



UNIBEN ENGLISH AND LITERATURE JOURNALS

Department of English and Literature
BENIN JOURNAL OF LITERARY STUDIES (BJLS)



<https://unibenenljournals.com>
ISSN (print): 1118-5538

Vol. 3, pp. 40-51, 2025

AN APPRAISAL OF MARITAL CHOICES AND THE MODERNIST CRISIS IN
FATIMAH BALA MOHAMMED'S *BROKEN, NOT A HALAL STORY*

Tolulope Rhoda Olajubu

Abstract

The article appraises the intricate relationship between marital choices and the modernist crisis as depicted in Fatimah Bala Mohammed's novel, *Broken, Not a Halal Story* (2020). Focusing on the protagonists Fa'iza Mohammed and Ahmad Babangida, the study argues that the novel is a critical exploration of how Nigerian Muslim youths navigate the tension between traditional religious prescriptions and modern individualistic desires. Fa'iza's internal conflict, rooted in her conservative upbringing and the familial expectation of a religiously sanctioned marriage, is posited as a microcosm of a broader crisis of authority within the diaspora. In contrast, Ahmad embodies a post-traditional Muslim identity, one that privileges personal autonomy and a de-sacralized approach to relationships. By analyzing their divergent perspectives, the article demonstrates how the modernist crisis fractures the conventional understanding of a "halal story," exposing the limitations of rigid religious frameworks in accommodating the complexities of modern love and identity. Ultimately, this appraisal posits that the novel offers a refined critique of societal double standards and gendered religious expectations, arguing that the "broken" relationship is a realistic and depressing outcome of this irreconcilable ideological clash, rather than a moral failure. This research contributes to ongoing scholarly dialogues in contemporary African literature, gender studies, and the sociology of religion, providing a framework for understanding the lived experiences of modern Muslim youths.

Keywords: Modernist crisis, Nigerian Muslim youth, marital choices, diaspora, gendered expectations.

Tolulope Rhoda Olajubu
School of Business and Management Studies, Federal Polytechnic.
email: olajubutolulope33@gmail.com, tololajubu@fedpolel.edu.ng

<https://unibenenljournals.com>

Introduction

Fatimah Bala Mohammed's *Broken, Not a Halal Story* (hereafter referred to as *BNHS*) has emerged as a significant contemporary novel, sparking a compelling and often contentious discourse around the intricate intersections of love, faith, and identity within the African Muslim diaspora. The novel, celebrated for its candid portrayal of a young Muslim couple's relationship, challenges conventional narratives by delving into the emotional and ideological complexities that define modern romance. It has been widely received as a powerful romance, yet its depth extends beyond a simple love story, serving as a critical lens through which to examine the socio-religious tensions experienced by a generation navigating a world of competing values. This paper contends that the novel's central conflict, the protagonists' struggle with marital choices, is not merely a personal tragedy but a profound reflection of a broader, epochal struggle- the modernist crisis. By situating the novel within this theoretical framework, we can move beyond a surface-level reading to a deeper, more academically enriching analysis of its cultural and religious implications.

The contemporary Nigerian literary landscape has undergone a significant transformation, moving beyond the post-colonial and nationalist narratives that once dominated the discourse. A burgeoning group of authors, including Mohammed, are now focusing on the delicate complexities of urban life, global migration, and the evolving nature of religious practice in a cosmopolitan context (Adesanmi 21). This new wave of literature is characterized by its engagement with themes of identity formation, the search for meaning in a globalized world, and the negotiation of traditional values within a modern framework. Authors are increasingly exploring how Nigerian youths, both at home and abroad, are adapting their cultural and religious identities in response to new social and economic realities (Eze 82). *BNHS* is a prime example of this trend, offering a window into the lives of young, educated Nigerian Muslims who are attempting to reconcile their Islamic faith with the individualistic desires and romantic ideals of the 21st century.

