



The Face of Arab Women in Cyber-Literature

M. Faisol^{*}, Abdul Basid^{**} And Al Lastu Nurul Fatim^{***}

Abstract

This study examines the representation of Arab women in cyber literary works by employing the cyberfeminism criticism perspective. The cyber world in literary works provides capacity for public dialogue while also playing a role in constructing the identity and self-image of women who engage with this content. This study uses a qualitative content analysis design in a deductive way, which was achieved by reviewing selected digital data to examine short stories in cyber literary works. The exploration of cyber literary works that represent Arab women provides an opportunity to identify particular depictions through a feminist critical framework, which include symbolic violence depicted through the negative labeling of women, such as curses, beasts, demons, marionette dolls, and ugly; passive object or women as a property for men to empower or degrade; and the moral authority of men to influence limitations placed on women as it pertains to their freedom and rights. This study highlights Haraway's (1991) argument that cyberfeminism emphasizes feminist objectivity in shaping ideas and the importance of accountability, position, and alignment. This argument suggests that cyberfeminism seeks to challenge traditional notions of objectivity and strives to recognize one's own positionality and the power dynamics they may shape. The feminist critique applied to these selected cyber literary works reveals Arab women still experience an identity crisis in the social sphere of digital or cyber society.

Introduction

The existence of literary cyberspace has provided the capacity for writers,

^{*} Associate Professor and Lecturer Arabic Language and Literature at Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia.

^{**} Lecturer of Arabic Language and Literature at Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia.

^{***} Lecturer at the Special Program for Arabic Language Development at Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia.



researchers, and teachers to engage with critical perspectives they may not otherwise encounter. These particular perspectives develop the capability to respond to societal marginalization and material limitations in self-representation, such as those experienced by Arab women (Hussain 2021). Self-representation of women in cyber literature can be considered a form of self-replication, which often (re)constructs inequalities that are present in real life (Aksar, Firdaus, and Pasha 2022). Cyberspace (re)constructs women's life experiences in virtualization/online and reality/offline by creating a space for expression (Koo 2020).

Although cyber could have become a valuable opportunity for women to gain liberation regarding self-expression, the reality has proven to be far different (Kiani, Tavakoli, and Mura 2023). More specifically, the digital world facilitates a public dialogue that is integrally instrumental in the construction of identity and self-image. Yet, the digital realm does not remove social expectations while also effecting emotional and intuitive processing in women both internally and interpersonally (Rodis 2023). Often, the online public sphere marginalizes, silences, and belittles Arab female voices. (Kharroub 2021). Meanwhile, some Arab media represents Arab women as free and autonomous individuals who actively contribute to the social sphere (Hamid, Basid, and Aulia 2021).

Although they online and offline are often thought of as separate, digital spaces (e.g., social media) intersect with physical reality through the interactions between digital infrastructure and social subjectivity. From a global perspective as it relates to feminism, recent studies examining women in cyberspace reveal the existence of feminist groups that empower women as virtual identities (Bavoleo and Chaure 2020; Li and Xiong 2023). Further studies indicate feminist groups in cyberspace can shape women's identity as it pertains to achievement in the realms of education, employment, athletics, and the struggle for constitutional rights (AlKhalifa and Farello 2021; Malekpour 2021; Tabaza and Mustafa-Awad 2022). Additional research indicates women in cyberspace can encounter new information or perspectives as a form of empowerment, resistance, digital self-representation, and global transregional networking (Esposito and Sinatora 2022; Hou and Zhang 2022).

A recent study examining TikTok content revealed that digital spaces can develop hybrid cultural identities, referred to as hybridization, which have significant implications regarding diversity, coexistence, innovation, freedom,



tolerance, and even women's empowerment (Civila and Jaramillo-Dent 2022). The previous study overlaps with this research through the hybrid cultural identities that were identified during the exploration of Arab women in digital spaces. This research examines the representations of Arab women in cyber literary works and short stories via a cyber-feminist criticism. The selected cyber literary works and short stories include genres related to Arab women, which may represent a new configuration of digital space involving power, morality, and emerging subjectivity.

The four short stories selected for this research represent Arab women in different ways. The first short story is titled *الربيع*, which translates to *Spring*. The narrative represents women as objects of sexuality by utilizing their authority as religious leaders (Girgis 2022). The second short story is titled *نجوى*, which translates to Najwa and is the name of the women who is the main character. Najwa is a dancer in a cafe who provides freedom to coffee lovers, which are primarily males. The theme of freedom actually signifies the restraint of women, which allows them to satisfy the hearts of men as authority holders (Odra 2022). The third short story is titled *في التوقيع الجحيم*, which translates to *signing on the list of hell*. The narrative involves women who work as interpreters at a company whose leader has high moral authority, particularly as it pertains to the female employees (Lathif 2019). The fourth short story is titled *فاطومي*, which translates to Fatumi and is the name of the main female character. Fatumi is represented as a figure who destroys other people's households and entices men who already have wives. As such, she is often scorned and negatively labelled throughout the community (Al-Buhi n.d.).

These selected depictions of Arab women in cyber literature confirms the previously identified phenomenon regarding the negative depictions and marginalization of Arab women in digital spaces. In this study, the authors examine four selected cyber literature short stories, which are written by four authors. The first cyber literature narrative is titled *فاطومي* (Al-Buhi n.d.) and it was written by Muhammad Labib Al-Buhi from Saudi Arabia. The second short story is betitled *الربيع* (Girgis 2022), which was authored by Nelly Girgis from Syria. The third selected piece is titled *التوقيع في دفتر الجحيم* (Lathif 2019)



and authored by Yasir Abdul Lathif from Sudan. The final selection is *نجوى* (Odra 2022), which was written by Odra From Egypt. These four short stories were selected to analyze a concerning trend involving the negative depictions and marginalization of Arab women in cyber literature. This trend reflects a sociocultural aspect of Arab society pertaining to the persistence of traditional gender roles and patriarchal norms. As the authors are themselves Arab and reside in the Arab world, this provides further reasoning for researchers to select these four cyber literary short stories as representative of Arab women as portrayed in digital spaces.

