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The Construction of Women in the Short Stories *Ma'nā Al-Ḥubbi* and *Ḥubbun bi Lā Naslin* by 'Abbās Ḥāfiż: A Feminist Study

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine how Egyptian women are constructed in the short stories *Ma'nā al-Ḥubbi* and *Ḥubbun bi Lā Naslin* by 'Abbās Ḥāfiẓ througt Rosi Braidotti's concepts of mother, monster, and machine. The research employs a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach. The findings reveal that women's identities are closely tied to domesticity, reproduction, and moral expectations within patriarchal society. First, women are constructed as mothers through expectations related to domestic skills, caregiving, and maternal affection. Their social value is associated with their ability to serve husbands, manage the household, and nurture children, even in the absence of biological motherhood. Second, women are constructed as monsters when they deviate from patriarchal norms. Female characters who reject reproductive expectations, fail to fulfill domestic roles, or violate standards of chastity are portrayed as abnormal and socially stigmatized. Third, women are constructed as machines because their existence is primarily valued through reproductive function. Women's bodies are treated as instruments regulated by social and cultural systems concerned with childbirth, sexuality, and family continuity. Consequently, infertility or the inability to reproduce reduces women's social value and limits their agency within marriage and family structures. Overall, the short stories reflect how patriarchal culture confines women within rigid biological and domestic roles.

Keywords: Women's Construction, Monster, Rosi Braidotti, Egyptian Culture, Patriarchy, Arabic Literature

الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل بناء صورة المرأة في الثقافة المصرية من خلال القصتين القصيرتين "معنى الحب" و"حبٌّ بلا نسل" لعبّاس حافظ، وذلك بالاستناد إلى الإطار النظري النسوي لروزي برايدوتي المتمثل في مفاهيم: الأم، والوحش، والآلة. تعتمد الدراسة على المنهج النوعي ذي المقاربة الوصفية التحليلية. وتكشف النتائج أن هوية المرأة ترتبط ارتباطًا وثيقًا بالأدوار المنزلية والإنجابية والتوقعات الأخلاقية التي يفرضها المجتمع الأبوي. أولًا، تُبنى المرأة بوصفها أمًّا من خلال التوقعات المرتبطة بالمهارات المنزلية والرعاية والعاطفة الأمومية، حيث تُقاس قيمتها الاجتماعية بقدرتها على خدمة الزوج وإدارة شؤون المنزل ورعاية الأطفال، حتى في غياب الأمومة البيولوجية. ثانيًا، تُبنى المرأة بوصفها وحشًا عندما تنحرف عن المعايير الأبوية، إذ تُصوَّر النساء اللواتي يرفضن الأدوار الإنجابية أو يعجزن عن أداء الواجبات المنزلية أو يخالفن معايير العفّة بوصفهن شاذات اجتماعيًا ومهمَّشات. ثالثًا، تُبنى المرأة بوصفها آلة حين تُختزل قيمتها في وظيفتها الإنجابية، حيث يُنظر إلى جسد المرأة بوصفه أداة تخضع لتنظيم اجتماعي وثقافي مرتبط بالإنجاب والجنس واستمرار النسب العائلي. ونتيجة

لذلك، يؤدي العقم أو عدم القدرة على الإنجاب إلى تقليل القيمة الاجتماعية للمرأة والحد من فاعليتها داخل الأسرة والزواج. وبصورة عامة، تعكس القصتان كيف تُقيّد الثقافة الأبوية المرأة داخل أطر بيولوجية ومنزلية صارمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: بناء المرأة، الوحش، روزي برايدوتي، الثقافة المصرية، الأبوية، الأدب العربي

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INTRODUCTION

Patriarchal systems in Egypt did not merely involve male domination over women. Rather, they operated through more complex social mechanisms that had developed historically over time. Hatem explains that patriarchal systems in Egypt functioned through gender segregation and the regulation of female sexuality (Hatem, 1986). Within this system, women's mobility, reproductive roles, and social relations were closely controlled in order to maintain male authority. Nevertheless, women's ability to exercise autonomy and participate in decision-making was not entirely absent, but was often shaped by factors such as educational attainment, family structure, and socioeconomic background (Ali, 2023). Consequently, patriarchy can be understood not only as male domination, but also as a system that supervises women's bodies, restricts mobility, regulates marriage, and controls reproduction and sexuality.

