

THE IMAGE OF WOMAN IN EGYPTIAN MASS MEDIA⁽¹⁾

In preparing this study on the image of woman in Egyptian feminine mass media, the researchers chose the women's magazine "Hawwa", a weekly periodical, as a medium of research. "Hawwa" has a wide circulation in Egypt and other Arab countries, addressing itself primarily to the average woman. They limited their study to the fiction material, comprising 28 short stories that appeared in 14 numbers, issued in three consecutive months: November, December, January, 1975-1976. Of the 28 stories chosen, 11 had an Egyptian background and were written by Egyptian women, 8 were written by non-Arab women and 9 by unknown authors. They chose fiction as a subject of study because fictitious narrative forms a homogeneous, informative source of material and is widely popular among women readers.

ANALYSIS OF THE STORIES

The analysis of the short stories meant to the researcher the separation of each into its component parts; 1) the theme or main topic; 2) the axis (plural: axes) which means "the concept or event forming a turning point in the action of the story and leading to a new stage in its development;" 3) the elements, details or partial events. The terms "theme, axis, element" are not clearly defined in the tables presented in the study but it should be possible to identify them if we consider the axes as the larger components of the theme and the details or elements as the minor ones.

The stories were analyzed from the following angles:

1 - The behavioral dimensions of the heroines or the ways by which they respond to their problems, which could be:

- a. negative or positive
- b. emotional or rational
- c. altruistic or egotistic

2 - The social roles played by the heroines.

3 - A comparison between the Egyptian and the foreign stories in content and tendency.

A. NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE ATTITUDES

A negative attitude means that the heroine refrains from taking any positive step in handling her problems. 1) She relies on outside help, 2) or follows a traditional

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method of treating them, like resorting to patience, submissiveness, self-depreciation and acceptance of the accomplished fact, 3) or falls into despair and goes through a nervous depression.

Examples of Negative Conduct:

- The wife refuses to forsake a husband who has ill-treated her.
- A heroine collapses before a crisis.
- A woman laments the passage of her youth.

Proportion of negative conduct in the analyzed stories:

In 5 themes out of 28, the heroines showed negative conduct, i.e. in 17% of the stories. The same attitude was shown in 7 out of 53 axes contained in the stories, i.e. in 12.8%. Also negative conduct was noted in 27 out of 115 minor elements or details, which means a proportion of 23.4%.

A positive attitude implies the ability of the heroine to confront her problems by her own personal initiative without waiting for outside help.

Examples of Positive Behavior:

- A young girl considers the choice of a husband as her sole business.
- A wife has the right to dispose of her wealth notwithstanding the husband's objection.
- An educated girl thinks that marriage should be based on love.

Proportion of Positive Behavior

Positive action was shown in 1) 5 out of 28 themes, in the proportion of 17.9% of the whole; 2) in 16 axes out of 53, i.e. in 30%; 3) in 19 elements out of 115, in the proportion of 16%.

B. EMOTIONAL VERSUS RATIONAL BEHAVIOR

Emotional behavior, as defined in this study, is one motivated by an emotional condition or an inner feeling like love, hate, jealousy, greed. It is complete submission to such feelings and inability to overcome them.

Examples of Emotional Conduct:

- A romantic young girl indulges in day-dreaming about her prince charming and later discovers the fallacy of her dreams.
- A devoted wife who has discovered her husband's unfaithfulness falls into despair.
- A young girl deprived of love tries to attract other people's attention by feigning chronic sickness.

Proportion of Emotional Conduct:

The proportion of emotional conduct in the 28 stories was 13/28, i.e. in 46% of the themes; on the axis level it was 39%; on that of the minor elements it reached 20%.

Rational Conduct

"It is a form of conduct dictated by reason. It is an external look into the self, which is considered as a variable, attended by an attempt to eliminate the personal, emotional element."

Examples of Rational Conduct

- A practically minded woman who prefers a marriage based on economic stability to one based on love.
- A woman with a strong and independent personality who is able to face her difficulties and carry out responsibility after her husband's death.
- A militant woman who succeeds in combining school work with a job that permits her to earn her expenses.

Proportion of Rational Conduct

Rational conduct among the heroines of the stories does not exceed 9.3% of the themes, 9.6% of the axes and 6.8% of the details.

The nature of their behavior within the three levels is restricted to the sphere of their emotional and family life.

C. ALTRUISM VERSUS EGOTISM

Altruism means that a person is inclined to give freely and to consider other people's interests before his own. Egotism, on the contrary, is a selfish attitude which overlooks the interests of others.