While *BNHS* has garnered significant popular attention and some critical commentary, there is a notable research gap in the academic reception of the novel. Existing analyses often focus on its romantic and religious dimensions without a sustained engagement with the underlying theoretical tensions. For instance, the moralist critique often views the "brokenness" of Fa'iza and Ahmad's relationship through a lens of religious deviance, arguing that the tragedy stems from a failure to strictly adhere to *Sunnah* or traditional courtship (Amina 14). The Romantic Idealist reading, on the other hand, exemplified by critics such as Nasiba Bawa, often focuses on the 'toxic' psychological traits of the protagonists. This perspective frames the narrative as a cautionary tale of individual emotional immaturity. However, such an approach tends to pathologize the characters' personal failings at the expense of recognizing the structural consequences of modernity that dictate their choices. The novel's central conflict, the "brokenness" of the relationship, is typically attributed to individual failings or a misinterpretation of religious edicts. However, this interpretation fails to fully capture the structural and ideological forces at play.

There is a pressing need, therefore, for a deeper academic analysis that situates the protagonists' marital choices and subsequent struggles within a broader theoretical

framework, specifically that of the modernist crisis. This crisis, as conceptualized in sociological and cultural theory, refers to the societal and psychological fragmentation that occurs as traditional, communal, and faith-based frameworks of meaning are challenged by the rise of secularization, individualism, and rational choice (Giddens 5). This paper aims to fill this gap by demonstrating that the novel's romantic and religious conflicts are symptomatic of this deeper, unresolved ideological clash.

The paper argues that Fatimah Bala Mohammed's *BNHS* serves as a critical examination of how Nigerian Muslim youths navigate the tension between traditional religious prescriptions for marriage and modern individualistic desires. The novel demonstrates that the "brokenness" of the central relationship is a direct and inevitable outcome of this irreconcilable ideological clash. Through its narrative, Mohammed suggests that the modernist emphasis on personal fulfillment, emotional connection, and self-determination is fundamentally at odds with traditional Islamic frameworks that prioritize communal harmony, familial approval, and adherence to prescribed religious roles, thereby creating an inherent and often painful paradox for its protagonists.

The critical reception of *BNHS* thus far represents a significant, albeit fragmented, understanding of the text's cultural impact. On one hand, the 'Moralist Critique' (Amina 14) views the protagonists' failure through a didactic lens of religious non-compliance. On the other, the 'Romantic Idealist' reading, as seen in the work of Bawa, pathologizes the relationship as a victim of individual 'toxicity' and emotional immaturity. While these perspectives offer valuable insights into the novel's psychological and religious realism, they remain limited by their focus on individual agency. This paper, therefore, moves beyond these localized interpretations by adopting a broader sociological perspective. As Eze suggests, the modern African novel is often a site where 'subjective realism' meets communal tradition (82). By synthesizing these viewpoints, this paper contends that the 'brokenness' of Fa'iza and Ahmad's relationship is neither a mere moral failure nor a personality defect. Rather, it is an inevitable manifestation of the modernist crisis. Drawing on Giddens's (1992) theory of the 'pure relationship' and Taylor's (1991) 'malaise of modernity,' this appraisal posits that the novel serves as a profound critique of the irreconcilable clash between the reflexive project of the self and the rigid requirements of a 'halal' framework. Ultimately, this paper argues that the novel's tragic conclusion is a realistic reflection of the structural fractures inherent in the lives of modern Muslim youths navigating the diaspora.

This paper will, therefore, employ a socio-literary analysis of *BNHS*. The paper will focus on a close reading of the novel's themes, character development, and narrative structure. The study will be supported by relevant theories from sociology and cultural studies, particularly those concerning modernity, individualism, and religious identity. Key theoretical concepts from scholars such as Anthony Giddens on the "pure relationship" and the "reflexive project of the self" (186), and Charles Taylor on the "malaise of modernity" (10), will be used to deconstruct the motivations and struggles of the characters. By integrating these theoretical lenses with a detailed textual analysis, this paper seeks to offer an in-depth and academically rigorous interpretation of the novel's profound cultural and social commentary.

Religion, Marriage, and Modernity in African Literature

Fatimah Bala Mohammed's novel *BNHS* offers a compelling narrative that delves into the complex interplay between religion, modernity, and individual agency within the context of the Muslim diaspora. As a work of contemporary African literature, it joins a growing body of texts that critically examine the tensions arising from the negotiation of traditional values and globalized, modern sensibilities. This review aims to contextualize Mohammed's novel within existing scholarship, providing an academic framework for an in-depth analysis of its core themes. The review is structured around three key subheadings: "Religion, Gender, and Modernity in African Literature," "The Muslim Diaspora and Identity Formation," and "Marital Choices in Contemporary Muslim Society." By engaging with established theoretical and critical perspectives, this appraisal seeks to lay the groundwork for a robust and academically rigorous article on the novel.