In Egyptian culture, women are often constructed within domestic roles that place them under male authority. Fathers or adult men are regarded as the heads of the family with authority over wives and children, while also bearing responsibility for the family's welfare (Lichtenstadter, 1952). Meanwhile, women's authority is primarily associated with maternal functions, such as childcare, caregiving, and domestic responsibilities (Hatem, 1986). In addition, women's social value is strongly connected to their reproductive abilities. Women who do not have children often feel pressured to allow their husbands to remarry or divorce them in order to obtain offspring (Hatem, 1986). Furthermore, the gender of the child also affects women's social position. Sons are often valued more highly because they are associated with economic security, family continuity, and protection of family wealth, whereas daughters are frequently viewed as potential sources of social shame if they violate social norms (Hatem, 1986). These patriarchal expectations position women within rigid social and biological roles. Women are valued according to their ability to nurture, reproduce, and preserve family honor, while those who fail to fulfill these expectations are often marginalized or stigmatized.

As a result, women's identities become closely tied to domesticity, sexuality, and reproduction.

Moreover, women's participation in household and reproductive decision-making was also limited within patriarchal family structures. Research by Govindasamy and Malhotra shows that Egyptian women were not always fully involved in decisions related to family planning and household finances. Although some women participated in joint decision-making with their husbands, this involvement was strongly influenced by factors such as education, employment, freedom of movement, and socioeconomic status. The study further demonstrates that women with lower autonomy and weaker bargaining positions within the household were more likely to leave reproductive decisions to their husbands (Govindasamy & Malhotra, 1996). This condition reflects how patriarchal systems regulated not only women's bodies and reproductive roles, but also their authority within domestic life.

Within this context, Rosi Braidotti's theory of mother, monster, and machine provides an important framework for understanding how women are socially constructed. Braidotti argues that women are often reduced to limited cultural categories that define their value through motherhood, bodily norms, and reproductive functions. The social construction of women in Egyptian culture, which places them in domestic roles, ties social value to motherhood, and judge dignity based on reproductive abilities and outcomes, shows how strongly women's identities are reduced to biological and household roles. This pattern not only determines women's social position but also sets strict boundaries on their behavior and bodies. Within the framework of Rosi Braidotti's theory, this phenomenon can be interpreted through three main constructs, namely mother, monster, and machine.

Braidotti discusses the dominant view of women, which is narrowly constructed through three main constructs: mother, monster, and machine. First, the construction of women as mothers. Braidotti (1997) argues that in the dominant social construct, women are always associated with maternal functions, even when they are not yet or are not biologically mothers. Second, the construct of women as monsters (Braidotti, 1997). Braidotti explains that monsters are used as metaphors for differences and deviations from the norm. Monsters are conditions that deviate from the norm of the body or abnormalities in women's physiques. Monsters also refer to all behaviors outside of social norms. Third,

the construction of women as machines. Women have often been constructed as machines, not literally but as a metaphor referring to something that can be understood, controlled, or disciplined. Braidotti explains that the machine in question is a combination of scientific, political, and discursive structures. So, it is not only about machines physically but also includes systems that automate and regulate human life. In the context of women being constructed as machines, it means that the dominant society considers that women can be classified, controlled, and positioned within the modern knowledge system (Braidotti, 1997).

The cultural construction of women is also reflected in literary works. According to Semi, literary works are born out of the human urge to express oneself about human issues, humanity, and the universe (Semi, 1993). One literary work that describes women's issues in Egyptian culture is the short stories "*Ma'nā Al-Ḥubbi*" and "*Ḥubbun bi Lā Naslin*" in the short story anthology *Alwanu min Al-Ḥubbi* by Hafiż `Abbas. This anthology was first written and published in Egypt in 1951 and was later republished by Hindawi in 2012. The anthology consists of 10 stories, two of which are the short stories "*Ma'nā Al-Ḥubbi*" and "*Ḥubbun bi Lā Naslin*".

The short story "*Ma'nā Al-Ḥubbi*" tells the story of a man who has a wife, a woman named "D," but she does not fit the mold constructed by society. According to him, a wife must be skilled in domestic affairs, able to cook and clean the house, and willing to have children. Later, the man meets another woman, "R." While getting to know her, he considers "R" to be a good woman and suitable to become his wife. However, "R" had previously become pregnant outside marriage and already has a child. At the end of the story, the male character accepts "R," despite initially perceiving her as a bad woman.

Meanwhile, the short story "*Ḥubbun bi Lā Naslin*" portrays a wife who cannot have children because of an accident she experienced in the past. Before marrying her husband, she already felt inferior because she could not bear children, even though her husband and his extended family accepted this. In the end, the marriage went ahead and her married life went well. One day, the wife went to a park and met a little boy. She liked the boy and visited his house to play with him. When she entered the boy's room to put him to bed, she found a photo of her husband with a woman and the boy. From the photo, she learned that her husband had married and had a child. At the end of the story, the wife

leaves and distances herself from the small family because she feels that her presence will interfere with the happiness of her husband and his new family.