Women's lives in cyberspace have the capacity to construct transnational self-representations as a form of expression, mobilization, and connectivity. Moreover, the utilization of cyber to publish and propagate literature is certainly a challenge for writers, literature lovers, and even scholars who may be more familiar with and still rely on conventional media. Therefore, it is timely and essential to examine the representation of Arab women in cyber literature.

Cyberfeminism in Arabic Literature

The term cyberfeminism refers to cybernetic feminism, which has been identified in recent research as developing a novel form subjectivity and emancipation (Hietala 2022). Cyberfeminism includes tech-savvy, and predominantly young, feminists to raise awareness and mobilize against exploitation and discrimination (Tazi and Oumlil 2020). The cyber nature of cyberfeminism relies on digital technology, such as social media, to investigate and spread awareness regarding cultural phenomena of subjugating and marginalizing women and oppressed groups. Further, these mechanisms of cyberfeminism cultivate a growing network of like-minded individuals—generally relying upon online tools to augment the off-line network—to produce a space for thought and action to demand justice (Stephens 2022).

This digitalization of offline phenomena opens a new era of networked visibility and the need to verify identities behind online accounts that impact offline life (Hewa and Tran 2023). This holds true for Arab women who often become objects of various genres of cyber literature. Cyberspace, which has a substantial and active female contingent, still needs to be researched and understood as it relates to gender gaps in macro and micro economic factors (Khoo et al. 2022). Moreover, cyberspace engagement integrates and replicates everyday life to blend offline and online interactions (Chen et al. 2023; Radu and Cotoc 2023).



This proliferation of internet access throughout the digital world allows the birth a new genre of literary works, which includes cyber literature. The emergence of technological change has precipitated novel methods in creating various genres of literary expression (Taum 2022). The field of cyber literature has explored a myriad of genres, including the space of the digital world, the internet, and technology in a social and cultural context. According to Hayles (1996), cyber literature often addresses topics aimed at the role of identity, power, social change, and even stereotypes between genders that occur in a digital society. Digital media is where materiality and information intersect through subject and mind or physicality, which reconstructs the existence of masculinity and femininity (Hayles 1996).

The subject and the mind or physicality as it interacts in the digital world (re)constructs public opinion or cultural views, which often involve discussing and advocating for rights, policies, empowerment, and justice (Nwaolikpe 2021). This is also true as it pertains to women's issues in Arab countries. This is likely because the issue of Arab women has attracted widespread attention, which may be a result of two important facts. The first is the symbolization of women in the roles of mother, wife, daughter, aunt, and co-worker, which are considered difficult to develop due to potentially constructing gender discrimination and inequality (Balavi, Nemati, and Alboghbeysh 2022). Second, the position of Arab women is considered integral to the development of the Arab world, which includes politically, economically, socially, and culturally. Moreover, these realities are directly impacted by every aspect of change, which includes positive and negative changes (Alghamdi et al. 2022). The public sphere of influence in the digital world exerts influence that may manifest strong implications. More specifically, digital spaces can unconsciously adopt and internalize attitudes, beliefs, and values presented in offline life, and vice-versa. In other words, it suggests that the power of the digital world embodies the potential for conceptualizing women's self-image and identity (Shikongo 2022). This potential may accelerate or hinder the advancement of women in society, as may be the case with cyber literary works related to Arab women.

Cyberspace has provided a novel mode of expression, particularly as it relates to Arabic literature. The proliferation of cyber-Arabic literature provides a space for writers and literary connoisseurs. Moreover, cyber-Arabic literature provides an opportunity for literary scholars to review, identify, and reveal findings within this genre of cyber literature.



Some studies that research cyber-Arabic literature has examined the capability of this genre as a *competing counterpublic* to upend the monopolizing of dominant literary online voices (Elsadda 2010), the communication relationship between authors and readers (Abdalgilil 2018), and even the altering of written Arabic in creative ways that are often used by authors of cyber literary works (Solimando 2017). Broadly speaking, this confirms that research into cyber literature has begun to attract interest, yet this interest must be augmented and applied to the development of Arabic cyber literature.

The participation of women in social media becomes a form of self-activation and self-expression, which correspondingly engenders misogyny, yet builds new identities that explore feminism and women's inclusion (Alichie 2023). Haraway (1991) asserts that cyberfeminism emphasized feminist objectivity in shaping ideas and the importance of accountability, position, and alignment. Haraway's (1988) argument suggests that cyberfeminism seeks to challenge traditional notions of objectivity and strives to recognize one's own positionality and the power dynamics they may shape. This emphasis on accountability, position, and alignment in shaping ideas is crucial to cyberfeminism, which recognizes the existence of multiple perspectives and acknowledges that feminist analysis is not a neutral or objective endeavor. Gender, identity, and sexuality can be explored using feminist critiques of cyberspace, which has infused debates within contemporary culture (Arshad 2022). Social media integrates aspects of oppressive societal expectations as it relates to self-perception and online experience (Miller and McIntyre 2022). A different study posited the potential that cyberfeminism has a uniqueness because classifications of race, economic status, and gender can function independently (Oyosoro, Okafor, and Aigbe 2022)..

