can you see the unseen?”

“Well, I could see something but what exactly it was, I can’t really say. You see, in the Quran, it states very clearly that human can never see the devil and jinn in their original forms. The devil and jinn were created from fire as human was created from clay. Human can only see the form that the devil takes. Either in a form of a human or animal.” Harris’s jaw dropped. He quickly closed his mouth.

(page 74)

In the Quran, Allah SWT indicates that those who believe in the unseen are those who possess Taqwa (fear of Allah) and Iman (faith):

This is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear Allah; (Al-Baqarah: 2)

Who believe in the Unseen, are steadfast in prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them; (Al-Baqarah: 3)

9. Conclusion

The findings of the research can be summarised as follows:

9.1 Elements of Post-Feminism Found in the Novel

9.1.1 Not only dedicating her life to achieving career success, a post-feminist character is also looking for success in her personal life too.

In the novel, the main character, Nieza, is portrayed as an independent career woman. Even though she focuses her life on her career as she is training to become a specialist doctor, she still has the desire to have a life partner. In the story Nieza has a crush on a fellow doctor named Harris.

9.1.2 A post-feminist character is also concerned about familial affairs no less than her professional commitment.

In the pursuit of her career, Nieza still concerns about the feelings of her parents. She knows that her parents are getting old and need her to look after them. As much as she wants to achieve what she has set out for her career, she still feels the need to do her responsibility as a filial daughter.

9.1.3 These findings are in line with what is proposed by Modleski (1991) and Whelehan (2000) as cited in Abdullah and Awan (2017) who look at post-feminism as a reconnection of women

to a pre-feminist stage, where they are concerned about domestic affairs, no less than their professional commitments and familial affairs.

9.2 Ways how the main character in the novel negotiates between love, family, career, and spirituality

9.2.1 Dealing with Love

Nieza, the novel's main character, is seen as a hopelessly romantic person. From the novel we learn that she is a big fan of romance films. She often imagines herself being the heroine in a romantic scene.

In real life, Nieza develops a crush on Harris after many kind deeds that Harris has done for her. Nieza refers to the day Harris saved life which is as "that fateful day".

When Harris confesses his feelings as well as proposing to her when they were meeting each other at a café, Nieza understandably becomes ecstatic.

9.2.2 Dealing with Familial Relationships

Even though Nieza loves her work and is very hardworking at the hospital in Liverpool, she still wants to keep a good relationship with her parents. Later in the novel, Nieza decides to go back to Malaysia to visit her parents.

9.2.3 Dealing with Career

Although her father owns clinic, Nieza still wants to be independent and learn how to establish her own clinic as it is also one of her dreams.

As a doctor, Nieza is a very reliable and an ethical worker. She treats all her patients equally and makes sure they pay the exact amount according to their bills, no matter if they are friends and family. If there are any troubled patients who have questions, Nieza tries to communicate with them patiently.

9.2.4 Dealing with Spirituality

Even though Nieza is a modern independent career woman, she is found to be very spiritual. As a Muslim, Nieza is observant of Islamic teachings and values. One of the most basic teachings in Islam is for men and women to preserve their modesty i.e. to cover their awrah. Despite living in a non-Muslim country, Nieza adamantly observes the prohibition of consuming food that is deemed unlawful in Islam.

In addition to that, to make sure that she prevents herself from committing something that is sinful especially with regard to her desire and feeling towards the opposite gender, she tries not to gaze at men.

Nieza is also someone who has strong faith in God's plan and she puts her trust in what God has set for her in her life. In relation to this, Nieza also believes that God has in His plan what is best for her, especially in terms of the person who will one day become her life partner. From the novel, we also learn that Nieza is not only an observant and faithful Muslim, and she also has a strong belief in the unseen. Nieza is portrayed in a novel as someone who has the capability to 'see' the unseen.

9.3 Comparison with Findings from Previous Studies

The findings of this research can be compared to the findings of the study conducted by Zaiyadi (2023) who did an analysis of a novel by the same author (Norhafsa Hamid). The fact that the novel *Will You Love Me?* (2023) serves as some sort of a sequel to *Will You Stay?* (2021), we can see the similarity between the two novels in terms of the theme, portrayals of the female characters and the issues that these characters have to deal with, albeit the protagonists in both novels are different individuals. There are a lot of similarities that we can see in Amy and Nieza (the protagonist from the two novels), not just because they are best friends, but because of the way how they carry themselves and how they as female Muslims who uphold religious teachings and principles have to deal with their environment and issues that surround them. As can be seen from the analyses of both novels, it is obvious too that the novels align with the postfeminist perspective.

In addition to that, the findings of this study can also be compared to the findings of the study by Siti Hawa Muhamad et al. (2023). Both studies are looking at the challenges that Muslim women in the West received and how they are being viewed for their persistence in upholding their religious identities such as wearing the hijab and practicing their religious obligations. Although in the study by Siti hawa Muhamad et al. (2023) indicates that Muslim women receive negative views especially in western media, there is a more positive reception to Muslim identities among the western society as indicated in the novel *Will You Love Me?* (2023).

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