

Metaphor, Creative Representation, and the Self: A Semiotic Analysis of Selected Arabic Short-stories by Female Writers

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Introduction

Every creative output is an attempt to represent something that is very close to our hearts and minds. Language as a semiotic system enables the user to express their innermost emotions and feelings. The semiotic system is a result of the convention created and accepted by the society in which the writer is trying to raise his or her concerns. The present paper is a humble attempt to scrutinise the questions of creative representation by studying selected Arabic short stories by female writers. Through a semiotic analysis of the themes and narratives presented in these selected stories, the socio-cultural standing of the female class in the given Arabic communities is scrutinised. In a society that is conventionally patriarchal and has always tried to deny the feminine identity and emotions, how these story-tellers bring the issues related to feminine life and body will be our primary concern of analysis. The semiotic system of language employed by these story-tellers will be studied with a primary focus on the metaphor from a cognitive perspective. The ways in which the female writers question or confirm the traditional conceptions of "female," "feminine," and "feminine body" will be studied through the analysis of the selected stories.

We will employ the social semiotic approach along with the idea of metaphor in the cognitive paradigm to analyse the selected stories. The stories selected here are all from *Arab Women Writers: An Anthology of Short Stories* (Cohen-Mor). Three stories by Palestinian writer Samiya At'ut (b. 1957) are selected here: 1. *That Summer Holiday* (At'ut 30-37), 2. *Mozart's Fez* (At'ut 100), and 3. *The Collapse of Barriers* (At'ut 277-279). The second writer is Layla Ba'labakki (b. 1936), a Lebanese writer. Her selected stories are – 1. *The Cat* (Ba'labakki 92-96), and 2. *The Filly Became a Mouse* (Ba'labakki 199-204). The third author selected is Samira Azzam (1927–1967), a Palestinian writer. Her short stories are – 1. *A Virgin Continent* (Azzam 101-105), and 2. *Tears for Sale* (Azzam 222-226). The fourth writer is Emily Nasrallah (1931-2018), and the selected story is – 1. *The Dinosaur* (Nasrallah 235-240). The last and fifth writer is Mayy Ziyada¹ (1886-1941) from Palestine. Her story is – 1. *Woman with a Story* (Ziyada 147-153). Instead of giving a detailed analysis of these stories, they will be studied with reference to some specific social-semiotic roles assigned to women in that society. The characters and themes will be analysed with a very specific reference to social functions and expectations.

The first section below will give a working definition and scope of the idea of semiotics. It also accounts for the idea of metaphor in semiotic understanding. The second section will deal with the concept of metaphor from a cognitive perspective. The third section will analyse the representation of women and the revolutionary voices in the selected stories using social roles as a criterion. The fourth section will provide an analysis of various metaphors used in the stories and their socio-cultural significance. The last section will raise the basic issues of discussion and provide general conclusions.

1. Signs and semiotics

We use the semiotic system known as language, which enables most human communication. At the very least, the construction of linguistic signs reflects the subjective ways in which we

see and perceive the world at different times, from different perspectives, or with different goals (Chandler 14; *Semiotics* 321; Naim 229). Languages' semiotic systems play an active role in the development of reality. Language is a non-neutral medium; hence, the choices the creative writers make matter, and they shape reality in a subjective manner. Creative writing is an active and conscious process of arranging the existing signs and norms of signification to convey some specific message. These messages are from the perspective of the creators of the text. The text is a form of message in which the sender of the message is absent, and hence the receiver has relative freedom in interpreting it. The creators of the text, the authors, encode the world from their experiences, fantasies, and imagination; the reader's role is to connect those creative descriptions with their own.