The intersection of religion, gender, and modernity has long been a central preoccupation in African literature. Early post-colonial texts, such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), often depicted the clash between indigenous traditions and the incursion of Christian missionary culture. More recently, however, scholars have turned their attention to the internal dynamics of religious belief and its negotiation with modern life, particularly within Islamic and Christian contexts (Egejuru 124).

In Islamic African literature, a notable thread explores the ways in which women navigate patriarchal religious structures and seek personal and professional fulfillment in a globalized world. Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* examine how female characters challenge or subvert traditional roles within the family and community. This aligns with scholarship that views African women's writing as a form of "cultural reclamation" and resistance against both colonial and patriarchal forces (Ogundipe-Leslie 28). The modernist crisis, in this context, is not merely a rejection of tradition but a complex process of reinterpretation and adaptation. It involves a "selective incorporation" of modern ideas, where individuals seek to reconcile their faith with aspirations for autonomy and self-determination (Mbembe 142). *BNHS* contributes to this discourse by foregrounding the protagonist's struggle to find agency within a faith-based framework, demonstrating how modernity presents both a challenge to and an opportunity for a renegotiated religious identity.

The experiences of the Muslim diaspora constitute a significant and burgeoning field of literary and cultural studies. Diaspora literature, as articulated by the scholar Stuart Hall, focuses on the fluid, hybrid nature of identity that emerges from migration and displacement (223). For Muslims in the West, this process is particularly complex, involving the negotiation of multiple identities: national, ethnic, religious, and gendered. *BNHS* is set in this transnational space, where the protagonist's sense of self is shaped by her Nigerian heritage, her British residency, and her Islamic faith.

Existing scholarship on the Muslim diaspora examines how these communities grapple with issues of representation, belonging, and the often-stereotypical gaze of the host society (Said 322). Writers in this space, such as Mohsin Hamid (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*) and Leila Aboulela (*Minaret*), explore themes of cultural alienation

and the search for spiritual and physical homes. Aboulela's work, in particular, resonates with Mohammed's novel by exploring the nuances of piety and the personal crises of faith that occur far from the home country. The identity crisis faced by diasporic Muslims is often framed as a choice between assimilation and an assertion of a distinct, often politicized, religious identity (Mamdani 17). Mohammed's novel, by contrast, seems to suggest a more refined third path, one where identity is not a static choice but a continuous negotiation, marked by both a connection to tradition and a quest for personal authenticity. The novel's engagement with the diaspora experience challenges simplistic narratives of cultural clash, offering a window into the lived realities of hybridity and transcultural belonging.

The institution of marriage, as both a social and religious cornerstone, is a central theme in African and diasporic literature. In contemporary Muslim society, as depicted in literature and sociological studies, marital choices are increasingly fraught with tensions between familial expectations, religious injunctions, and individual desires for companionship and compatibility. The scholar, Deniz Kandiyoti has discussed the concept of "patriarchal bargain," where women negotiate within a patriarchal system to secure a degree of power and security (275). In *BNHS*, this "bargain" is placed under scrutiny as the protagonist navigates the pressures of finding a "halal" partner while also seeking a meaningful, egalitarian relationship.

Many contemporary novels from the Muslim world and its diaspora, such as Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love* and Uzma Jalaluddin's *Ayesha at Last*, explore the shift from arranged marriages to more modern courtship rituals, often with humorous and critical undertones. These narratives highlight the generational divide between parents who prioritize religious and social compatibility (often defined by a rigid set of rules) and a younger generation that values personal connection and mutual respect (Cooke 154). Mohammed's novel directly engages with this tension, framing the protagonist's struggle as a "modernist crisis" of choice. The text critiques the rigidity of certain social norms that, while rooted in religious tradition, may fail to account for individual emotional and spiritual needs. By focusing on the protagonist's deeply personal decision-making process, *BNHS* contributes to a body of literature that re-evaluates the role of marriage as not just a religious or social obligation but as a site of personal and spiritual growth.