Method

This study employed a qualitative content analysis that utilizes a deductive methodology. Content analysis is relevant for the analysis of selected content from cyber literary works. The content analysis in this study will describe the phenomenon of women in short stories and create categories and concepts based on the theory of cyberfeminism. This type of analysis is conducted to make inferences from selected cyber literature and analyze these short stories on intrinsic elements (Drisko and Maschi 2015).

This study examines four short stories from two websites of cyber literature that are from the years 2019 through 2022. The selection of data was based



on the genre of cyber literature that focuses upon Arab women. The short stories of cyber literature were obtained from the following websites:

Table (1): Data

Country	Website Moderator	Website	Short Story Title
Cairo	Youssef Rakha	sultansseal.wordpress.com	الربيع
			نجوى
			التوقيع في دفتر الجحيم
Saudi Arabia	Muhammad Labib Al-Buhi	analbahr.com	فاطومي

The data collection technique relied upon by this study was initiated by exploring cyber literary works in different social media groups and/or official websites. This initial process allowed researchers to acquire data and sift through the content. The results of collecting cyber literary content was then classified by user name, content forms, and comments from readers or other users (Toivonen et al. 2019). Note-taking techniques were used to collect data and record the results according to the study topic (Arfianti 2020).

The content analysis technique was employed to analyze data collected (Elo and Kyngas, 2008). This particular type of analysis has three stages, which are the preparation stage, the organization stage, and the reporting stage. The preparation stage involves collecting data on selected short stories found on two websites, which had narratives that focused on Arab women. The organization stage embodies the categorizing of the data extracted from the selected cyber literature based on the concept of cyberfeminism. More specifically, this step involved reviewing the selected texts for portrayal of Arab women related, symbolic violence, passive objects, and moral authority. Finally, the reporting stage involves examining and determining the results of the analysis by filtering the extracted content through the conceptual framework of cyberfeminism.

The data analysis technique of this study uses the Krippendorff's (2004) content analysis model, which has six steps. First, collecting the short story data obtained from four short cyber narratives that focus upon Arab women. Second, determining the specific sample—choosing specific passages from the selected works—to be studied. Third, recording or coding, which involves taking notes related to selected data. Four, reducing and filtering all selected data that is not relevant to the study. Five, inferring and drawing conclusions regarding the selected data. Six, narrating and describing the data through the



theoretical framework of cyberfeminism, which may be juxtaposed by previous studies that either support or reject the findings.

Result and Discussions

The selected representations of Arab women in cyber literature are examined. The researchers found thirteen potential data points—short stories—on two cyber literary websites (sultansseal.wordpress.com and analbahr.com). For this content, four cyber-Arabic short stories were selected, which had women as the focus of the narrative.

Symbolic Violence

Symbolic violence has been a particular threat to Arab women. This threat typically manifests via the power of groups—either entirely male or multi-gender social groups—to shape self-interest, which also draws attention to gender inequalities (Duncan-Shepherd and Hamilton 2022). Symbolic online violence has become a patriarchal habitus that (re)constructs stereotypes and gender biases, which play an important role in cybersexism (Maulana 2021). In the four selected cyber literature short stories we detected symbolic violence in multiple data points.

(١) وكان الشيوخ منهم يسمونها اللعنة، وكان نسوة المدينة
يقولون أنها الشيطان في صورة امرأة، وكان شباب القرى
والمدن جميعا يطلقون عليها اسم "زهرة البنفسج اليانعة"

(1) The elders called it a curse, including the city women who were called devils in female form, that the village and city youth were all named "ripe purple flowers" (Al-Buhi n.d.).

The selected passage in data (1) uses the Arabic word *اللعنة*, which translates to *curse*. In the Qur'an, the word *اللعنة* means *a curse*, which is aimed at the unjust and disbelievers in the oneness of Allah. While in short story, the word is used to specifically address the main female character named Fatumi. Curse words have a negative connotation and are used as a metaphor for someone with bad luck, or someone who is cursed. In this case, the curse is an expression of the group toward an individual who has experienced misery or misfortune. In addition, there was also the Arabic word *الشيطان*, which translates to *devil*. The usage of the Arabic word for devil was also aimed at



women. This specific passage reveals that women are considered negative and marginalized in the eyes of the elders, which are traditionally men. More specifically, women are depicted as figures who bring bad luck, misfortune, and misery.

Negative labelling of women can become a form of self-identity, which is determined or influenced by individual actions as a form of social representation. The language used in negative or hate speech is not just a representation of hateful ideas, it is an act of violence that aims to subjugate women as objects or symbols of patriarchy (Loza 2022). The female behavior portrayed by the main character, Fatumi, can be interpreted as deviant in relation to societal norms. Thus, the negative labelling will impact how people act towards Fatumi. Implicitly, this confirms the existence of symbolic violence, which manifests in the form of stereotyping women who are considered deviant in relation to standard cultural norms and social laws. The stigma that society places upon Fatumi due to the negative labeling will impact her social identity.

(٢) أيتها السيدة فاطومي، لي معك حديث قصير. وليكن
هنا في هذه اللحظات، في تلك الحديقة، لن أردد القول
بأنك رجس من عمل الشيطان، أو أنك فتاة مطرودة من
رحمة الله، لا أيتها السيدة، لن أقول هذا القول مهما كنت
تتمرغين في الغواية والضلال، فما أنت على كل حال إلا
أخت في الإنسانية، إن كان قلبك اليوم في غفلة من أمرك
فسوف ينكشف لك الغطاء في يوم من الأيام.

(2) O Lady Fatumi, I would like to speak to you briefly. Let us remain here for a while, in the garden. I will not say that you have committed an abomination that belongs to the devil, or that you still have God's mercy. If someday your heart is negligent then your cover will appear (Al-Buhi n.d.).

