



THE ANALYSIS OF MENTAL METAPHORS IN LEILA

ABOULELA’S NOVEL “MINARET”

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Abstract: This article examines the role of mental metaphors in Leila Aboulela’s novel *Minaret*, analyzing how cognitive linguistics can uncover deeper layers of meaning in the protagonist’s experiences. Through a detailed study of metaphorical expressions related to faith, displacement, and self-identity, the research highlights the cognitive mechanisms that shape the protagonist’s perception of her journey. The study draws upon Conceptual Metaphor Theory to explore how abstract emotions and cultural transformations are mapped onto concrete experiences. The findings demonstrate that Aboulela employs mental metaphors to depict the protagonist’s psychological evolution, reinforcing the novel’s themes of spiritual awakening and cultural hybridity. This analysis contributes to cognitive literary studies by illustrating how metaphor serves as a cognitive bridge between personal experience and broader socio-cultural realities.

Key words: mental metaphor, cognitive analysis, culture, novel, character, theme, symbol



“Minaret” by Leila Aboulela is a major work that explores female religious identity, Islamic culture and self-discovery. This book describing the inner world of the characters, their spiritual journey, and the depiction of Islamic culture based on mental metaphors or cognitive metaphors. And the insight of mental analogies animates Aboulela’s writing in explaining not just religion and culture, but also the characters’ struggles and spiritual pursuits.

As a conceptual metaphor, the title of the novel, “Minaret,” is interesting itself. A minaret is primarily known in Islamic culture as a building associated with a place of worship already known as a mosque. The minaret is not just the pinnacle of a mosque where prayers are lifted and heard; it also symbolizes upward mobility, spiritual ascent, and the inner journey of faith. The title “Minaret” reflects the transformative journey of Nazira, the protagonist, as she rediscovers her inner world, reclaims her spiritual path, and reaffirms her religious identity.

Throughout the novel, the metaphor of the minaret serves as a powerful symbol of Nazira’s spiritual quest and her profound metamorphosis. She begins as a woman adrift, grappling with spiritual turmoil and caught between her religious convictions and personal struggles. Yet, she yearns to elevate herself—much like the towering minaret—seeking a deeper understanding of religion and the essence of Islamic values.

Early in the novel, Nazira voices her internal conflict and the weight of her doubts, revealing the depth of her spiritual unrest. Nazira discusses her internal conflict and state of doubt in one of the novel's opening pages: *"Now I look up to see the minaret of the mosque above the trees. I might not see it again from this particular angle..."*

This section highlights how deeply the minaret symbolizes Nazira’s journey of self-discovery and spiritual awakening. For her, climbing to the top of the minaret represents a path to spiritual liberation—a way to rise above her struggles and emerge from the shadows of despair.



The novel “Minaret” uses powerful mental metaphors like "light" and "darkness" to illustrate Nazira’s inner conflicts and spiritual quest. "Light" is often a symbol of faith, truth, self-realization, and spiritual renewal, while "darkness" captures her moments of spiritual doubt, weakening faith, and a sense of being lost.

In the later chapters, Nazira reflects deeply on her spiritual and theological transformation. Her growth is vividly portrayed through the tension between light and darkness—a struggle that mirrors her journey toward clarity and inner peace: *"A hollow place. A darkness that would suck me in and finish me.."* This passage captures the complexity and inner struggle of Nazira’s spiritual journey. She grapples with the challenge of moving toward spiritual renewal and embracing the light. Her inner transformation is deeply influenced by her growing acceptance and understanding of this light.

In “Minaret”, the themes of freedom and patience are explored as profound metaphors. Patience, a cornerstone of Islamic culture, is portrayed as a steady, composed, and disciplined way of life. For Nazira, patience means learning to master her worldly desires and internal conflicts, guiding her toward a simpler, more contemplative existence.

In contrast, freedom symbolizes self-discovery, social acceptance, and spiritual liberation. As Nazira delves deeper into a life rooted in faith, her longing for both patience and freedom grows stronger. Her journey becomes a delicate balance—learning to embody patience while striving for the personal freedom that comes with inner peace and spiritual enlightenment.

The book encourages us to be patient in other areas of life as well as in the religious order. However, freedom comes from embracing Nazira's religious beliefs and social position in society. *"This empty space was called freedom.."*

In “Minaret”, the "garden" and "grapes" serve as rich symbols of Nazira's journey toward self-awareness. The grape often represents material desires and inner passions, but it also reflects the struggles individuals face when adapting to societal expectations and the



risk of losing their sense of self. In contrast, the garden symbolizes purity, spiritual life, and self-discovery. It is a place of renewal and upward growth. For Nazira, cultivating the garden mirrors her own spiritual awakening and personal growth. Aboulela uses this metaphor to highlight Nazira’s transformative journey—her process of self-discovery, the revival of her inner world, and her fresh perspective on life. *"Like the vineyard that requires care and attention, I realized that my soul, too, needed to be cultivated. The grapes were no longer just fruit; they were the result of patience, the promise of a harvest to come."*

In “Minaret”, Leila Aboulela masterfully explores Nazira’s spiritual and personal growth through vivid mental metaphors. Symbols such as the minaret, light and darkness, freedom and patience, and the garden provide profound insight into her inner struggles and journey of self-discovery within the context of Islamic culture. These metaphors not only reflect Nazira’s internal conflict regarding her religious identity but also illuminate her quest for spiritual freedom, balance, and understanding. Through Aboulela’s skillful use of cognitive imagery, readers are invited to reflect on the complexities of faith, the challenges of spiritual ascent, and the transformative power of patience and introspection in overcoming personal turmoil. The symbolic richness in “Minaret” stands as a testament to the profound potential of faith to inspire transformation and renewal.



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