Interestingly, both these processes of encoding and decoding the message are directly affected and associated with the cultural system of the user of the sign system. The creative usage of the sign system is mostly non-literal and uses a lot of cultural symbolism. One such creative usage is that of a metaphor that is directly associated with the cultural background of the user. In terms of semiotics, a metaphor entails one signified serving as a signifier for another signified. A metaphor is an expression of a main, "literal," subject through a secondary, "figurative," subject (Chandler 127). Creative writing is always associated with some sort of non-literal interpretation. This non-literality, according to theorists like Vico, is itself symbolic of the idea of civilisation. Following Vichian theory of glottogenesis, Danesi talks about the special role and function of metaphor in the very development of language. Here, it is claimed that the link between imagination and language, the link between iconicity and conceptualisation, is the metaphor (Danesi 68). Furthermore, in the metaphoricity hypothesis, which Danesi, following Vico, calls the fourth event in human language development, it is argued that language takes the abstract form; abstract thought is a direct result of the human cognitive capacity of metaphoricity. Here, it no longer remains just a figure of speech; it is no longer an iconic reporting of events and experiences. This capacity to assign the metaphoricity to the given events and experiences is probably the driving force to human civilisation because it not only allows us to see and express things at a generalised, impersonal, and non-iconic level but also allows us to see and feel for others' abstract experiences and sufferings.

2. Metaphor

Metaphors, which were once connected to the concept of figurative and poetic language, are also vital to our daily communication. Using the analogy of the known to communicate the unknown is one of the most widely employed techniques. Metaphor is not a new concept in the study of language and literature. It used to be primarily thought of as a figurative language and was seen as a crucial aspect of non-literal languages. We have a variety of viewpoints on the idea of metaphor since, over time, a lot of significant scholars have attempted to define and theorise it. According to Nuessel (230), the "metaphor" has taken the role of "figurative language" as a cognitive tool in the new cognitive domain. Therefore, contrary to what we previously thought based on earlier studies, it is no longer merely another figure of speech. Nuessel explores comparison theory and interactionist theory, two major schools of thought on metaphor. A comparative theory proposes a comparison between two things or ideas. A metaphorical phrase is used in replacement theory, a subset of comparison theory, to replace a literal term. On the other hand, interactionist theory functions at the phrase level and is predicated on the interaction of distinct concepts. The components of a metaphor are conceptually linked together, creating a fresh interpretation. Like this, Arseneault (445–446) addresses many philosophical facets of the idea of metaphor. He distinguishes between two categories of metaphor: "living metaphors" and "non-literal tropes like irony, metonymy, and synecdoche."

According to Halliday (*Grammatical Metaphor* 116), a metaphor is an inherent quality of higher-order semiotic systems and a potent tool for creating meaning. As part of the study of figurative language from a semiotic perspective, Nuessel (230–242) offers a succinct

overview of a few of the more well-known theories of metaphor, including those of Aristotle, Vico, I.A. Richards, Max Black, Paul Ricoeur, and Lakoff and Johnson. According to Vico, our knowledge has a sensory foundation. One of our senses, vision, is the most crucial one because it is how we see the world. Similarly, Lakoff and Johnson's contemporary empirical research on metaphors makes a similar case. In their now-classic book, *Metaphors we live by*, theorists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson explain that "metaphor is not just a matter of language, that is, of mere words," that "the human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined," and that "metaphors as linguistic expressions are possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person's conceptual system" (6). Furthermore, "conceptual metaphor is a natural part of human thought, and linguistic metaphor is a natural part of human language" (248). The non-literal language develops a fundamentally relational understanding of reality as it is construed with the analogy of another known concept. The socio-cultural reality is framed within the system of an analogy of known figures, artefacts, and concepts. Starting from these views that metaphors are not just linguistic objects and that concepts are localised and filled with culture-specific content, this study aims to present the experiential sources of metaphors, the actual practical patterns of domination, and the socio-cultural structures and values that make people conceive, perpetuate, or challenge them.

