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## Women's Negative Portrayal in Iraqi TV Series 2022: A Critical Discourse Analysis

### A B S T R A C T

The study endeavors to show the portrayal of women in the Iraqi TV drama, and the impact that they have on the Iraqi society. Media, in general, and TV drama, in particular, are designed to sediment ideologies and establish accepted social norms and behaviors. Therefore; women are represented negatively to undermine, marginalize and disparage them. A qualitative content analysis is conducted to show the ideologies behind the negative representation of women in the five most popular Iraqi television dramas. Women were negatively represented in these series as: weak, causes of conflict, and evil. They are also represented negatively as unreliable, properties of men, ignorant and as sex objects.

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تصوير المرأة السلبي في مسلسلات التلفزيون العراقية 2022: تحليل خطاب نقدي

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#### المستخلص

تسعى الدراسة إلى إظهار صورة المرأة في الدراما التلفزيونية العراقية وتأثيرها على المجتمع العراقي. تم تصميم وسائل الإعلام بشكل عام والدراما التلفزيونية بشكل خاص لترسيخ الأيديولوجيات وإرساء الأعراف والسلوكيات الاجتماعية المقبولة. لذلك؛ يتم تمثيل المرأة بشكل سلبي لتقويضها وتهميشها والاستخفاف بها، يتم إجراء تحليل نوعي للمحتوى لإظهار الأيديولوجيات الكامنة وراء التمثيل السلبي للمرأة في المسلسلات التلفزيونية العراقية الخمس الأكثر شعبية، تم تمثيل المرأة سلباً في هذه المسلسلات على أنها: ضعيفة والسبب الرئيسي للصراعات والشر، كما يتم تمثيلها بشكل سلبي على أنها غير مؤهلة للثقة وجاهلة، وتصور ايضاً كملكية للرجل فقط.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تصوير المرأة ، أيديولوجيا ، مسلسلات عراقية ، الصورة النمطية.

## 1- Introduction

Iraqi drama has a strong psychological impact on viewers, who unconsciously accept the attitudes, beliefs, and values that are given visually or verbally. People are unaware of how easily they are manipulated by the subtle messages presented in these shows. As a result, stereotypes of women in Iraqi society still portray them as helpless, docile, and obedient. These TV shows have a history of validating these falsehoods in a number of ways, which has contributed to their perpetuation. Additionally, because Iraqi drama employs both the successful medium of television and the widely accepted discursive mode of insult as its means of delivery, verbal violence can have a significant discriminating impact.

Yet, there has been a paucity of research which is to uncover the ideology in Iraqi TV drama to investigate the way language is utilized and manipulated to create a certain 'mental image' in the minds of the audience. Such a mental picture not only perpetuates a derogatory view of women but also reproduces and entrenches the ideology of masculine superiority that rules and controls communities.

## 2- Literature Review

Women are frequently labeled with negative traits such as being submissive, sensitive, dependant, emotional, domineering, unsure of themselves, or having a changeable mind. The men are typically portrayed positively, though, as being extremely logical, independent, forceful, and competitive. Kaul & Shahni, (2010) found in their analysis of Indian television dramas that women are portrayed in ways that reinforce conventional roles already present in society. Television portrayals of men and women in their broadcasted roles are likewise rife with sexist stereotypes. In the realm of television, women are typically represented as domestic helpers, wives, mothers, and as submissive individuals preoccupied with conventional family responsibilities. Men are shown as active, enthusiastic, and aggressive.

### 2.1 Female Stereotyping in Media

Although gender stereotypes are persistent, female stereotypes tend to be more prevalent than male stereotypes (Collins, 2011; Goffman, 1979). The first apparent aspect in relation to female stereotyping is their under-representation, which Tuchman (1978) has referred to as the symbolic annihilation of women. Another instance of under-representation is when a male character is written into the lead role rather than a female (Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media, 2014).

The most prevalent form of stereotyping involves the physical attributes of female characters, who are virtually usually shown as being youthful, beautiful, and attractive. Additionally, this portrayal is extended to a fixation with youth and beauty, in which the females are depicted as solely caring about their appearance (Wood, 1994)

The portrayal of women as the victims of violence and other types of crime is another stereotype that is frequently present (Gunter, 1995; Tuchman, 1978). In addition to being the targets of violence, women are frequently portrayed in media as passive objects (Wood, 1994).

Submissiveness (Tuchman, 1978; Wood, 1994), emotionality, frailty, and dependency are other characteristics akin to passivity (Gunter, 1995).