Both short stories portray women who are positioned within patriarchal expectations related to domesticity, morality, and reproduction in Egyptian society. Although the stories do not explicitly mention specific geographical regions or social classes, the representation of women in these works reflects patriarchal constructions that confine women within certain social roles and expectations. Therefore, these short stories are important to examine further in order to reveal how literary works represent and reconstruct the social construction of women within patriarchal culture.

Based on the above description, the research question in this study is How are Egyptian women constructed in the short stories *Ma'nā al-Ḥubbi* and *Ḥubbun bi Lā Naslin* by 'Abbās Ḥāfiẓ?. In relation to this research question, this study aims to reveal the construction of Egyptian women in the short stories "*Ma'nā Al-Ḥubbi*" and "*Ḥubbun bi Lā Naslin*" by 'Abbās Ḥāfiż.

A literature review has been conducted involving material and formal objects. The material objects of this study are the short stories "*Ma'nā Al-Ḥubbi*" and "*Ḥubbun bi Lā Naslin*" by 'Abbās Ḥāfiż and the formal object is the construction of women. Both short stories are included in the anthology *Alwānu min Al-Ḥubbi*. Previous studies on this anthology have been conducted by Nadillah and Purnamawati (2025) through their study entitled "Women as Mother and Machine in Patriarchy: A Reading of Mince and Zawj Taghiya". Their research reveals that women in the short stories are constructed as mothers who experience multiple burdens in domestic and public spheres, while also being positioned as reproductive and sexual objects under patriarchal control. Although the female characters occupy oppressed positions, they still demonstrate forms of resistance against dominant patriarchal norms.

In addition, the short story "*Ḥubbun bi Lā Naslin*" was previously studied by Damayani (2024). She examined the intrinsic elements in the short story. Based on her research, it is known that the main character in this short story is "I," followed by additional characters such as the father, mother, husband, son, and so on. The plot of this short story is a flashback and has various settings, namely a ship, a big city, a park, a hospital, and a station. The time setting of this short story is August 5, in the morning and at night, with a social setting that depicts a group of wealthy and respected people with

modern thinking. The theme of this short story is the main character's ability to manage his emotions in facing family problems, which helps him determine the right solution. The title of the short story, "*Ḥubbun bi Lā Naslin*," reflects the main character's condition, while the point of view used is first-person.

As for the formal object, the construction of women as monsters has been done by Aprilia (2015) and Hayuningtyas (2024). Aprilia (2015) conducted research on the construction of women as monsters in Olivier Charneux's novel La Grande Vie. Based on his research, it can be seen that until the 20th century, women were still often constructed negatively by men and the patriarchal hegemony that was maintained in literary works. This happened because of men's worries and fears about women, who are now stronger and can compete with men. Hayuningtyas (2024) conducting research on the representation of Bene Gesserit women in Dune using nomadic subjectivity theory analysis. Based on the research, it can be concluded that Bene Gesserit shows significant agency and adaptability, challenging patriarchal norms, and depicting the complexity of female identity in the science fiction genre.

Based on the literature review that has been conducted, research on the construction of Egyptian women in the short stories "*Ma'nā Al-Ḥubbi*" and "*Ḥubbun bi Lā Naslin*" using Rosi Braidotti's theory is a new study that has never been researched before. Therefore, this study seeks to fill that gap by analyzing how women are constructed within patriarchal culture in both short stories. Furthermore, this study is expected to contribute to a broader understanding of how Egyptian women are constructed, as well as to expand discussions on Braidotti's theory, particularly the concepts of mother, monster, and machine.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach. This study aims to examine a specific problem by referring to available historical facts and data. Then all data and facts are responded to, collected, analyzed, and interpreted systematically (Neuman, 2007, 2014).

This study consists of three stages, namely data collection, data analysis, and presentation of data analysis results. The first stage is data collection, which begins with reading and translating the short stories "*Ma'nā Al-Ḥubbi*" and "*Ḥubbun bi Lā Naslin*".

Then, words, phrases, and sentences that represent the construction of women as mothers, monsters, and machines are marked and recorded. The second stage is analyzing the data that has been collected and classified using Rosi Braidotti's theory with the framework of mother, monster, and machine. The third stage is presenting the results of data analysis in the form of a description.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings of the analysis on the construction of Egyptian women using Rosi Braidotti's theoretical framework, namely women as mother, monster, and machine. The analysis of the short stories *Ma'nā al-Ḥubbi* and *Ḥubbun bi Lā Naslin* shows that Egyptian women are represented through these three figurations. The following section elaborates on each of these constructions in greater detail.

