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## THE MANIFESTATIONS OF SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ON SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

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### Abstract

This paper explores the symbolic violence directed at Libyan women through images and posts shared on social media platforms, specifically Instagram. Focusing on a specific visual of a middle-aged woman overly applying makeup, the post mocks her for being immature and irresponsible despite her age, contrasting this with societal expectations of middle-aged women in Libyan culture. Through semiological analysis, the paper argues that such images perpetuate negative stereotypes, associating women with carelessness, failure to uphold social prestige, and disobedience to cultural norms. The post, with its accompanying textual elements in the Libyan dialect, uses symbolic violence to degrade women who deviate from traditional roles, portraying them as irresponsible or rebellious. Further, the paper identifies recurring themes of symbolic violence in social media content, such as comparing women to wild animals or ridiculing their dress choices, reinforcing an inferior image of women in Libyan society. These posts reflect societal attitudes that blame women for family failures and exploit traditions to justify such symbolic violence. The paper concludes that this imagery not only devalues women, but also perpetuates harmful cultural narratives, contributing to their marginalization within Libyan society. To combat symbolic violence against Libyan women on social media, efforts should focus on public awareness campaigns, media literacy, stricter platform regulations, support systems, positive representation, and culturally-informed research. These measures aim to challenge stereotypes, prevent harmful content, and support affected women.

*Keywords:* Symbolic Violence, Libyan Women, Social Media, Stereotypes, Semiological Analysis, Gender Inequality, Cultural Norms, Traditions And Customs..

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Violence isn't a new phenomenon, but an old one that has existed since the early human existence on earth. Indeed, the story of Qabil and Habil is the most prominent one for such violence, where our planet witnessed the first violent murder crime amongst the human race. Violence is linguistically known as each saying or action that is opposed to compassion and kindness – an action that embodies the physical power used to harm others. Conceptually, it refers to each aggressive behavior directed towards the illegal usage of power or threat to cause harm to others. Violence is accompanied by obligation and restriction, and it is a type of illegally-exerted power to impose one's dominance over another. Despite the multiple factors leading to violence, its basic element is related to the instinct of aggression that varies among people; such aggression is affected by several conditions, including the prevalent culture. Also, violence is often accompanied by negative feelings and ideas that individuals employ to justify their aggressiveness. Even though motives, methods, objectives and results vary, they all refer to a similar content, which is violence and causing harm to self or others (Fayadh, 2021). Symbolic violence is a contemporary sociological concept that refers to using symbols to impose the offenders' way of thinking, expression and visualization on others in order to satisfy their own interests. This type of violence is manifested in the cultural, emotional and ethical practices that depend on language, images, signs and symbols that are used as tools for dominance- it is characterized by being hidden, where victims don't feel its existence (Arseven, 2018). Symbolic violence is implemented intangibly and indirectly against victims, where it is applied based on signals and symbols that are exchanged during communication processes. Ignorance or emotion could be the basis upon which this type of violence, known as masked violence, is based. Symbolic violence targets all people as opposed to the physical violence that targets certain individuals. Also, symbolic violence has several forms that generally represent indirect signs and symbols. The offenders mainly depend on concealment, a concept which was developed by the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu in 1972 (AbdulAtheem, 2011). There are two types of violence: physical violence that causes physical harm to others, and symbolic violence that is performed through language and dominant ideas; symbolic violence may also take place through insults, slander, religion, media means and mental violence. Therefore, Pierre Bourdieu describes symbolic violence as a soft, insensible, and invisible form of violence, which is practiced by symbolic methods related to communication and transmitting knowledge, especially through the process of recognition, or when things are related to the maximum limits of intimacy relationships and feelings (Alsahy & Aleemuddin, 2020).

Symbolic violence represents the soft, intangible, and metaphysical moral and disciplinary side of violence. It is carried out through many and varied mediations, the most prominent of which is the language that accesses the unconscious structures. Symbolic violence is a form of gentleness that can mitigate the impact of real violence that ravages everything. A person can disguise himself with it and use it as a tool to achieve his goals and aims without apparent harm to others, and thus he does not fall into the trap of condemnation that accuses him of practicing real violence and threats. A person may resort to the power of symbolism to escape the restrictions imposed by laws, thus indirectly achieving dominance and control. Evidence of this is Pharaoh's speech to his people in the Almighty's saying: "Is not the kingdom of Egypt mine, and are these rivers flowing beneath me?" The question here carries the violence of meaning that the authority imposes on the recipients to spread psychological fear in them and dominate them. This question is not intended to seek understanding, but rather to acknowledge his dominance and authority over them.