As for as relationship, stereotypes are also created, in addition to those concerning behavior and appearance. According to extensive research, women are portrayed in the media as being excessively focused with romance and their love life as well as nurturing and caring for their loved ones (Gunter, 1995). (Wood, 1994). Additionally, women who neglect their caring obligations to their families are stigmatized (Walderzak, 2016a). It's interesting to note that the nurturing and caring aspect is frequently connected to the domestic realm (Tuchman, 1978; Wood, 1994), where it is demonstrated that females participate in doing typical household activities.

Others as well, such Gerbner et al. (1978), feel that despite the higher awareness of the issue, the representation of women is deteriorating. Additionally, the media continues to promote the old notion that says men are the household heads and women are the homemakers (Gerbner et al., 1978; Poerwandari et al., 2014). The ratio of male to female primary characters has been steadily increasing, according to other academics (Gauntlett, 2008; Zeisler, 2008). The stereotype of the female being preoccupied with and portrayed as young and beautiful has also persisted, as has been noted (Gauntlett, 2008; Poerwandari et al., 2014; Zheng, 2011). The typical portrayal of women has remained one of gentility and passivity (Poerwandari et al., 2014), and they frequently have lower employment statuses than male characters (Zheng, 2011). In some cases, the portrayal of women has actually gotten worse due to increased stereotyping in more recent years as opposed to a more liberal portrayal in the past and more use of the tropes of the angelic traditional woman and the demonic contemporary woman.

## **2.2 Genre and TV Drama**

Television has gained recognition for itself as a powerful social medium and a center for the dissemination of "social ideals and behavioral expectations" since it was first invented (Yates, 1997). The significance of television, according to Kottak (1990), is in its pervasiveness for "it is not used selectively, but rather by practically all the people, all the time. It crosses demographic boundaries - presenting to diverse classes, races, sexes and nationalities a common set of symbols, vocabularies, information and shared experiences."

From this point on, it has a very strong influence on forming social norms and behaviors as well as regimenting ideologies and beliefs. In 1960, one of the first Arab nations to offer television service was Iraq. Since then, it has become a force in culture, spreading a variety of themes and teachings. "acceptable behavior, establishing role-expectation and shaping and reflecting social norms and ideologies" (Yates, 1997). Drama, on the other hand, is one of the best mediums for propagating ideology and establishing social norms.

## **2.3 Feminism and Muted Group Theory**

Studies in a wide range of subjects, including those dealing with women's roles, lifestyles, politics, and women's issues, are included in feminist theory. The theory tries to comprehend the nature of sexuality, gender relations, and gender inequality. It also emphasizes the interests, rights, and concerns of women. Discrimination, stereotyping, objectification, sexual

objectification, and domination are among the topics examined in the context of feminist thought.

A study with the title, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness", Showalter (1981) states, "Women's difficulties with feminine identity come after the Oedipal phase, in which male power and cultural hegemony give sex differences a transformed value" (Showalter, pp. 196). She adds, "Women have been left out of history not because of the evil conspiracies of men in general or male historian in particular, but because we have considered history only in male-centered terms" (Showalter, pp. 198). Showalter shows that because women are asked incompatible questions about history, women's contributions to society are ignored. Since there may be a female culture present within the larger culture that both men and women participate in, she believes that the best way to address this will be to focus on a "woman-centered inquiry." Women typically assimilated its principles in the American "cult of real femininity" and the English "feminine ideal," according to Showalter when she analyzes gender roles in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. However, males defined and defended the feminine domain. (Showalter, pp.198)

Moreover, Showalter(1981) makes mention of the underrepresentation or inappropriate portrayal of women who do not belong to the mainstream national culture. She cites research indicating that while major ethnic groups were represented on Malaysian TV news, drama, and comedy, minority ethnic groups were marginalized .

Richards (1982) in "Negative Forces and Positive Non-Entities: Images of Women in Amiri Baraka's Dramas are Marked by "Arresting imagery, Funny but Painful Irony" however, claims that despite the fact that Baraka founded the Black Arts movement and that his writings demonstrate how art can be a powerful tool in the fight for freedom, he ignores the fact that his dramaturgy is extremely "male-dominated and woman-hating"

### 3. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative content analysis to demonstrate the negative representation of women in the most popular Iraqi TV. drama from 2020 to 2022. Five popular Iraqi television dramas were chosen for this study, namely : AL Im Albadeela( Surrogate mother) on Mbc Iraq, Ma mat Watten(Home is not dead ) on al Sherqiea, Welaet Bateekh( State of Watermelon ) on Dijella, Banat Saleh (Saleh's Daughters)on Mbc Iraq, and Virus on UtV. These TV drama series were all broadcast on various television stations in the year 2020- 2022.