Women as Mothers

In Egyptian culture, the identity of women is inextricably linked to maternal functions, encompassing domestic proficiency, reproductive capabilities, and an inherent nurturing disposition. This phenomenon is deeply rooted in the social and religious doctrines that shape societal perceptions of the ideal woman. A significant influential figure in this discourse is Al-Ghazali, who posited that the primary benefit of marriage for men is liberation from domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, and maintaining the household. Consequently, men are afforded the freedom to focus on professional endeavors or the pursuit of knowledge. According to Al-Ghazali, a *salihah* (pious) woman is one who manages all domestic affairs, a duty framed as a form of religious devotion (El Sa'dāwi et al., 2003). These cultural constructs have become deeply embedded in the familial roles of Egyptian society.

The primary responsibility of a wife is to serve her husband, remain present at home upon his return, prepare meals, and fulfill his needs tasks viewed simultaneously as a wifely obligation and a husband's right (Henry, 2011). These roles are socialized from childhood into adulthood. Research by (Mensch et al., 2003) indicates that Egyptian adolescents continue to uphold these traditional patterns, where females are relegated to the domestic sphere while males maintain dominance in decision-making.

Furthermore, El-Halawany findings demonstrate that even among highly educated women in Egypt, traditional perceptions of femininity continue to persist. The study states

that the major task of women is to produce offspring (El-Halawany, 2009). Moreover, higher education does not necessarily dismantle patriarchal gender expectations, as women continue to be associated with childcare responsibilities and domestic labor (El-Halawany, 2009).

These conditions reinforce the notion that domesticity and womanhood are viewed as an indivisible unit. This association is reflected in the short story "*Ma'nā Al-Ḥubbi*", where the female character "R" is depicted as an exceptionally capable homemaker:

> أعطيها من المال غير النزر اليسير، ولكنها بذلك القليل قنعت، وحشدت في البيت من كل طيب وبديع وبهيج ... وكان سرورها الأكبر أن تتحفني كل عشاء بلون جديد من الطعام ومبتكر طريف من المأكل والألوان.
> وكذلك كانت ربة بيت صناع ماهرة، وسيدة في الدار أريبة حذقة.
>
> (Ḥāfiż, 2012)
> */U'ṭīhā min al-māli ghaira an-nazri al-yasīri, walakinahā biżālika al-qalīlu qani'at, wa ḥasyadat fī al-baiti min kulli ṭayyibin wa badī'in wa bahījin... Wa kāna surūruhā al-akbaru an tuṭḥifunī kulla 'asyā`in bi launin jadīdin min at-ṭa'āmi wa mubtakarin ṭarīfin min al-ma`kali wa al-alwāni.*
> *Wa każalika kānat rabbata baitin ṣanā'an māhiratan, wa sayyidatan fī ad-dāri arībatan ḥażiqatan./*
>
> 'I gave her but a meager amount of money, yet she was content with that small sum, filling the house with everything good, beautiful, and cheerful... Her greatest joy was to present me every evening with a new dish, fresh and innovative foods of various flavors. She was a skilled and industrious homemaker, as well as a wise and clever lady in managing the house.'

This excerpt illustrates that woman's value is determined by her domestic skill, her maintenance of the household, and her service to the male figure. This representation aligns with (Braidotti, 1997a) concept of the mother, which asserts that the construction of womanhood is constantly tethered to maternal functions and labor.

Beyond domesticity, women are expected to embody maternal traits such as nurturing, compassion, and fertility. According to (Hatem, 1986), a woman's value within marriage is largely dictated by her ability to produce offspring, as procreation is viewed as the primary objective of matrimony. Women who are unable to conceive often find themselves in precarious positions, sometimes even expecting their husbands to divorce

them or take another wife who can provide heirs. Furthermore, many married Egyptian female workers choose to leave the workforce due to social pressure to prioritize childbearing. This construction is further evidenced in the short story "*Ḥubbun bi Lā Naslin*", where the female protagonist is characterized by her nurturing and affectionate nature, despite having no biological children:

ومن ذلك العهد أقبل عليَّ بنفسه وأصبح أتبع لي من ظلي، وجعل يناديني أمي الأخرى، وأحسست له حبًّا عميقًا هو هتاف الأمومة المكينة من غريزتي الحبيسة في صدري، لم تجد منقبلاً متنفسًا ولم تر لتبعته مغيضًا.