The study showed that the heroines were motivated by altruism in 10.7% of the themes, in 11% of the axes and in 8.7% of the details.

The egotistic attitude pervades the themes in the proportion of 14%, in the axes it is 9.4% and in the details 8.7%.

Social Roles

The main role played by women in the 28 stories is that of housewife at a proportion of 60% in the main topics, 40.4% in the basic axes and 32% in the minor details.

These proportions reveal the importance of marriage in woman's life. The details show the importance of love to her and the suffering she goes through at her husband's infidelity. Her main occupation is to try to keep her husband's affection by giving birth to children, especially male ones.

The mother's role is manifest in 5.8% of the 52 axes. This small proportion, however, helps us to conclude that a mother's happiness depends on her children, especially the males among them. She identifies with them, plans their marriage and tries to make them fulfill her wishes.

The other roles played by women characters in the stories are those of daughter, grandmother, friend, worker, etc. but these roles are insignificant and are not worth considering, according to the authors of the study.

A comparison between woman's image in the Egyptian stories and in foreign ones showed no outstanding

difference, except that her role as wife covered 45.5% of the Egyptian stories while in the foreign ones this role was limited to 25%.

Concluding Remarks

The general results of this study about woman's image in the 28 stories published by "Hawwa" magazine, show a good deal of equality between the negative and the positive attitudes of the heroines. The same similarity appears on the level of altruism and egotism. But the preponderance of **emotional** over rational behavior is evident from the following figures:

Emotional

46% of the themes
39% of the axes
24% of the details

Rational

9.3% of the themes
9.6% of the axes
6.8% of the details

Safiyya Majdi, one of the three researchers who participated in the study, commented on the results by saying (pp. 112-114) that the behavior patterns which define the Egyptian woman's roles in the light of the analyzed stories are limited to her relationship with man. In most of them she essentially appears as a follower, not a complement to her husband. Her role is to serve and please him, and to derive her happiness from his approval of her conduct. He is in the family the center point of interest while her role is secondary. Her only care is to provide him with male children and to prepare her daughters for marriage by making them duplicates of herself, playing the same role that she and all her ancestresses played before. Her image is on the whole a traditional one, a stereotype.

Safiyya Majdi protests against this image by saying: "It should be appropriate to inquire about the absence of the integrated woman from this image, the active, productive woman in the educational and social fields. Where is this new woman in the fiction of Egyptian feminine media? Though she has been duly presented in the first report on the changing social role of woman in Egypt today, she seems to be totally absent from the above stories."

European Women in the Political Field

Women who, during the last thirty years, occupied leading political positions in their countries, did not belong to the Western hemisphere but to countries of the Third World: Indira Gandhi, Indian prime minister; Golda Meir, minister of foreign affairs in Israel; Isabel Péron, president of Argentina and S. Bandaranaike, president of Sri-Lanka.

The present generation witnesses the rise of European women to positions of power. At least five of them have recently succeeded in snatching positions that used to be the exclusive rights of men.

In no. 9 of *Al-Raida* we published an article about Margaret Thatcher, the first woman prime minister in England.

On July 17, 1979, Mme Simone Weil, the first woman in France to occupy the secretariat of the Higher Judicial Council and the first to serve as minister of health, was elected president of the European Common Parliament by universal suffrage. Her

election took place in the second electoral round of the opening parliamentary session.

For the first time in Portugal, a woman has been asked to be prime minister and form a transitional government whose function will be to prepare the general elections of next fall. She is Dr. Maria de Lurdes Pintassilgo, 48 years, who in 1975 represented her country at the UNESCO and in 1974 was the first woman to become minister of social affairs.

In the Parliament of European Communities, another woman occupies a position of leadership: Mme Danièle Demarch, a member of the Communist Party who has been elected vice-president of the said Parliament.

In Italy, Mme Nilde Iotti, associate of one of the founders of the Communist Party, was elected last June to the presidency of the Italian chamber of deputies. She thus

occupies the third political rank in her country, immediately following those of president of the republic and head of the senate.

It is worthwhile to recall here that Simone Weil, who has been elected president of the European Parliament, was a fellow student of Simone de Beauvoir's at the Sorbonne around 1927. In her autobiography, "Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter", (translated by James Kurkup, Penguin Books, 1959), the author of the *Second Sex* refers to her as one who had "a great reputation for intelligence and her bizarre get-up... A great famine had broken out in China and I was told that when she heard the news she wept; these tears compelled my respect much more than her gifts as a philosopher. I envied her for having a heart that could beat across the world." "To her only one thing mattered in the world today: the revolution which would feed all the starving people of the earth" (ibid. p. 239).