3. Representation of Social Roles of Women in the Selected Stories

Every societal system identifies certain very specific, almost fixed, and closed functions for its members. The social title given to the member defines his or her social value and status in the given community. To put it in other words, the roles assigned to the member determine his or her freedom to express oneself. Semiotically speaking, each role is a sign which comes with significance in the given community. For a woman, every society has certain identified roles which are almost universal, such as mother, daughter, wife, or lover, among others. The role of the sister is not well-developed in the selected stories, and hence its discussion is excluded here. The identity of a woman is discussed as it forms a direct symbolic code (Barthes 17–18), an antithesis against the idea of a man, in the entire social and literary narratives. The discussion of these roles is also important because each selected role – a social sign – is in a paradigmatic relationship with other signs within these social narratives. The characters portrayed by the writers are marked in terms of gender and in clear contrast with the other gender. So paradigmatically, the portrayal of one action by a gender excludes the possibility of the similar action by the other gender. For example, the kinds of compromises and sacrifices that the wife made in the given stories are socially fixed to the functions of a wife. Hence, husbands are automatically excluded from similar compromises and sacrifices. Thus, the narratives portray the life of the male gender even without talking about them. Semiotically, the texts of the chosen stories could be interpreted by the essential semiotic perspective in terms of denotation and connotation. The denotation refers to the literal meaning or the dictionary interpretation of an utterance representing the signifier, which could be an icon or a symbol, or an index. In contrast, the connotation refers to various representations of social overtones, cultural implications, or emotional meanings associated with a sign (Danesi 2004). Most of the metaphors discussed below emerge from these cultural connotations.

The idea of time with reference to the woman is also important here from the social perspective of the given community. The roles which are being discussed below also describe the fact that women do not get time for themselves and their betterment. At the same time, the fight to balance the time for each role is also very real. The fundamental problem is not actually a particular role-related activity or time but what Schües (11) calls the *rhythm of time*, the temporal structure of society, and the way in which the activities are to be carried out. For example, the role of the wife, socially, expects the woman to be engaged in household activities and child bearing and rearing. This expectation supersedes all the other desires of a woman in the society represented in the given stories. In short, every social sign comes with fixed functions and expectations, which, in a way, block the other non-defined explorations in the life of a common woman.

3.1 The Mother

A mother is a social sign that makes the family complete. Mothers normally have closer relationships with their offspring. At'ut (*That Summer Holiday*) uses the character of the mother to break the news of restrictions on young Dalal. But it was quite clear from the narrative that the mother is merely repeating the orders of the father, but it was a matter of the visibility of the "breast," a social taboo in the father-daughter conversation, that the mother sends the message. Here, the mother does not try to defend the freedom of her nine-year-old daughter. Dalal's mother plays a stereotypical Arab mother and wife's role, that of transferring the restrictions from the father, who is the master of the house, to their daughter. She blindly obeys, without thinking at any moment that their girl may be exposed to negative psychological effects. At the same time, by doing what her husband is asking her, Dalal's mother becomes instrumental in maintaining and solidifying the gendered hegemony. Her acceptance of the orders and transferring them to Dalal makes her an obedient servant of the husband but not a mother that thinks about her girl-child. The symbolic code here does not remain to be that of contrast between husband and wife, but it becomes more of a relationship between master and servant.

In Ba'labakki's "The Filly became a Mouse" (199–204), the mother figures are shown as a reincarnation of the sacrifice and leaving everything for the happy lives of their daughters. The unsuccessful dreams of the mothers are carried on to the daughters to fulfil. The mothers escape the house of their husbands to make the lives of their daughters better and freer. Here again, the mother is there for the child, but the male counterpart is just the husband of the mother, not the father of the child – shifting all the responsibilities and sacrifices onto the mother.

"Tears for Sale" (222–226) by Samira Azzam brings a new facet to the role of the mother. Khazna - a middle-aged lady and the breadwinner of her small family of herself and her daughter, Masouda - serves as a mourner in the small village; interestingly, she is also the beautician and guide for the young brides of the village. Both completely opposite events in the village - funeral and marriage - are incomplete without the dramatic presence of Khazna. She is doing all the hard work for the bright future and conspicuous marriage of Masouda. But, unfortunately, Masouda could not survive typhoid. Now, the narrator and the entire village speculate how Khazna would mourn someone so close to her. But she was completely silent in her grief and loss. Some villagers also claimed that she did not mourn Masouda because she was not paid for it and deliberately failed to understand the loss the mother was suffering. Cohen-Mor (16–17) observes that "the role of women in preserving traditional rites is dramatised in 'Tears for Sale'. [...] the same woman performed both opposite rites, served to highlight the pivotal position of women in the cycle of birth, life, and death." As a woman and mother, Khazna had very limited choices to earn her bread and butter; if Khazna were a male, she would have remarried, and the death of the daughter would have unburdened that male to lead a freer life.