(Ḥāfiż, 2012)
/Wa min żālika al-ʻahdi aqbala ʻalayya binafsihi wa aṣbaḥa attabiʻu lī min ẓillī, wa jaʻala yunādīnī ummī al-ukhrā, wa aḥsastu lahu ḥubban ʻamīqan huwa hutāfu al-umūmati al-makīnati min gharīzatī al-ḥabīsati fī ṣadrī, lam tajid munqabilan mutanaffasan wa lam tar litabiʻatihi maghīḍan./

‘From that time on, he drew near to me of his own accord and became closer to me than my own shadow; he began calling me ‘my other mother.’ I felt a deep love for him, a powerful maternal cry from my maternal instinct that had been imprisoned in my chest, which previously found no outlet or release.’

وأخذته ساعة النوم في أحضاني فجعلت أغني له أغنيات الطفولة حتى أخذ الكرى في رفق بمعاقد جفنيه.

(Ḥāfiż, 2012)
/Wa akhażtuhu sāʻata an-naumi fī aḥḍānī fajaʻaltu ugannī lahu ugniyāti al-ṭufūlati ḥattā akhaża al-kurā fī rifqin bi maʻāqidi jafnaihi./

“I held him in my arms at bedtime and sang him childhood songs until sleep gently took hold of his eyelids.”

The text suggests that women are constructed as naturally adept at caregiving. The maternal instinct appears spontaneously in the presence of a child, even in the absence of biological ties. The phrase “*al-umūmatu al-makīnatu*” reinforces the idea that maternal functions are viewed as inherent, natural, and almost automatic to the female identity. This resonates with (Braidotti, 1997) critique of how women are perpetually defined through their maternal roles.

In conclusion, the short stories "*Maʻnā al-Ḥubbi*" and "*Ḥubbun bi Lā Naslin*" demonstrate that women in Egyptian culture are consistently constructed through the lens of maternal functions, both in the domestic sphere and in caregiving roles. This aligns with the broader feminist critique regarding the essentialist tethering of female identity to

the maternal role.

Women as Monsters

In Egyptian culture, womanhood is strictly tethered to maternal functions: domestic proficiency, procreation, and a nurturing disposition. When a woman operates outside these roles or deviates from established norms, her existence is perceived as an anomaly. Within (Braidotti, 1997) framework, this condition is categorized as the monster a term referring to deviations from bodily or behavioral norms deemed abnormal.

The female characters in the short story "*Ma'nā Al-Ḥubbi*" exemplify the construction of the woman-as-monster when their behavior disrupts the prevailing social order. According to (El-Saadawi, 2003) the female body in Arab societies is often positioned as fitnah that threatens social stability; thus, it must be confined to the domestic sphere or remain under male surveillance. The birth of a daughter in an Egyptian family can even be a source of anxiety due to the fear of the shame she might bring if she violates social codes (Hatem, 1986a). A violation of this norm occurs with the character "R," who is depicted as gentle yet has a child out of wedlock. Although she takes responsibility for her actions by raising the child and attempting to reform her life, she is stigmatized as a polluted woman for violating the sanctity of virginity:

> وأنا اليوم قادر كل تلك الظروف التي اجتازتها تلك الفتاة المسكينة حق قدرها، ولكني في تلك الأيام كان كل رأيي فيها أنها امرأة ملوثة دنسة لا تصلح لمثلي زوجا،
>
> (Ḥafiż, 1951)
> */Wa anā al-yauma qādirun kulla tilka aẓ-ẓurūfi allatī ijtāzathā tilka al-fatātu al-miskīnatu ḥaqqa qadrihā, wa lākinnī fī tilka al-ayyāmi kāna kullu ra`yī fīhā annahā imra`atun mulawwaṡitun danisatun lā taṣluḥu li miṡlī zaujān./*
>
> 'Today, I can truly appreciate all the circumstances that poor girl went through; but in those days, my sole opinion of her was that she was a contaminated and filthy woman, unfit to be the wife of someone like me.'

This excerpt highlights the female figure as a monster. Despite "R's" efforts to take responsibility and rebuild her life, she is labeled filthy and unworthy of marriage. This stigma is reinforced by the notion that such a woman is unfit to mother a man's progeny:

ولكني في أعماق النفس كنت ثائرًا غاضبًا، إذ كنت على ما ألفت من عقائد الناس ونظراتهم في الحياة لا أزال أرى أن امرأة مثلها لا تروح خليقة بأن تكون لذريتي أما،

(Ḥafiż, 2012)
/Wa lākinnī fī a'māqi an-nafsi kuntu śā`irān gāḍibān, iż kuntu 'alā mā aliftu min 'aqā`idi an-nāsi wa naẓarātihim fī al-ḥayāti lā azālu arā anna imra`atan miślahā lā tarūḥu khalīqatan bi an takūna li żurriyyatī ummān./

'But deep in my soul, I was rebellious and angry; for according to the beliefs and outlooks on life I was accustomed to, I still viewed a woman like her as unworthy of being the mother of my offspring.'