### 4- Analysis and Discussion

Focusing only on analysing the content of the selected Iraqi drama TV series, the study shows that 90% of the images of women are negative. It is noted that depicting women as weak characters in both the lead and supporting roles is one of the dramas' recurrent motifs. Iraqi women are portrayed as the following:

1- The most unfavorable stereotype that is perpetuated in drama is that of using women's bodies as a means of procreation or as a commodity for sexual stimulation. "AL Im albadeela" ( Surrogate mother).

2- A representation of women as symbols of evil and, to some extent, immorality, as seen in the "Virus" series.

3- Other undesirable perceptions of women included those displayed by the various main characters of various scenes in *Welaet Bateekh* (State of Watermelon) and *Ma mat Watten* (Home is not dead), episode 12, season 2. These characters included those who were illiterate, intellectually limited, inexperienced, materialistic, opportunistic, weak, or dependent.

4- Unfaithful Women Image as the main character( Faten ) in *Banat Saleh*( Saleh's Daughters)

5-The Image of Hypocritical and gossip women Am Atteya (Al Kadoud), Noor in (Teeba)

In "*Ma mat Watten*" (episode 12, season 2), Ameena embodies the stereotypes of a weak, dependent, illiterate, and intellectually limited woman in Iraqi regions who is not allowed to inherit her father's property. Ameena asks for her inheritance rights when she sees her brother Ghanem. Ghanem abuses Ameena verbally and physically in this incident. Ghanem never uses positive language when referring to his sister. Ameena feels helpless in the face of clan traditions and norms, so she chooses to remain silent rather than claim her earnings and give up her economic rights.

In "*Al Im Albadeela* (Surrogate mother), the protagonist Amal, Khaled's mother, is portrayed as the epitome of evil because she paid to have Nevean's father's surgery done in order to pursue her own plan. Nevean, on the other hand, has been portrayed as a birthing vessel for a child. Due to her inability to get pregnant and satisfy her spouse, Zeena is presented as being helpless and lacking in confidence.

A lot of derogatory imagery has been utilized to characterize women in the Iraqi comedy television series as depicted in the sitcom "*Welayet Battekh*" (Watermelon State). In the scene between Ghassan and Jenan, Jenan is presented as a stingy woman who constantly bothers her husband, phones every hour, and gives her poor husband commands. In another scene, Ghassan's wife is made out to be foolish since she can't drive, and another husband then approaches Ghassan to make fun of his wife, who is also made out to be stupid. When Ashettey (Ghassan's wife), forgets where she left her son, the metaphor of a neglected wife is used. However, Ghassan uses a lot of abusive language against Ashettey and her aunt in this scene, berating them verbally. Additionally, it has been stressed that the wife's acceptance of verbal abuse, direct insults, and derogatory language as the standard mode of discourse between a man and his wife combined with the use of such verbal abuse as a source of humor may have a serious impact on tolerating and accepting prejudices against women

Faten is presented as the unfaithful wife in "*Banat Saleh*" (Saleh's daughters). She separated from her husband Saleh, who was jailed for 20 years on a murder charge. She asked for a divorce and married a rich man named Jamal and told her daughters that their father had died.

The last series in this study is *Virus*, another Iraqi production that maintains the stereotyped inferior perception of Iraqi women rather than doing right to them. A very offensive representation of female university students is used. Handerin is portrayed as a hacker who is blackmailing her coworkers and accessing their personal pages. The image of Russell is that of a shallow person attempting to seduce her professor. Every other minor female character in this series is portrayed badly.

## **5-Conclusion**

Drama on Iraqi television has a poor representation of women. Over the past three years, women have been portrayed as (excessively) emotional, making it difficult for them to think clearly and make decisions. This is in addition to the focus on the traditional role of women as being preoccupied with cooking, cosmetics, and gossip. It has been noted that Iraqi women have never appeared in TV dramas as the main character with a positive orientation, as males have, and that all supporting female characters have negative orientations.

The study shows that Iraqi TV drama has significant influence on extending the boundaries of socially appropriate behavior as well as how it fosters societal conditions that make discrimination more readily accepted and justified as proper (Ford 2000). On the basis of the aforementioned, I may come to the conclusion that it is typical in a conservative country like Iraq for women to be portrayed negatively when they are viewed by a variety of people on the influential medium of television. TV shows are not a harmless form of entertainment, but rather a very detrimental one that offers a fertile ground for the development of sexist attitudes and the justification of the dogma of masculine supremacy.

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