As shown in the data (2), Fatumi is depicted as a woman who has a vile attitude because she has enticed many men who have wives and children. This portrayal reveals that Fatumi's prestige in the community is very low, which is attributed to her negative behavior that is compared to a devil. This analogy



has damaged Fatumi's identity as a woman as she negatively views herself as unloved, less valuable, and less useful in the community.

The self-identity of an individual is not only an internal mechanism, but also involves external mechanisms. For example, how others view them as objects and the role of categorization in social identity (Stets and Burke 2000). If social identity is damaged, their access to move freely and interact with the community may be limited, which is portrayed through Fatumi's experience in this narrative. More specifically, when self-identity is damaged through internal and external mechanisms—particularly when self-esteem is lowered as is the case with Fatumi—it is often enforced by the dominant group as a social construct and thus manifests as a representation of reality. This portrayal reveals the concept of symbolic violence against women is evident in this cyber literature, which is illustrated by the dominant group of males expressing dissatisfaction and swaying social opinion. More specifically, this reveals that this group of males have power over women.

(٣) إنك جميلة أيتها السيدة بغير شك ولا نزاع، جميلة في
الظاهر، كجمال قشرة التفاح، ولكن ليس في داخلك ما
في داخل التفاحة، خلف قشرتك الظاهرة عن وديدان في
يوم قريب أو بعيد سيذهب هذا الجمال، ولكنه يوم آت لا
ريب فيه، وفي ذلك اليوم سيمر بك الذين كانوا يسجدون
لهذا الجمال فلا يمنحونه بعد أن يولي إلا اللعنات
والبصقات، وستنهض أرماس الضحايا من قبورها لتطارده
روحك يوم تستيقظ وتلعنك، ستطاردك اللعنة حتى القبر.

(3) You are beautiful if there is no strife; the apparent beauty is as beautiful as the skin of an apple. However, soon, it will disappear with the appearance of decay and habit, or later, it will disappear, but someday, it will surely be missed. Someday, those who used to adore your beauty will overlook everything by cursing and spitting, and the victims will also rise from their graves to pursue your soul and curse you to the grave (Al-Buhi n.d.).



Although many characters in the story have berated, mocked, and even compared Fatumi to the devil, there is one character who still cares about Fatumi. Data (3) is a passage that describes someone advising Fatumi as they offer flattering expressions regarding her external beauty, which is analogous to the beauty of apple skin. However, this beauty can disappear especially if her bad habits are not discontinued. If the ugliness of her bad habits contaminates the beauty of the apple, then the apple skin will be rotten. Such an analogy corresponds to human beings whenever they are unwilling to correct their bad habits, behaviors, or attitudes. There is also the Arabic word *البصقات*, which is the plural of *بصقة* translates to spit or what a person spits out of their mouth in the form of mucus or saliva. While in short story, the Arabic phrase *العنات والبصقات* translates to *cursing and spitting*, which is directed at Fatumi if she does not change her bad behaviors and attitude. If she does not change, then it will cause cursing, hatred, anger, humiliation, and even disrespect from others, which she will carry until death. The actual words represent a symbolic act that is used to express one's anger or hatred, which can be referred to as soft violence because it is invisible (Bourdieu 2001). However, this invisible power has changed the social order and correspondingly damaged Fatumi's social identity.

In the eyes of her community, Fatumi's actions result in her being labelled as a woman with many vices. The dominant in-group within her community also labels Fatumi as a woman without dignity. The labelling is based on symbolic actions that function via the dominant social order from the action exhibited by the subject (Fatumi). This conceptualizes the subject as an agent that reveals their identity, which is co-created through herself and her community via social construction within community power relations (Brown 2021). In short, women are subject to their community's prevailing contingent of control and dominance, which creates subjectivity and thus governs behavioral and attitudinal conduct through acceptance or rejection by the community.

(٤) أيتها السيدة ذات الغلاف الجميل الزائف، هناك جمال

آخر في الأعماق أشد قوة وأعظم خلودا.. ابحتي عن هذا

الجمال، إنه هو الباقي.. اخرجي من قشرتك الظاهرة

العفنة، وغوصي في أعماق عالم الجمال الأبدي..



(4) O woman who covers beauty with falsehood,
that beauty from within is stronger and eternal...
Seek this beauty, for it is eternal. Come out of
the rotten shell that is currently visible and dive
into the world of eternal beauty (Al-Buhi n.d.).

The passage in data (4) reveals that Fatumi has external beauty that is recognized by many in her community. However, Fatumi's beauty is an external and impermanent beauty, which is a cover for her falsehoods. The Arabic word *الزائف* translates to *fake*, which refers to counterfeit objects, fraudulent treatment, false statements, and disparagement. While in short story it is translated to *falsehood*, which is an expression of Fatumi's reputation of lies or deceit. The Arabic word *قشرتك* means shell or skin—the outer part and surface that serves as both a form of covering and protection. The word *العفنة* means mushrooming, decay, or filth that has a change in odor and deterioration. Moreover, the Arabic phrase *القشرة الظاهرة العفنة* translates to a *visible rotten shell*, which indicates Fatumi has lived with a hard shell of ugliness covering her entire body. Both Arabic passages symbolize the self-representation of Fatumi as someone who has committed despicable acts by deceiving people for her gain and harming those around her.

The symbolic depiction of Fatumi in this cyber narrative is explicitly representative of Arab women and how they are considered physical objects that are subject to the recognized and dominant social system. The collective manifestation of identity includes women community members, which define cultural, class, and racial similarities and differences. It is an imaginative discursive display of collective ambitions and objectives that are generated as a result of group consciousness (Filonik and Kucharski 2021). Thus, Fatumi as a character is representative of the social interpretation of women, which subsequently leads to the construction of identity structures within the collective consciousness.