Critical Reception: Beyond the Romantic Surface

Despite its significant impact on the contemporary West African literary scene, the critical discourse surrounding *BNHS* has remained largely confined to the realms of "subjective emotionality and moral didacticism" (Amina 12). Existing reviews frequently treat the novel as a "cautionary manual for young Muslims" rather than a complex sociological artifact. For instance, much of the digital reception focuses on the protagonists' perceived moral failings, with readers often critiquing the characters' "lack of patience" or "departure from traditional modesty" (Bawa). This study, however, argues that such readings are symptomatic of a critical gap that fails to account for the structural inevitability of the couple's collapse.

The "brokenness" of the title is often misinterpreted as a personal choice, whereas a close reading of the text reveals it to be a byproduct of an irreconcilable ideological

clash. In the opening chapters, Fa'iza's internal monologue highlights the heavy burden of communal expectation: "I wanted to be the girl who did everything right. The one who stayed within the lines, who made her parents proud, and who found love in the most 'halal' way possible" (BNHS 14). The language of "staying within the lines" suggests a spatialization of morality that is increasingly difficult to maintain in the "fluidity of the diaspora" (Hall 223). Existing criticism fails to analyze how this desire for "halal" perfection is at odds with the modern quest for personal authenticity.

Furthermore, Ahmad's character is frequently dismissed in popular reviews as "toxic" or "emotionally unavailable." Yet, the text presents his behavior as a manifestation of a de-sacralized approach to relationships. He explicitly challenges the traditional framework when he tells Fa'iza: "You're so obsessed with the 'halal-ness' of this that you've forgotten how to actually be in a relationship. We aren't characters in a storybook, Fa'iza. We are real people with real, messy feelings" (BNHS 204). This dialogue serves as a primary source of evidence for what this paper identifies as the modernist crisis. While critics see "messiness" as a character flaw, this study posits it as a "reflexive project of the self" (Giddens 186) attempting to break free from the "malaise of modernity" (Taylor 10).

The gap in scholarship is thus clearly defined: while the popular "Moralist Critique" and "Romantic Idealist" readings pathologize the individual, there is a total absence of an appraisal that situates this "brokenness" within a broader theoretical framework of modernist fragmentation. By moving the focus from the characters' "moral failure" to their "ideological entrapment," this paper offers an original and necessary contribution to the sociology of the African Muslim novel.

Ahmad Babangida and the Post-Traditional Muslim Identity

Unlike Fa'iza, who seeks to validate her identity through communal and religious benchmarks, Ahmad's identity is constructed through personal autonomy. He views the "Halal Story" not as a sacred path, but as a restrictive social performance. This is evident when he confronts Fa'iza regarding the performative nature of their courtship: "I'm tired of performing, Fa'iza. I'm tired of this charade where we pretend we're living in some fourteenth-century village. We are in London. It's the twenty-first century. Can't we just be us?" (BNHS 112). Ahmad's frustration reveals the modernist crisis in its most acute form, the rejection of "moral horizons" in favor of individual "authenticity" (Taylor 14). His character arc challenges the reader to look past the "toxic" label assigned by popular reviews and see a man caught in the malaise of modernity. He is a "post-traditional" subject who attempts to de-sacralize his relationship to make it "real."

Ahmad's approach to love aligns with Giddens's concept of the "pure relationship," which is "stayed in only as long as each party derives sufficient satisfaction" (58). This is fundamentally at odds with the Islamic conception of marriage as a *mithaq* (covenant) that transcends individual happiness for the sake of God and community. When the relationship becomes difficult, Ahmad does not turn to religious patience (*Sabr*); he turns inward: "If this is what being 'halal' feels like- suffocating, pressured, and fake- then maybe I don't want it. I want something that breathes. I want a connection that doesn't need a label to justify it" (BNHS 189). Through this remark, the

novel exposes the "brokenness" not as a lack of love, but as an irreconcilable ideological clash. Ahmad's quest for a relationship that "breathes" is a direct challenge to the "rigid religious frameworks" that Fa'iza clings to for safety.

The Structural Necessity of "Brokenness": A Synthesis of Ideological Clash

The terminal "brokenness" of Fa'iza and Ahmad's relationship is the realistic climax of what Charles Taylor describes as the "fragmented horizons" of modernity (26). The text reveals that their struggle is a zero-sum game: for Fa'iza to achieve the "halal" ideal, Ahmad must sacrifice his "authenticity"; for Ahmad to achieve "personal fulfillment," Fa'iza must abandon her "moral framework."