3.2 The Daughter

Dalal, a nine-year-old girl, is primarily presented as boyish; she enjoys playing with other kids in the street. She plays soccer, seven stones, and war games. All these games are primarily defined as masculine in nature. (At'ut, *That Summer Holiday*). When the father hears about his daughter's developing body, he does not question the gaze of the street people – primarily adult males — and puts restrictions on her clothes and her freedom. When Dalal was told about the growth of her breast by her mother, she realised why Abu Mehmud had tried to touch her the previous week. She also becomes aware that she has grown into a woman – though not aged enough, but mature enough that perverted male gazes would like to consume her. As a daughter, she is bound to carry forward the orders her father gave her through her mother. Dalal is not only the protagonist of this story; she is also a prototype figure and

daughter in Arab society from the 1920s to the 1980s. Her father's attitude and reaction are what usually occurred to any other Arab father, especially in lower- and middle-class settings. At'ut clearly tried to conceptualise a daughter as a victim of social restrictions, while there were no such restrictions laid down for Dalal's brothers. Thus, the symbolic code of brother-sister becomes operative here in which the former is privileged.

In Ba'labakki's "The Filly became a Mouse" (199–204), the daughter, the central character of the story, has learned the piano and ballet dance as they were the unfulfilled dreams of her mother. But she could not dance post-marriage as her husband did not allow her and asked her to be a good mother and housewife instead. In Ziyada's "Woman with a Story," the woman in question is a daughter of a well-educated and liberal-minded father; she is given an education, and she learns singing. But, when it comes to marriage and family, she has to follow the dictates of her father and society. In such cases, a woman has considerable freedom if she is a daughter and underage; but as soon as she is mature enough to get married, her value and status within the family changes; once she is married, she is a wife and under the dictates of her husband. Thus, the same biological gender, depending on her age and marital status, has a different significance.

3.3 The Lover

In the story "Mozart's Fez" (At'ut 100), the author tries to convey a clear message about the Arab man as a lover. A girl is beckoned by a man who starts to play his flute. She involuntarily dances with him until she feels exhausted. When she enters his tent, she is shocked to see that there are hundreds of women inside. She intends to ask him for an explanation when she sees him already beckoning another woman. Here, the 'Fez' of the title signifies masculinity as the specific type of cap is worn by males. The tent is a sign of the harem where females are kept more like sex slaves, deprived of basic emotional attachment, and used only for pleasure. Interestingly, both the *fez* and *harem* are syntagmatically connected with the males in terms of possession. The females are part of it, enclosed and enchanted.

"The Cat," a story by Ba'labakki (92–96), presents two love stories; the first is of a cat who leaves her house for her lover and has had kids with him, but her life changes completely, while the other story is about a young, modern, liberated woman who is having an affair with a married man, nineteen years older than her. She is a lover who feels jealous when she is on a dinner date, and her lover pays more attention to a cat and decided to deliver the cat to his father before the dinner. The story conveys the message that in Arab society, liberated women are more vulnerable than traditional women because of a male tendency to view them as fallen, degraded, uprooted, and unworthy of being taken seriously. The story does not seem to be a mere literary production but a reflection of how most Arab women understood themselves at the time when the short story was written. The protagonist, presented in the story in first person, is eagerly seeking passion, respect for her emotions, safety, and the invaluable happy moments that can fulfil her desires as a woman meeting her lover. However, instead of being delighted when she meets him, she finds him hunting for a cat for his father to play with. The character identifies with the cat's fate as a plaything or toy. The repetition of the word "lonely" in the story emphasises both the character's and the writer's inner conflict. His indifference forces her to help the cat get out of his car and run away as if she compares herself to the cat. This is an indirect equation between the cat and the central character, the protagonist. To sum up, the feminine narrating self is larger than the characters of the story she unfolds, larger than her own character, which suggests the existence of an unrequited open-mindedness hinted at with the last words of the story: "I hurried away to wander in the silent, deserted alleyways" (Ibid. 96).