These passages affirm that women who exist outside social constructions have their value reduced purely to their physical state. The female body serves as a signifier of family honor; when deemed tarnished, the woman is relegated to the position of a disgusting monster unfit to continue the lineage. For "R," the monstrous construction is enacted through her body and reproductive history, as her physical state becomes the metric for morality and social legitimacy.

Furthermore, Egyptian culture views reproductive function as a woman's primary obligation. A woman who does not desire or cannot have children is seen as failing the purpose of marriage, often prompting the husband to seek another wife (Hatem, 1986). This demand is evident in the following excerpt:

وكاشفتها في أمر الخلفة والرغب في الذراري والبنين، فصارحتني أنها لا تريد منَّ ذلك شيئًا، فأخذت أدرك رويدًا أن كل غرضها من الزواج بي لم يكن سوى الركض في ميدان اللهو كيف شاءت وشاء لها الهوى.

(Ḥāfiż, 2012)
/Wa kāsyaftuhā fī amri al-khilfati wa ar-ragbi fī aż-żarārī wa al-banīni, faṣāraḥatnī annahā lā turīdu min żālika syai`an, fa akhażtu udriku ruwaidan anna kulla garaḍihā min az-zawāji bī lam yakun siwā al-rakḍi fī maidāni al-lahwi kaifa syā`at wa syā`a lahā al-hawā./

'I spoke frankly with her regarding offspring and the desire for progeny and sons, but she candidly told me she wanted nothing of the sort. I gradually began to realize that her entire purpose in marrying me was nothing more than to run in the fields of amusement as she pleased and as her whims dictated.'

In Braidotti's theoretical framework, the refusal of reproductive functions disrupts the patrilineal succession central to the patriarchal order. Such a woman is positioned as

a "monster" because she rejects being a reproductive vessel, choosing instead bodily autonomy.

The construction of the monster also appears in the story "*Ḥubbun bi Lā Naslin*", where a female character suffers an accident that renders her infertile. While medically beyond her control, in the Egyptian cultural context, reproductive failure is viewed as a deviation from nature. An infertile woman is considered defective, loses her social value, and may feel unworthy of remaining in a marriage. As noted by (Hatem, 1986), women without children often feel compelled to allow their husbands to remarry or divorce them to obtain heirs. Moreover, the gender of the child impacts a woman's status; the birth of a son provides security and economic support, whereas a daughter is often viewed as less valuable or a source of concern. The following quote describes the moment the character learns of her condition from her mother:

> وفتلعثمت أمي قائلة: كلا يا ابنتي، لقد كانت أصابتك داخلية عندما سقطت من فوق صهوة الجواد، وكان لا بد من إجراء عملية جراحية عاجلة لنجاة حياتك من مخالب الموت، ولقد كانت عملية خطيرة، وكانت نتيجتها أنك لن تلدي إذا تزوجت أولادًا، ولن تقع لك نعمة البنين.
>
> (Ḥāfiż, 2012)
> */Wa fatala'samat ummī qā`ilatan: kallā yā ibnatī, laqad kānat aṣābatuki dākhiliyyatan 'indamā saqaṭti min fauqi ṣahwati al-jawādi, wa kāna lā budda min ijrā'i 'amaliyyatin jirāḥiyyatin 'ājilat li najāti ḥayātiki min makhālibi al-mauti, wa laqad kānat 'amaliyyatan khaṭīratan, wa kānat natījatuhā annaki lan talidī iżā tazawwajti aulādān, wa lan taqa'a laki ni'matu al-banīn./*
>
> 'My mother stammered, saying: 'No, my daughter. You suffered internal injuries when you fell from the horse, and an emergency surgery was necessary to save your life from the clutches of death. It was a dangerous operation, and the result is that you will not bear children if you marry; the blessing of sons will not be granted to you.'

The character's position is no longer deemed meaningful within a marriage because she cannot produce children—specifically sons, who provide prestige and security. This confirms that a woman's failure to fulfill reproductive expectations is constructed as a form of deviance. This phenomenon aligns with (Braidotti, 1997:61-62) concept of the "monster": when a woman fails to conform to the social and biological norms attached to her, she is classified as an anomaly.