(5) فقال هارون وهو ينسحب: ستذبلين أيتها السيدة وشيكا
كما تذبل الوردة، وتداس البقايا منك بعد وجهي...

(5) Harun said as he retreated: Lady, you will
soon wither like a withered rose, and after that,
you will be trampled underfoot (Al-Buhi n.d.).



In the passage in data (5) the Arabic word *تذبل* translates to *withering*, which indicates the freshness has departed or dried up, also it indicates weariness or sadness. Further, the Arabic word *الوردة*, which is in the Qur'an, translates to red, rose, pink, or reddish in color. While in short story, the two words go together to form a phrase *تذبل الوردة*, which translates to *withered rose*. In this case, the withered rose can be interpreted as love or beauty that disappear like a dream. The phrase is directed to Fatumi as her beauty is likened to a rose. However, this beauty will not last if Fatumi's actions are composed of lies, ugliness, and falsehood. Therefore, Fatumi's beauty is not eternal as it is symbolized as beautiful rose, which withers because of ugliness.

This societal recognition of Fatumi shapes the meaning-making practices of her inner conscious and imaginative dimensions, which is integrated into her conceptualization of identity. The conceptualizing of identity symbolically reveals Fatumi's internal thought process is reflexive, as it is influenced by power and social discourse. In addition, the conceptualization of identity embodies the existence of perceptual and structural interdependence as a bond of verification processes in the social context (Burke 2023). The social world views and responds to an individual's self-expression, which concurrently influences and shapes social actions or habitus.

(٦) صُورَت له الشاشة كدمية ماريونيت تتحكم في خيوطها
الفتاة، يسلم عليها ويرقص معها رقصات تعبيرية. كان
يرى نفسه كدمية ماريونيت بدوره في أحلامه التطفلية
خلال هذه الفترة؛ هو كدمية يدير خيوطها عالمه المسير،
وشاشته كدمية تُدير خيوطها فتاة المدينة الساحلية.

(6) Having represented the woman as a marionette doll capable of being controlled by strings, he greets and dances with her expressively. She sees herself in the dream as a disturbing marionette in this stage: she is like a puppet restrained in her activities with no freedom, and the representation of the women of the coastal city is like a puppet on strings (Odra 2022).



The passage in data (6) contains the Arabic word *دمية*, which means *doll*, *imitation*, or *toy*. In the short story, the word is in the Arabic phrase *دمية ماريونيت*, which translates to *marionette doll* and is used to describe Najwa. Marionette dolls are controlled or moved using strings that are attached to respective limbs. This phrase symbolizes Najwa as she is controlled and moved based on the wishes of the men visiting her in the cafe. Najwa has the freedom to ask for more money. However, this freedom is a specter that deprives Najwa of her rights through the constrictive power that serves the benefit and enjoyment of men. Like a marionette doll, all activities performed by Najwa must fulfil the wishes of the men in the cafe because she has been paid a high price to dance expressively in front of all visitors.

Najwa is subjective to patriarchal power throughout her workplace, which is the cafe. As a woman, Najwa is subjected to symbolic violence, as revealed by the analogies related to power, social base, and individual habitus. The power and social base are dominated by men (patriarchy) who often choose a self-image of high power, while women choose a submissive self-image with less power (Krumhuber, Wang, and Guinote 2023). The capacity of men to make choices as the dominant group influences the expression of individual women through the language of behavior and self-representation. Moreover, power requires reassertion of power from the social sphere to maintain effective control, which is true in a digital world created by men (Klinger and Svensson 2021).

(٧) قال الشهيد ملك الهزل: “جئت مصطحبًا سكرتيرتي الحسنة والوحش البشع”.

(7) The king of humor said: “I come accompanied by my beautiful secretary and a beast” (Lathif 2019).

(٨) له “يا عزيزي تلك كانت سكرتيرتي الحسنة، الوحش لا يزال خلفي”. انزل درجةً أخرى تراه.

(8) He said: “O my brother, that is my beautiful secretary, and the beast is still behind me”. Down with the rest of you (Lathif 2019).



The Arabic word *الحسناء* in data (7) and (8) is a derivative of the word *حسن*, which in the Qur'an is interpreted as *best, good people, great, and righteous*. In the short story, the word translates to *beautiful*, which is juxtaposed with the Arabic phrase *البشع الوحش* that translates to *wild animals*. The word *beautiful* is used to describe a women's external beauty and ability to attract the attention of men. On the other hand, the phrase *wild animals* holds a negative connotation, which is indictive of having the appearance or demeanor of a beast (ugly or unsightly). The meaning of *beast*, as well as *wild animals*, are typically used to depict enemies or threats to humans. The juxtaposition of the two serves the intention to mock, which is preceded by an expression of flattery. The comparison of a women to a beast reveals the oppressive power, via verbal harassment, that the male leader employs to describe his female secretary. The verbal and psychological oppression becomes social marginalization, which can further imprison a women's sense of identity and social value (Ghosh 2023).

Humans should not be negatively labelled as animals, objects, or other creatures as this is representative of symbolic violence. The symbolic violence in the data above reveals a patriarchal symbolic power, which is manifestly predicated on the appearance of female physical objects. Implicitly, this exposes the repression of women as subordinate, as they are represented as weak and less valuable within the social construct. The social construction created in these select passages of cyber literary has confirmed the existence of symbolic violence through the creation of narratives in cyberspace (Fernandes and Santos 2020).