In Ba'labakki's "The Filly became a Mouse" (199–204), the protagonist meets a male at her friend's house, and she immediately falls for him. She was like a filly who wanted to explore the world. But soon, this love affair turns into a marriage, and the journey of the filly is

confined to a house. In most of these cultural narratives, the journey of love to marriage is equivalent to the journey from freedom to domestication. The lover has relative freedom of the self, while the wife comes under the contract of domestication, and the first sacrifice of this contract is her liberty.

3.4 The Woman

At'ut's story "The Collapse of Barriers" (277–279) describes an incident involving a man and a woman stuck in an elevator. It is a short dialogue between a young girl and a male operator inside an elevator. The event is narrated from the man's point of view, who cannot refrain from showing his sexual desire toward the other gender. After he stops the elevator on purpose, he lights a cigarette, which she does not like. While he praises her beauty, she does not feel well because of the lack of oxygen, which she fears might be interpreted as her weakness. She eventually controls herself, changing the tone of her voice from submissiveness to dominance, thus showing that she is a strong lady. Such cases have usually been investigated by sociologists as sexual harassment. It is widely considered a negative social phenomenon. If we read between the lines, the writer conveys a subtle message about two social cases widespread in Arab society: repression and sexual harassment. In the end, however, she wants to draw attention to a girl's possible rapid change in attitude when she finds herself in such a critical situation: once the door opens, the young woman quickly regains control of her posture. The woman here, not in any way connected to the man, has to undergo such a tense situation, but the writer's projection is empowering in terms of Hanan's taking charge of the situation, which becomes possible, probably, because of her not being associated with the male in any socio-familial relations. The girls are made women through such male gazes; the story is an interesting take on how free women are seen as constant objects of the erotic gaze, which makes them conscious and mature before time about their own bodies.

Azzam in her story "The Virgin Continent" (101–105) talks about a very important and significant aspect of a woman's life, her history. The story presents a simple conversation between two people – a man and a woman, who can be lovers or husband and wife. But the conversation is about their past affairs. The male proudly speaks about his girlfriends, but when the female talks about her affair that happened seven years ago and with whom she could not marry as he was poor, the male could not digest it. The story ends with the woman saying that knowing about her past makes the male uncomfortable because it snatches his title as the *discoverer* of the virgin continent away from him. The woman always has to be without the past. Her very existence comes to the fore only when 'the right' man chooses her. Before that, she must not have any story associated with her name. But the case of the man is different; he can have as many stories to tell as he wants, as this act empowers his masculinity. Both the characters in the story are educated and claim to be frank with each other. The story highlights the fact that the absence of history for a woman strips her of her unique identity. Azzam highlights a wide range of social phenomena, such as male hypocrisy, mean practices of double standards, and prejudice (Cohen-Mor 11). The story is presented in the form of dialogue which also signifies directness and proximity between the characters.

In Nasrallah's story "The Dinosaur" (235–240) the narrator narrates an encounter between a western male and an Arabic female in one of the Western countries. The Western male talks about his second wife who was a virgin at the time of their marriage which comes as a surprise for him. He could not believe that a woman in this modern age, living in the late twentieth century, would remain a virgin for so long. For the woman coming from another culture, it comes as a bigger shock; a male was talking about his sex life with an unknown female, and a male was expecting his wife to be sexually experienced and active before marriage. It is a culture shock for the woman because, in her culture, the woman should be "without (a) story," without a past, an untouched-unbroken object, virginity for a woman is a virtue. This story directly connects with Azzam's "The Virgin Continent." In this story, the male talks about time, not about space – the continent. There are spaces – continents – that expect

something quite contrary from a woman irrespective of time. While the title of this story becomes very significant – the dinosaur refers to a specific time dimension and not space.