The impossibility of this reconciliation is captured in their final, exhaustive confrontations. Fa'iza views the dissolution as a failure of spiritual endurance:

"I tried to build a house on a foundation you didn't believe in. You wanted a 'connection,' but I wanted a covenant. You wanted something that 'breathed,' but I wanted something that lasted. How can two people walk the same path when they are looking at two different maps?" (BNHS 245).

Here, the "maps" represent the competing frameworks of meaning. Fa'iza's use of the word "covenant" invokes a traditional, sacred permanence, while Ahmad's desire for a relationship that "breathes" reflects the "pure relationship" that Giddens identifies as being subject to "reflexive monitoring" and constant renegotiation (58).

Ahmad's response serves as the definitive statement on the modernist crisis of authority. He rejects the idea that their failure is a moral one, framing it instead as a liberation from a suffocating artifice:

"Stop acting like this is a tragedy of faith, Fa'iza. It's a tragedy of timing. We are trying to force a square peg into a round hole. You want me to be a 'Halal' husband, a title defined by your parents and your community, but you never once asked who I actually am when the prayer rug is folded away. We are broken because we were never whole; we were just two people trying to fit into a story that wasn't written for us." (BNHS 261).

Ahmad's critique of the "story that wasn't written for us" is a direct hit at the "Halal Story" trope. He exposes the "halal" framework as a prescriptive narrative that cannot accommodate the "messy, real people" of the diaspora. His assertion that the "prayer rug is folded away" suggests a compartmentalization of faith that Fa'iza, in her quest for a holistic religious life, cannot accept.

The finality of their "brokenness" is not, as some critics suggest, a "moral failure" (Amina 14) or "emotional immaturity" (Bawa). Instead, it is a structural necessity. As the novel concludes, Fa'iza's realization reflects the "malaise of modernity" where the loss of a shared moral horizon leads to inevitable isolation:

"I realized then that 'halal' isn't just a set of rules; it's a shared reality. And if you don't share that reality, all the rules in the world won't keep you together. We weren't just two people breaking up; we were two worlds colliding and finding they couldn't occupy the same space." (*BNHS* 288).

This exhaustive evidence proves that Mohammed's novel is a sophisticated critique of the modernist crisis. The "broken" ending is the only intellectually honest outcome for characters caught between the "reflexive project of the self" and a "traditional religious framework" that they can no longer inhabit with equal conviction.

An Appraisal of Marital Choices in *BNHS*

The analysis of Fatimah Bala Mohammed's *BNHS* is best situated within the broader theoretical discourse on modernity, individualism, and the transformation of social institutions. This framework posits that the protagonist's challenges with marital choice are not merely personal or familial, but are symptomatic of a fundamental "modernist crisis" in which traditional, communitarian structures are confronted by the forces of individualism and self-reflexivity. Drawing on key sociological and philosophical theories, we can understand marital choice in the novel as a critical site where the struggle between collective religious identity and individual self-actualization is most keenly felt. The theoretical lens presented here will illuminate how the characters' negotiations of love, faith, and identity are reflective of a global phenomenon in which traditional social blueprints are being redrawn, often with significant friction.

Defining the "Modernist Crisis"

The "modernist crisis" in this context refers to the profound destabilization of traditional social norms and institutions, particularly those that once provided a clear and unassailable framework for life choices. Anthony Giddens's concept of "reflexive modernity" provides a robust starting point. According to Giddens, in modern societies, individuals are increasingly compelled to actively construct their identities and life narratives rather than inheriting them (5). The "pure relationship," a model where a relationship is maintained only as long as both parties find sufficient gratification from it, contrasts sharply with traditional marital forms rooted in obligation, lineage, and social stability (58).

In *BNHS*, Fa'iza's desire for a partner based on emotional connection, rather than purely on religious or familial sanction, is a classic manifestation of this "pure relationship" ideal clashing with a traditional model. This is evidenced when she reflects on the sterile nature of her parents' expectations: "I was supposed to want the man with the right lineage, the right degree, and the right beard. But I wanted someone who knew the shape of my soul, not just the strength of my father's name" (*BNHS* 42).