Passive Object

Women are often perceived as passive objects of cultural and biological determinism in the practice of female image-making and identity (Joseph and Chavez 2023). Women viewed and represented as property are empowered by patriarchal elements through sexuality and violence. In select passages from the cyber short stories there are expressions of women as passive objects, such as:

(٩) لم يبق لي من حجج لعدم الكشف عن جسدي

(9) I have no more excuses for not showing my body (Girgis 2022).



The passage shown as data (9) has the Arabic word *يبقى* which is derived from the word *بقي* and in the Qur'an means *permanent, abiding, remaining, eternal, and everlasting*. In the short story, the word is juxtaposed with other words to create the phrase *لم يبق* that translates to *no excuses*, which serves as a form of resignation. The submission in this passage depicts a woman who accepts that her body must be shown to a man. This portrayal reveals that women are often objects of sexuality intended to fulfil the personal interests of men. More specifically, this depicts women as unable to refuse or determine their own personal choices involving bodily sovereignty.

Women are often sexually objectified and treated as objects of little value (Rousseau et al. 2018). Such representations tend to portray the female body as a physical object of male sexual desire. When women are depicted as sexually objectified objects it demonstrates their lack of autonomy as dehumanized passive objects. When women are portrayed as sexual objects in the digital world, it not only depicts women as passive objects, but also displays sexist expressions that publicly reproduce patriarchal patterns (Kara 2020). Within the selected passages under examination, male characters have dehumanized women by degrading them via physical oppression and harassment, which certainly reflects social, legal, and cultural norms.

(١٠) ولم تكن فاطومي في منأى عما يقال عنها أو يشاع،
ولكنها كانت تستقبل كل ذلك ساخرة في غير اهتمام،
هازئة بالشباب والرجال والنساء على حد سواء، لا تلقى
بالأ لأحد من هؤلاء أو هؤلاء.

(10) Fatumi is also not far from what is widely rumored that she gets sarcastic treatment no matter who mocks her, whether women or men (Al-Buhi n.d.).

The Arabic word represented in data (10) is *ساخرة* and it is derived from the Arabic word *سخر* which in the Qur'an means to *mock, scorn, and insult*. While in short story, the Arabic phrase *يقال عنها* translates to *rumored or gossiped about*. Meanwhile, the Arabic word *ساخرة* translates to *sarcastic treatment*. This negative labeling of Fatumi is indicative of the violence she experiences. Fatumi has



become the subject of gossip and the sarcasm that is intended to offend or insinuate annoyance and anger toward her. This treatment toward Fatumi was conducted by the entire community, which includes both men and women. The sarcasm becomes a symbolic experience as a form of harm for Fatumi.

The sarcasm is intended to mock or ridicule Fatumi, although sometimes ambivalence is implied. Overcoming ambivalence is difficult since it creates limitations for the individual within their social environment, which likely inflicts a form of trauma (Banet-Weiser 2018). In the cyber world, women are framed as passive objects, which is revealed by the verbal harassment and sarcasm (Harvey 2020). Fatumi is depicted as a passive object as she is unable to do anything in the face of verbal sarcasm, which negatively conveys the perception of the social group. In the cyber sphere, sarcasm implicitly tends to be a mechanism for dealing with maladaptive behavior, which may embrace gender stereotypes and ideologies that influence social perceptions and behaviors (Ward and Grower 2020).

(١١) فمد يده يريد أن يتحسس جسدها ملاطفا فأمعنت

النظر في عينيه، ثم اندفعت إلى الداخل تصرخ:

خنزير.. خنزير..

فقد رأت في صورته بفراسرتها التي أصبحت لا تخبى ..

أن ذلك الذي اهتدت بكلماته إلى الطريق قد تحول إلى

خنزير..

(11) He stretched out his hand, wanting to touch her body gently while looking into her eyes, then rushed in, shouting: pig.... pig.....

She looked at her reflection with an unfailing premonition that the person she said would lead her to the right path had turned into a pig (Al-Buhi n.d.).

The passage in data (11) features the Arabic word *خنزير*, which in the Qur'an is translated as *pig*. In the short story, the usage of the word *pig* is directed at men. Fatumi yelled the word *pig* at the man who wanted to touch her body. Fatumi uses this expression because the man was supposed to lead her to the right path, but instead attempts to touch her. As such, the man attempts to



take advantage of Fatumi to fulfil his desires. The use of the word pig is similar to a swear word in English because in this moment Fatumi understands his true intentions, which was not to lead her to the right path, but to take advantage of her.

In cyberspace, women are often presented as passive objects that are only used for the sexual and biological needs of men (Chen and Gong 2023). As in the short story, Fatumi is often shown as a passive object intended to fulfill male desires. In addition, Fatumi also encounters misogyny in the form of harassment, assault, and institutional neglect, which explicitly deprive women of their freedom, social support, and dignity (Banet-Weiser 2018; Hamamra 2020). Thus, male dominance sexually objectifies women as passive objects for control, which maintains social subordination (Bareket and Shnabel 2019).

Moral Authority

Moral authority holds strong influence or power to act according to one's worldview. Those with authority often threaten moral life (Zengin 2022), as with workplace surveillance, gender non-conformity, and sexual harassment. In this case, two passages were identified in the cyber literary short stories that represent moral authority over women, such as:

(١٢) بدأت ظاهرة نجوى، مانحة حرية الإرادة، منذ مدة
ليست ببعيدة بين مرتادي قهوة حمالة الحطب.

(12) Najwa's recent phenomenon of free will
among coffee lovers for wood carriers (Odra
2022).