“Woman with a Story” (147–153) by Mayy Ziyada narrates a series of stories circulating about a woman whose unfortunate life was revealed in the end. A woman who had to live the life of a ‘half widow’ following socio-religious and cultural norms. Her beauty, her talent, and her elegance become just a matter of gossip for the people of the village. Everybody wants to crack a story about her on the very look of her. Ziyada depicts a harsh society that always places blame on women in all circumstances and in all cases without paying attention to the level of injustice. This is perfectly embodied in the rules and the cruel gossip about women once their husbands escape or abandon their responsibilities. Such women are constantly seen as ‘available’ for gossip, for allegations, and for the male gaze and pleasure. Ziyada successfully depicts the life of an upper-class family in which Madame Gh. B. was born. She is described in the third person, which subtly demonstrates that a story may sometimes not be enough to show what a victim thinks about her own social status and state of mind.

3.5 The Wife

In Ba’labakki’s “The Filly became a Mouse” (199–204), the protagonist - presented in first person - is the wife suffering her delusional life and recalling her unfulfilled past dreams about the filly that she was. She willingly gave control of this filly to the man of her dreams, her – now – husband, and he managed to convert her into a mouse, a house rat that had not seen the outside world and ate the leftovers of her master, sleeping with him, and being crushed by him regularly. The story is about her realisation of being a filly again and her revolt against the authority of her husband and the patriarchal system. But again, this revolt does not come for her self-fulfilment; rather, it comes as a sacrifice of a mother for the daughter – the way her mother did for her. Ba’labakki clearly shows here that a wife is primarily a species that belongs to the house. She is confined to the four walls of the house. Even in her other story, “The Cat,” there was a mention of the wife, the wife of the protagonist’s love, who is just mentioned. The entire narration in the story takes place outside, on the road; while a wife is a homebound creature, her existence is not acknowledged in the public life of the lover. The space assignment here is that the wife is for and in the house, while the lover is for public life. This narrative, in a way, shows the process of domestication of a free-spirited woman into something like a house rat, whose existence goes extinct in front of the owner of the house.

4. Metaphoric Reconstruction of Feminine Self

The narratives critically present the aspects of various established ideas and practices. The notions of love, marriage, family, and other such ideas, along with their impact on the life of a female, are presented from self-experience.

Many cultures compare women with lesser human things or animals. (cf. Turpin 11–21, Khatri 206–213) A similar conceptual metaphor emerges in the narratives of selected short stories, *A WOMAN IS A DOMESTICATED ANIMAL*². In the story “The Summer Holiday” (At’ut 30–37), both the females – Dalal and her mother – look more like the servants and victims of the head – the father and the husband – of the house and the patriarchal Arab society. In “Mozart’s Fez,” too, the victimisation of females is implicitly visible, a position caused by the high carelessness of her feelings or the severe ignorance of her senses. The first-person narrative in this story not only projects the author as a “victim” but also makes each reader the subject of the same fate, where they are simply the object of male gaze and desire. In the story “The Virgin Continent,” the above conceptual metaphor is significantly expressed in the choices that the protagonist is making. The protagonist literally says that she is governed by her family’s and relatives’ set of restrictions. She is obliged to leave her lover because he is poor, and she is afraid to lose her mother’s love and respect. She adds that her father could not bear the disgrace if she did not listen to their choice, and her mother might die from

sadness. It is as if the family horse loses the prestigious race, and the entire family loses its reputation. Her family imagines that her future with that poor man would be more complicated and would mean no more than begging for bread for a living as if she is another animal to be fed by the head of the family without her own desires and aspirations.

Ba'labakki, in her story "The Cat," directly and indirectly equates the women and their situation with a cat, a well-domesticated animal. The title of the story becomes a metaphor, and the first-person narration in the second half of the story is directly associated with the first-hand experience. In the second story, "The Filly became a Mouse," Ba'labakki still maintains the metaphors of animals for the woman - the filly who is known to travel and explore the world is the protagonist before marriage. But the same protagonist turns into a house-bound mouse whose survival is at the mercy of her master. We must understand here that though filly is associated with exploration and freedom, it is still a domesticated animal and runs on the command of the mounter. She does not explore the world by her own will. But that very exploration is also snatched away in her post-marriage life, and she turns into a house-bound, insignificant, and particularly ugly animal. People normally take pride in possessing a filly and like to talk about its beauty and skills, but they consciously try to hide the mouse to the extent that mice would be killed if they become a nuisance in the mind of the master of the house.