Furthermore, Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid modernity" offers another layer of analysis. Bauman argues that contemporary life is characterized by fluidity and instability, where institutions and relationships are fleeting and subject to constant change (2). In this "liquid" state, the enduring commitment of traditional marriage

appears to be an anomaly. The novel's portrayal of dating and the anxieties surrounding long-term commitment in a transient, diasporic setting reflects this. Ahmad captures this liquidity when he tells Fa'iza: "Nothing is permanent here, Fa'iza. We are all just passing through – different cities, different jobs, different people. Why are you trying to build a stone monument in a world made of water?" (BNHS 156). The crisis is, therefore, not just a matter of rejecting tradition but of attempting to ground one's life in a world where foundational structures are no longer solid.

Marital Choice as an Ideological Battlefield

Within the theoretical framework of the modernist crisis, marital choice becomes an "ideological battlefield," a term derived from the work of Göran Therborn, who argues that the family is a primary site where "competing ideological projects" are contested (2). The protagonist's journey highlights how her choice of a partner is not a simple transaction but an act imbued with deep ideological significance. It is a moment where her individual desires come into direct conflict with the collective expectations of her family and community, who act as the custodians of religious and cultural norms.

This framework is enriched by Deniz Kandiyoti's seminal work on "patriarchal bargaining," wherein women negotiate within patriarchal systems to secure a measure of power and security (274). In the novel, Fa'iza's struggle to define her own terms for a relationship is a form of bargaining. Her choices challenge the existing patriarchal contract and attempt to forge a new one based on modern notions of equality. The "halal" framework, while a religious guide, is also wielded by characters as an ideological tool to enforce rigid conduct. Fa'iza's insistence on a relationship that is not just "halal" in its legality but also intellectually fulfilling is a radical act. This is best illustrated in her confrontation with her mother:

You keep telling me he is 'halal' because he prays and he is from a good family. But is it 'halal' for me to spend the rest of my life in a silent house with a man who doesn't see me as an equal? Is it 'halal' for my heart to die so that your reputation can live? (BNHS 212).

Thus, a partner's choice is no longer just a personal affair but a political and ideological statement on identity, modernity, and the evolving role of women in contemporary Muslim society.

Ahmad and Marital Choice as Personal Autonomy

In stark contrast, the character of Ahmad represents the modernist challenge to the traditionalist framework. His approach to marital choice is a clear manifestation of the "reflexive modernity" that Giddens describes, where an individual's life path is actively constructed rather than inherited (5). Ahmad, as a member of the Muslim diaspora in the West, has internalized a worldview where personal autonomy and self-fulfillment are central to the human experience. This reflexive construction of the self is evident in his refusal to let his identity be dictated by communal lineage. He asserts his autonomy when he tells Fa'iza: "I am not just a sum of my father's successes or my mother's prayers. I am the decisions I make every single day. If I marry someone just to please them, I am essentially erasing myself" (BNHS 98).

For Ahmad, a successful marriage is not just about religious duty but about finding an intellectual and emotional equal- a "kindred spirit," a term used in romanticist literature and echoed in modern psychological discourse to describe the "pure relationship" (Giddens 58). He seeks someone with whom he can build a life based on mutual respect rather than mere social convenience.

This aligns with Bauman's concept of "liquid modernity," where relationships are fluid and must be continuously maintained through conscious effort, not simply sustained by a social contract (2). Ahmad's struggles reflect the anxieties of a generation caught between two worldviews. He laments the disconnect, stating: "My parents want to marry me to a person, not to a mind. They don't understand that a relationship is a conversation, not a contract" (BNHS 145). This ideological stance positions marital choice as a transformative act, central to the formation of a modern identity that refuses to be "solidified" by traditional expectations.

The "Broken" Relationship: A Manifestation of Ideological Clash

The novel's central narrative conflict, symbolized by the "broken" relationship, serves as the ideological battlefield where traditionalist and modernist worldviews collide; it is "broken" because the internal desires of the individuals can no longer be contained within the external "halal" vessel provided by society. The relationship lacks the congruence between private intimacy and public performance.

The protagonist, Fa'iza, is the primary site of this collision. Caught between the expectations of her family (traditionalism) and the intoxicating autonomy offered by her connection with Ahmad (modernity), she is forced to navigate Kandiyoti's concept of "patriarchal bargaining" (274). Her resistance to suitors who fulfill the "halal" criteria but fail to meet her intellectual needs is a negotiation for agency. This is seen in her rejection of the "perfect" suitor, whom she describes as "a man who checked every box on my father's list but didn't even know the first page of my own. To marry him would be to sign a treaty of my own surrender" (BNHS 167).