The Arabic word *حرية*, which translates to *freedom* and *independence*. In the Qur'an, the word means to *seek the truth*, *seek the right path*, and *follow the right guidance* with the use of the word *تدروا*. While in short story, the word is used in combination with words to form the Arabic phrase *حرية الإرادة*, which translates to *freedom of will*, which represents the autonomy or ability to act as one desires. In the cafe, Najwa is a woman with rights and authority to act without any restrictions. This happens because Najwa is a female dancer in the cafe who entertains men who come to enjoy her coffee. This freedom that Najwa demonstrates is a form of control over her coffee lovers, which are men, that follow her wishes or authority as an entertainer.



Implicitly, the treatment Najwa receives as a result reveals that patriarchal values, social attitudes, and cultural norms can suppress and control women. Patriarchal values influences the configuration of women's identities, which may concurrently shape the existence of the cyberfeminism paradigm (Multani 2023). As a result of the patriarchy, Najwa is no longer free to do what she wants, even in her work. Patriarchal norms construct a view as a communicator of established principles to impose what is undesirable and this influence underlies a lot of gender injustice (Singh et al. 2022). In the cyber world, these norms form the virtual branch of patriarchal ideology (Alichie 2023). Patriarchy also establishes the capacity to convince others of how actions or treatment should be, thus establishing moral authority to represent the prevailing norms.

As a female character, Najwa is portrayed as subject to the power of misogyny by perceiving and depicting women as objects or tools to achieve goals. Moreover, misogyny in the digital space is displayed in the presence of sexual violence, which increases the visibility of these acts, as well as normalizes them (Banet-Weiser 2018). These passages systematically confirm such structural inequalities are evident.

(١٣) هكذا تبادل رواد القهوة قصة صعود نجوى كحامي

المدينة الجديد، وأصبح همهم الشاغل تدريجياً هو توفير
ما يكفي من المال لتدبير عزومة عشاء لنجوى، حيث
أن نجوى لا ترقص دون عشاء، أو إن حرية الإرادة لا
تُمنح على معدة فاضية "عشان متتعيش"، كما يقول أحد
البوسترات المعلقة على باب المقهى. أصبح الإقبال زائداً
على حرية الإرادة إلى أن فتحت نجوى إمكانية إرسال
العشاء لها ديليفري: ترسل لها عشاء، فترسل لك رقصة.
كانت المشكلة الوحيدة أن حرية الإرادة لا تنتقل رقمياً،
لذا عليك شراء مُشغّل شرائط فيديو قبل المبادرة بالطلب.

(13) Thus, the coffee connoisseurs shared stories of Najwa's rise as the city's new protector. Their concern would gradually provide enough money to be able to have dinner with Najwa because



Najwa would not dance without dinner, nor would the desired freedom be given on an empty stomach “so as not to get tired”, as one of the posters on the door of the café had said (Odra 2022).

The passage in data (13) continues from the previous quote, which discusses Najwa’s freedom. Najwa does have the authority to bestow freedom upon café visitors. However, freedom lovers need to pay more compensation to ensure Najwa’s stomach is not empty, which would make her tired. The Arabic word *معدة* translates to *stomach*, which is combined with other words to create the phrase *معدة فاضية* translates to *empty stomach*, which is someone who is experiencing hunger and is certainly not the actual meaning. The phrase is used to portray someone, in this case Najwa, as needing more money as compensation to entertain coffee lovers.

The authority and instruction in the café environment are determined by the urgency and desires of men, which is considered normative and cannot be neglected or violated. Najwa’s authority to determine compensation implicitly constructs a claim of moral authority, which is shaped by patriarchal norms. In the cyber scope, patriarchal norms are based on societal principles that are often independent of written laws, which oppress and damage women’s lives. For that reason, there is a need for change and to highlight the importance of effective support for women (Rúðólfsdóttir and Jóhannsdóttir 2018). In addition, patriarchal norms in the cyber world allow the emergence of basic assumptions that can dominantly represent Arab women as depoliticized and uninterested in their existence (El-Ariss 2019).

In recent years, there has been significant discourse surrounding the promises of digital liberation in various literature. However, despite advancements in technology and the seemingly limitless possibilities for self-expression, the representation of women in digital literature remains mired in Arab patriarchal culture (Banet-Weiser 2018). One reason for this is that the authors of these sources have personal and academic experiences in Arab culture, which grant them insight into the cultural domain and access to Arab society (Lily et al. 2023). This insider’s perspective allows them to identify the ways that patriarchal values are perpetuated in digital literature. Another reason could be the influence of Arab ethnicity on both public and private aspects of society. For example, social media platforms are designed with certain



assumptions regarding privacy that may not align with Islamic interpretations of privacy (Abokhodair and Vieweg 2016).

While the Arab Spring and other women's social movements have brought about some positive change and demands for equality, the representation of women in digital literature still reflects deep-rooted patriarchal norms and values. Digital platforms initially seemed to act as valuable opportunities for women to challenge gender inequalities by presenting their lives on their own terms. However, upon closer examination, it becomes evident that these platforms often reinforce traditional gender roles and stereotypes. This is evident through the analysis of influencer accounts on platforms like Instagram, where the majority of content produced by Arab women adheres to societal expectations and conforms to patriarchal ideals of femininity, beauty, and modesty (Hurley 2021). More specifically, these realities are expressly manifest in the selected passages under examination, which exhibit multiple instances of upholding patriarchal norms through the depiction of Arab women as passive and sexual objects, as well as through symbolic violence.