Azzam's second story, "Tears for Sale," uses metaphors from different perspectives. LIFE IS A JOURNEY is the metaphor that unconsciously may have governed the writer's thought when she depicted the critical end of many people from the neighbourhood. Death is a usual end, but it is more painful when caused by severe diseases. This is one of the most evident conceptual metaphors in Ba'labakki's prose as well. In the story, the narrating subject travels to more than one country, and each country is considered a station characterised by difficulties, alienation, and disaffection. The 'filly' here is the symbol of life as it travels, while the 'mouse' is a symbol of death, as it cannot explore the places. Her life in Europe required sacrifice on her mother's behalf, as the latter encouraged her daughter to learn ballet and become an artist. In this context, a second conceptual metaphor emerges, which is also a metaphor universally admitted: since a mother always cares for her children, MOTHER IS A DONOR, as mentioned above in section 3.1. This idea does not characterise only the narrator's mother. It extends to the narrator herself when she expresses her motherly affection for her own daughter. Over the first five years of marriage, the protagonist turns into a housewife, whereas her husband is the master, who feels entitled to ignore her completely. Marriage is a kind of contract of domestication where knowingly or unknowingly, a woman allows her husband to make all her decisions, and she becomes an entity within the walls of a house, taking care of those walls and floor and people associated with them. The husband becomes the master of the house, neither more nor less. The Arabic term to describe a husband is "*si Sayeed*," which means "master." Ba'labakki represents the transformation from a modern free woman artist into an enslaved wife, using a metaphoric conversion from a beautiful, elegant white filly into a sticky black mouse, which the master of the house frequently traps, smashes, and chokes.

While considering the relationship between the woman and her husband or lover, another conceptual metaphor surfaces: LOVE IS A JOURNEY. Their seven-year journey starts when the two fall in love at their common friend's party, and then it takes them to a station symbolised by their wedding. They get married despite her mother's disappointment. The latter knows that marrying an eastern man means giving up her career as a dancer. The narrator evokes her mother's role in her attempt to see her daughter pursue a career as a dancer. Their journey together goes through bad patches caused by ignorance, lack of cooperation, and selfishness. After seven years, the spell of tense love that has kept the couple together dissipates when the woman realises that he has betrayed her. The open end of the circular short story, when the dancer takes her daughter and leaves the house, as her own mother did, suggests at least two possible destinies: either to repeat the tragic experience of her mother or to conceive and follow unprecedented creative paths. In the case of another

story, "The Cat," the same conceptual metaphor – LOVE IS A JOURNEY – is present but here, both the lovers are in the process of knowing each other – the way strangers meet in a journey, and eventually, they like or dislike each other; it turns out to be short companionship. In "The Virgin Territory," Azzam also plays with this conceptual metaphor where the male character is proudly talking about his past affairs. For a man, love seems to not be a real JOURNEY, but maybe a very short trip or a picnic. Man is ready to start more than one relationship without considering the scale of loyalty. The author was extremely successful in conceptualising the Arab world metaphorically and ironically through the title of her story, "A Virgin Continent," which transmits the subtle and hilarious idea that if men are proud of their experiences with dozens, is it then possible to have a continent of pure women? It also metaphorically presents that the hymn of a woman is the most important part of her body - if it is there, all the men would want to conquer and discover the continent of the feminine body. Azzam very subtly construes the conceptual metaphor – MARRIAGE IS A DEAL, as it passes through a conduit of trading. Azzam was very successful in conceptualising this metaphor with a protagonist that leaves her lover and accepts a rich man chosen by her family. In this way, marriage lost its spiritual and holy aspect when it became a commercial deal between two males: her father and her suitor, the woman who is being bargained about remains a commodity. A similar construal of the narrative and usage of conceptual metaphor is also seen in Ziyada's "Woman with a Story," where the woman suffers because her husband, selected by her father, leaves her only after a few days of marriage. She is not divorced, and at the same time, she is not married. A deal, which also included dowry, was made between the father of the woman and the prospective husband – the woman who had to spend her life in that deal did not have anything to say in it. For various reasons, the deal can turn into a nightmare for the woman, as her choice is not considered before striking the deal.