Women as Machines

In addition to the constructs of the mother and the monster, women are frequently constructed as the machine. Within (Braidotti, 1997) framework, the construction of the woman as machine encompasses systems that automate and regulate women's lives, reflecting how the female body is treated in the realms of science, politics, and technology. In Egyptian culture, women are perceived as machines whose primary function is the production of offspring. This construction is deeply embedded in Upper Egypt. El-Halawy explains that women in that Upper Egypt which is that region contain patriarchal system, women are subordinated to male authority and primary expected to produce offspring, while men occupy the role of provider and authory holder (El-Halawany, 2009). Consequently, women who are unable to conceive often feel a social or moral obligation to permit their husbands to remarry or to seek a divorce so that the husband may obtain heirs (Hatem, 1986).

In Egyptian society, women are not only expected to produce offspring, but their bodies are also regulated through various cultural traditions and social expectations. One important aspect of this regulation concerns the preservation of female purity and virginity before marriage. Virginity is considered a valuable symbol of morality, family honor, and social respectability. The loss of virginity before marriage is often regarded as a social disgrace that may lead to severe consequences, including honor-based violence (Van Rossem & Meekers, 2020). As a result, women’s sexuality is closely monitored, as female sexual desire is often perceived as something that must be controlled in order to preserve family honor and maintain social norms. Within this context, the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is frequently justified as a means of controlling women’s sexuality and preserving family honor.

FGM refers to all procedures that involve the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injuries to the female genital organs for cultural or non-medical reasons. These practices include clitoridectomy, excision, infibulation, and other forms (Egypt.UNFPA). In Egyptian society, FGM is commonly perceived as a mechanism for preserving a purity and moral integrity until marriage. Despite increasing awareness of its serious health risks and harmful consequences, the practice persists due to strong social pressures and parental concerns about their daughters’ future prospects (Scholarworks & Berkshire, n.d., 2022).

Women who do not undergo FGM are often stigmatized as impure, morally suspect, and incapable of controlling their sexual desires. In contrast, women who have undergone the procedure are viewed as more respectable and are believed to have better prospects for marriage, social status, and prestige (Assaad, 1980). This dynamic illustrates that the female body is constructed as something to be regulated, disciplined, and programmed according to social expectations aligning with the concept of women as machines, that is, entities subjected to systems of control and normalization.

In 2008, the Egyptian government criminalized the practice of FGM, officially recognizing it as a punishable offense. However, the practice has not been entirely eradicated. According to the Egypt Country Profile by Too Many 28, et al. (2017), approximately 87.2% of Egyptian women aged 15–49 have undergone FGM. This high prevalence places Egypt among the countries with the largest number of affected women and girls globally, largely due to its population size.

These forms of regulation demonstrate that women's bodies are socially valued according to specific biological and cultural functions, particularly those related to sexuality and reproduction. This construction of women as machines is illustrated in the short story "*Hubbun bi La Naslin*". The female protagonist in the short story is a woman rendered infertile due to an accident. Initially, her marriage appears stable; however, after several years, she discovers that her husband has remarried in secret. This realization is preceded by her internal struggle regarding her perceived utility:

وإذا كان ذلك ما سيرتقب مني فهل لي الحق في الزواج به وحرمانه تلك النعمة إلى الأبد؟

(Ḥāfiż, 2012)
/Wa iżā kāna żālika mā sayurtaqabu minnī, fahal lī al-ḥaqqu fī az-zawāji bihi wa ḥirmānihi tilka an-ni'matu ilā al-abadi?/

'And if that is what is expected of me, then do I have the right to marry him and simultaneously deprive him of that blessing forever?'

This passage suggests that the woman internalized a view of herself as defined primarily by her reproductivity function. Her sense of worth becomes contingent upon her ability to bear children, reflecting a reduction of womanhood to a functional role. In this sense, her identity can be understood through the concept of woman as a machine, because the female body is treated as an instrument for reproduction.

The construction of the woman as machine becomes even more palpable when the husband remarries and fathers a child with another woman without his wife's knowledge. The protagonist only discovers the truth when she encounters a photograph of her husband in the home of a young child she is visiting:

فقمت به لأرقده في مهاده، ولكني ما كدت أقف بعتبة بابها حتى جمدت في مكاني لاأستطيع حراكا، لقد أخذت عيني على المنضدة صورة زوجي في إطار مجمل.