The digital space should be a space for Arab women to work together and voice their demands for freedom and rights. Unfortunately, the emergence of cyber literature to date still exhibits distorted and commercialized discourses and practices regarding the oppression of women's rights (El-Ariss 2019). The ideological workings of the Arab world in the digital sphere still normalize acts and expressions of misogyny against women, while also claiming that men are the real victims (Banet-Weiser 2018). This makes the real world, alongside the digital space, a battlefield for Arab women to struggle to advance their goals of freeing themselves from all patriarchal restrictions in society, politics, economics, and religion.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the representation of Arab women in cyber literature displays acts of symbolic violence, women as passive objects, and moral authority. These findings are similar to those proposed by Haraway (1991), which posits that cyberfeminism emphasizes feminist objectivity in shaping ideas and the importance of accountability, position, and alignment. The feminist objectivity displayed in the short story is constructed by the thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions of the male characters, which emphasizes the recognition of one's own positionality and the power dynamics that shape it (Haraway 1988). It also places women in a position of defensiveness and marginalization (Lloyd 1995), powerlessness and



intimidation (Sengupta et al. 2022), and threatens their self-image by enforcing patriarchal norms (Duran 2022; Rollero et al. 2022).

The findings in our research concur with Haraway's (1991) perspective on cyberfeminism, which established the foundation for the movement and its exploration of the intersections between technology, gender, and identity. More specifically, it introduced the cyborg concept as a symbol that challenges essentialist categories by blurring the boundaries between humans and technology, as well as nature and culture. Cyberfeminism emerges as a response to the increasing influence of technology throughout society, particularly regarding how technology intersects with gender and identity. It utilizes concepts to critique patriarchal structures, challenge gender norms, and explore the possibilities of technology for feminist activism and empowerment. Haraway's (1991) concept of cyberfeminism in the cyborg manifesto also includes:

- critique of essentialism, which analyses essentialist notions of gender and identity by proposing the cyborg as a symbol fluidity and multiplicity
- intersectionality, which acknowledges gender along with other social categories such as race, class, and sexuality to highlight the complex ways that technology and identity intersect
- technology empowerment, which explores the potential for technology to empower marginalized groups—including women—and serve as a tool for resistance and activism, rather than as a neutral or deterministic force
- reimagining feminist politics, which may open new possibilities for feminist theory and practice by challenging traditional boundaries and binaries

Overall, the handling of cyberfeminism in the cyborg manifesto is characterized by a radical rethinking of gender, identity, and technology. This theory still exerts a lasting impact on feminist theory and activism, which has served to inspire scholars and activists to explore the potential of technology for feminist empowerment and social change.

The findings of this study depict cyber literature that will impact the representation of Arab women in the public sphere. This phenomenon is in line with Abdel-Raheem (2022) who argues that Arab women—in the context



of cyber sphere—have experienced gender bias and discrimination, which affects and perpetuates sexual stereotypes and biases. Meanwhile, this findings does not comport with Hamid, Basid, and Aulia's (2021) study, which states that Arab women are represented as free individuals who actively contribute to the social environment and are autonomous. The public cultural norms, as represented by the cyber sphere, has constructed means of marginalization that is routinely and constantly subject to change by conforming to predetermined norms (Cerezon et al. 2020).

The findings of this study can also be compared to Stephens' (2022) conclusions regarding the phenomenon of cyberfeminism, which involves action taken in the digital realm that is concurrently conceptualized in everyday life. The phenomenon of cyberfeminism has simultaneously created an identity in the real world by means of the virtual world, which is integrated into everyday life as a combination of offline and online interactions. This is also in line with the findings of Chen et al. (2023), as well as Radu and Cotoc (2023). This also supports Nwaolikpe's (2021) findings that the digital world can construct public opinions or views regarding women's issues in Arab countries regarding rights, policies, empowerment, and justice.

Conclusion

This study has examined the representation of Arab women in cyber literature and identified the occurrence of symbolic violence toward women, women represented as passive objects, and moral authority. Symbolic violence is revealed through the negative labelling of women such as curses, beasts, demons, marionette dolls, and ugly. Arab women are also represented as passive objects by depicting women as property that can be empowered or degraded via the whims of men. Finally, moral authority is portrayed via the influence of men on the limitations of women's freedom and rights. The identified themes in the selected cyber literature comport with Haraway's (1991) perspective involving cyberfeminism, which challenge essentialist categories, traditional notions of gender and identity, as well as the relationship between humans and technology. The findings in this study also point to Arab women experiencing an identity crisis, both in the social sphere of society and the public at large.

These selected cyber literary works presents a reality that reveals the cultural phenomenon of women as an oppressed group—in a humanist way—in daily life (Stephens 2022). Moreover, these representations of Arab women in cyber literature have confirmed the position of Arab women in the real world.



However, some views have stated that Arab women have experienced a transition toward empowerment and equal rights of men. The recognition and movement of women's existence will certainly experience constant (re)negotiation between structure (external) and agency (internal), which is realized in the process of their changing social experience. Thus, the digital world has been able to shape the image of women—positively and negatively—as well as the progress of Arab women regarding rights, policies, empowerment, justice, and oppression in society.

The portrayal of women in cyber literature, when viewed through the lens of cyberfeminism, includes agency (agents of change) and empowerment; identity and representation for diverse and inclusive representations of women; virtual realities and embodiment; intersectionality and diversity experiences; as well as resistance and activism to build solidarity with other marginalized groups (Haraway 1991). By examining women in cyber literature through the framework of cyberfeminism, both authors and readers can critically examine the manner that gender, technology, and society intersect in fictional narratives. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the complexities of women's experiences in digital spaces and invigorates discussions involving representation, empowerment, and social change.

The focus of this study on the representation of Arab women in the selected passages of Arabic cyber literature is a limitation of this study. Future studies may explore additional texts using other scientific methods. Moreover, cyber literature can also be explored via public comments or opinions left by readers. This study contributes to the development of Arabic cyber literature. Thus, researchers recommend further exploration of Arabic cyber literary works in the context of language according to the phenomenon of Arabic language features and structures.

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