In the short story "The Dinosaur," a stranger tries to lure a woman in her thirties who lives in a village. The man keeps asking her direct questions, such as "How old are you?" In this context, it is worth mentioning that age is considered a social force that determines a woman's destiny in Arab society. Reaching the age of thirty or forty is considered to make a woman seem unattractive and unwanted. As a result, she would like to be younger. Thus, a woman's age is comparable with the validity date of a product. She is likened to a dinosaur, an animal that cannot be domesticated.

Every sign selected by the creator of the text is significant as it is a conscious choice made by the subject. The usage of figurative language by the selected authors makes the stories more significant. Especially instead of presenting a report of their suffering in a literal sense, the authors have decided to use creative language and a literary genre that simply translates their direct or indirect personal experiences into a metonymic representation of women in general in the given society. Thus, the narratives of the stories are about the day-to-day experiences of women in the society, expressed in figurative language by the selected authors. The narratives also use certain metaphors which are universally recognised and interpreted identically across the world. At the same time, there are conceptual metaphors that encode very specific kinds of experiences as a narrative itself. Some of these conceptual metaphors are also recognised across cultures and communities. The stories we have seen above precisely do the same thing - it allows us to see the condition of the women in different situations and settings and feel what they must have gone through. The social roles discussed above, obviously not unique to the given culture, allow the abstraction of the characters and allow us to see them in a different light.

Similarly, the idea of time mentioned earlier also plays a significant role figuratively. As a reader, when we read these stories, it appears that they talk about life in the distant past. The time that we perceive as a reader and the actual time develop the cultural gap identified metaphorically. The authentic representation of the lives of women by these women writers not only presents the gap between narrow-minded and liberal lifestyles but also highlights the existence of two worlds for two genders. The stories of the women writers present another fact

which is the kind of time they could devote to their self-development and self-expression. The ordinary women of these communities lack this time which they can call their own and use for self-development. The very absence of free public life for these women itself becomes a metaphor for their social imprisonment.

5. Conclusion

The selected short stories are by women writers from different communities and nationalities of Arabic origin. They also represent different generations. And their stories represent different aspects of a woman's life in these communities. The creative stand by the writers to represent the mundane reality of the women's life does more than just document their experiences. The stories, in fact, turn out to be the representation of a multitude of voices; they serve as a metonymy of social history. They not only represent but also question the age-old practices that involve various feminine roles and stereotypical expectations of the female self. We have attempted to highlight two major aspects here: the social roles assigned to women and the metaphors, conceptual and simple, thematically employed by the selected writers. Society is a rigid structure directly influenced by institutions such as marriage, religion, and family. All of them have a very specific role assigned to the woman. From the perspective of time, if a woman observes the norms of these institutions, she will be eternally happy in the life hereafter. Signifying the dichotomy of ephemeral and eternal, which also attempts to justify the "ephemeral" suffering for the larger good of society, family, coming generations, and the eternal heavenly life. The practices documented by the writers provide us with a new perspective, a perspective that tries to assert and construct their own identity not as a woman but as a human. The metaphors related with love, sacrifice, marriage, and similar ideas, are also the signs that try to turn social belief into a natural dogma. By articulating these metaphors with all their significance, positive as well as negative, the writers make it clear that they could see through them. Both the semiotic systems of language as well as of social practices are undoubtedly very strong and rigid. But, by raising a mirror of exposition in front of them, the writers allow the reader to see through them. The moment 'real' becomes an object of discourse, it ceases to be real and becomes someone's "truth" (Leitch 1281). Here, we could observe the truth in imaginary and symbolic forms.

Notes

¹Mayy Ziyada is also known as May Ziadeh.

²The Conceptual Metaphors are traditionally represented in all CAPITALS.

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