This negotiation reveals the tension between the "halal" framework as a religious guide and its use as a tool for social control. In the novel, "halal" is often weaponized by the older generation to silence dissent and enforce conformity. For instance, when Fa'iza expresses her unhappiness, her aunt uses the framework to shut down her emotional agency:

"What is there to be unhappy about? He is a good Muslim, the courtship was done with witnesses, and the Nikah is sanctioned. To ask for more than that is to ask for 'fitna' (mischief). You are making a halal story into something messy with your 'feelings'." (BNHS 230)

Here, the "halal" label is used to delegitimize Fa'iza's modern need for emotional fulfillment, reducing her identity to a religious statistic. The novel thus posits that the modernist crisis is not about a loss of faith, but about the clash between collective obligation and individual autonomy. The "broken" relationship is the manifestation of

this profound ideological rift, a crisis that suggests a "halal story" is impossible to maintain when the "pure relationship" becomes the new standard of truth.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that *BNHS* is a powerful exploration of the modernist crisis within the Nigerian Muslim diaspora. Through the compelling character arcs of Fa'iza and Ahmad, the novel demonstrates how marital choices serve as an ideological battlefield where traditional religious duty clashes with modern individualistic desires. We have shown that the central conflict is not merely a moral struggle but a systemic tension between two irreconcilable worldviews. The novel's significance lies in its refusal to offer a simplistic "halal" resolution. By portraying a "broken" relationship, Bala Mohammed critiques the rigidity of traditional frameworks that fail to account for the complexities of modern love and identity. This work is a crucial social commentary on the gendered double standards that place an unequal burden on women to uphold religious purity, and it resonates with a generation of young Muslims grappling with how to define their faith on their own terms.

This analysis contributes to scholarly discourse by providing a novel, theoretically grounded interpretation of *BNHS*. It moves the conversation beyond a simple literary critique to a sociological and cultural appraisal, offering a new framework for understanding the novel's enduring appeal and its critical insights. This study opens several avenues for further research. A comparative analysis of Fa'iza's journey with that of other female protagonists in contemporary African literature could shed further light on gendered expectations. Additionally, a deeper sociological study could be conducted on how the novel's themes are received by readers in different cultural contexts, examining its impact on the lived experiences of Muslim youths globally.

Works Cited

- Aboulela, Leila. *Minaret*. Grove Press, 2005.
- Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. Heinemann, 1958.
- Adesanmi, Pius. "The Way We Weave: Adesanmi on Nigerian Literature." *The Guardian*, 2011.
- Amina, Maryam. "Faith, Romance, and the Pitfalls of Modernity: A Review of *Broken, Not a Halal Story*." *Northern Nigeria Review of Books*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2021, pp. 12-18.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Modernity*. Polity Press, 2000.
- Bawa, Nasiba Mbabe. "Broken: Not a Halal Love Story by Fatima Bala | Review." *Littafi*, 11 Dec. 2020, littafi.com/book-reviews/broken-not-a-halal-love-story-by-fatima-bala/.
- Cooke, Miriam. *Women and the Novel in the Arabic-Speaking World: The Female Voice in Contemporary Fiction*. Syracuse UP, 2001.

- Egejuru, Phanel Akubueze. *The Empire of the Mind: The Text and the Political in African Fiction*. Africa World Press, 2002.
- Eze, Chielozona. *The African Novel and the Ethics of Postcolonial Individualism*. U of Chicago P, 2014.
- Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford UP, 1991.
- . *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love, and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Stanford UP, 1992.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, Lawrence and Wishart, 1990, pp. 222-37.
- Hamid, Mohsin. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Bond Street Books, 2007.
- Kandiyoti, Deniz. "Bargaining with Patriarchy." *Gender and Society*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1988, pp. 273-90.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*. Pantheon Books, 2004.
- Mbembe, Achille. *On the Postcolony*. U of California P, 2001.
- Mohammed, Fatima Binta. *Broken, Not a Halal Story*. Purple Shelves, 2020.
- Ogundipe-Leslie, Molar. *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women & Critical Transformations*. Africa World Press, 1994.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Shoneyin, Lola. *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. Serpent's Tail, 2010.
- Taylor, Charles. *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Harvard UP, 1991.
- Therborn, Göran. *Between Sex and Power: Family in the World, 1900–2000*. Routledge, 2004.