(Ḥāfiż, 2012)
/Fa qumtu bihi li uraqqidahu fī mihādihi, walākinnī mā kidtu aqifu bi 'atabati bābihā ḥattā jamadtu fī makānī lā astaṭī'u ḥarākan, laqad akhażat 'ainī 'alā al-minḍadati ṣūrata zaujī fī iṭārin mujammal/

'So, I picked him up to lay him in his cradle, but I had barely reached the threshold of the room when I froze in my tracks, unable to move. My eyes fell upon a photograph of my husband on the table, set in a beautiful frame.'

The protagonist's realization upon seeing her husband's photograph in the child's home highlights her exclusion from important marital decisions, particularly her husband's remarriage. Her shock reflects not only betrayal, but also her lack of agency within the household. Furthermore, the presence of the child symbolizes the reproductive role she could not fulfill, suggesting that her value as a wife is determined primarily by her ability to bear children. In this sense, the female protagonist is constructed as a machine whose worth depends solely on her reproductive utility. Once she is no longer capable of producing offspring, her presence within the marriage becomes replaceable, and her voice is excluded from significant family decisions. This demonstrates how the female body is treated as a functional instrument for reproduction rather than as an autonomous individual with agency and emotional value.

In the context of Egyptian culture, women's intellect or cognitive abilities are often undervalued, leaving them little room to voice opinions or participate in pivotal family matters. This is reflected in an Egyptian proverb stating that a woman's intellect is likened to that of a child, and should a husband follow his wife's advice, his life will be mired in suffering (Altohami, 2023). Such perspectives reinforce the notion that a woman's value is limited to her capacity to bear children. Within (Braidotti, 1997) framework, this exemplifies the construction of the woman as a machine a body valued only insofar as it fulfills a specific reproductive utility.

However, over time, the construction of women as machines has not remained entirely absolute. Women with agency have influence over interpersonal issues and participate in decision-making, including fertility decisions, within the family (Samari, 2019). Women's access to higher education has created new spaces for negotiating autonomy and selfhood. El-Halawany's findings demonstrate that higher education has enabled women to participate more actively in household decision-making, including matters related to marriage, family management, and birth control. At the same time, education contributes to women's perceptions of self-autonomy and empowerment within the domestic sphere. Nevertheless, this autonomy remains limited and conditional upon broader social and cultural structures (El-Halawany, 2009). Furthermore, empowerment should not merely focus on expanding women's access to education, but must also address and transform the gender norms embedded within Egyptian society (Samari, 2019). Therefore, the construction of women as machines has not completely disappeared; rather, it has shifted into a more complex and conditional form shaped by women's access to education and social capital.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the short stories *Ma'nā Al-Ḥubbi* and *Ḥubbun bi Lā Naslin* by 'Abbās Ḥāfiż reflect the patriarchal construction of women in Egyptian culture through the figurations of mother, monster, and machine proposed by Rosi Braidotti. The analysis reveals that women's identities are strongly tied to domesticity, reproduction, and moral expectations imposed by patriarchal society.

First, women are constructed as mothers through the expectation that they possess domestic skills, maternal affection, and nurturing qualities. Women's value is closely associated with their ability to care for the household, serve their husbands, and express maternal instincts, even in the absence of biological motherhood. The female characters in both short stories illustrate how womanhood is culturally linked to caregiving and domestic responsibilities, positioning motherhood as the central marker of feminine identity.

Second, women are constructed as monsters when they deviate from patriarchal norms. Female characters who reject reproductive expectations, fail to fulfill domestic duties, or violate moral standards related to chastity are portrayed as social anomalies. In

Ma'nā Al-Ḥubbi, the character "R" is stigmatized because she has a child outside marriage, while in *Ḥubbun bi Lā Naslin*, infertility places the female protagonist in a socially deficient position. These representations demonstrate that women who fail to conform to patriarchal expectations are marginalized and regarded as abnormal within society.

Third, women are constructed as machines because their existence is primarily valued through reproductive function. The female body is treated as an instrument regulated by social and cultural systems concerned with childbirth, sexuality, and family continuity. The analysis shows that women's worth within marriage is often measured by their ability to produce offspring, particularly sons. Consequently, infertility or the inability to reproduce reduces women's social value and limits their agency within family structures. This construction reflects how patriarchal culture objectifies women as functional bodies rather than autonomous individuals.

Overall, the two short stories reveal that patriarchal culture in Egypt constructs women within rigid biological and domestic frameworks that restrict female autonomy and identity. Through Braidotti's concepts of mother, monster, and machine, this study demonstrates that literary works not only reflect social realities but also reproduce cultural ideologies surrounding gender, morality, and reproduction. Therefore, the study contributes to broader discussions on feminist literary criticism and the representation of women in Arabic literature, particularly within the context of Egyptian patriarchal culture.

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