The study addresses the problem of identifying manifestations of symbolic violence against Libyan women on Instagram accounts through a semiological approach. The primary objectives of the study

include identifying the manifestations and symbolic features of violence directed toward women on social media platforms, analyzing the methods of symbolic violence employed, and understanding the social contexts in which such violence occurs. To achieve these objectives, the study seeks to answer several key questions: What are the manifestations of symbolic violence directed toward women on social media sites? What are the symbolic features of this violence? What methods are used to perpetuate symbolic violence against women on these platforms? And what are the social contexts associated with symbolic violence? By exploring these questions, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of symbolic violence against women in the digital space.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. Definition of Symbolic Violence

In 1979, Pierre Bourdieu introduced the concept of symbolic violence, though this notion was presented as a book chapter just a year before his famous distinction was published. Symbolic violence is the slight, delicate and often invisible imposition of systems of meaning that legitimize, normalize and, consequently, solidify structures of inequality. This imposition takes the form of humble knowledge of mutual anticipation of words and deeds, as well as the a priori recognition of the mystery of legitimate necessity, which is imposed on those who are subjected to it by virtue of the fact that, since childhood, they have been brought up in this imposition. What is at stake here is a differential imposition of the a priori evidence of everyday durable, social hierarchies, in that a kind of pre-formatted perception of the social world is induced on the dominated, and their social expectations are shaped by that very perception that they gradually tend to perceive as natural (Massimo Ragnedda, 2015). In other words, the individuals tend to fit the hierarchies and structure of the social settings in which they live into their mental structures. Born out of a critique of structuralism, Bourdieu reinforces thus the idea that symbolic violence functions through the internalization of the existing social structure. Symbolic violence has been widely used as a concept to articulate the relationship between the dominant class and the dominated. It usually refers to things that imply structures of inequality. This inequality is understood to be both produced and reproduced through some structural devices, and cultural devices, represented by the principles underlying and regulating access to these same devices and the institutions themselves, such as the school system or the media, dividing groups with unequal amounts of capital (Bermúdez-Tamayo et al., 2024; Ferreira & Holanda Maschietto, 2025). The media in a broad sense can be considered as a device of domination. It can be imposed on society's larger social order, and its vision of the world. As an ideological mechanism with the ability to construct the very categories of thought, and hence the knowledge of the social world, the media are one of the symbolic institutions that more significantly contribute to the construction of the doxic order. More-over, the symbolic existence of the media is extremely crucial, in that it is viewed as one of the classification systems, and one of the rare sets that structurally produce and impose the legitimate definition of the social world; the visions of the media thus possess a circular legitimating power: through the production of these visions, they are in a position to legitimate that world view substantiating their classification (Friedland, Roose, & Mohr, 2025; Smith, 2024).

Social media platforms offer users a variety of ways to express their thoughts and feelings about others. It is observed that these platforms enable sexist attitudes toward women in the public space. Symbolic violence is symbolized by a subject who knows himself or herself and the world symbolically, and is defined in three dimensions. Individuals regard masculine subjectivity and representation as

proper or natural representation, commercialization of media by individuals, and targeted publication of news and images. Indeed, violence victims are those who cannot dignify words with words. Most violence can also be in the form of representations (Агаџа, Tortajada, & Willem, 2021; Galpin, 2022; Ligman, Felig, & Goldenberg, 2024; Tian & Ge, 2024; Willem & Tortajada, 2021). Furthermore, it cannot be represented or respected with words, where language could be insufficient to reach and show the intensity of wounds and blows, and that is read again in the context of media violence. This concept emphasizes the inability to make meaning that will force symbolic division by playing on meaning in the metaphorical sense and the win of matter in the literal sense. Indeed, it is a violent, sudden, abrupt, vociferous run away that stops the word (the brain is drained); it is observed that media violence is represented in this way. Moreover, symbolic annihilation, reinforces violence, where some groups of people are not represented, as if it do not exist and are erased from the field of discourse. It is focused within the context of violence, femininity, and representation by questioning the relationship of these structures with the concept of symbolic annihilation of women through men's occupation of the visual, worth-presidential status in space, increasing accumulation power, and the representation of the image. In the posts addressed to male public figures, the presence of violent, sexist, sexual language is mentioned (Aldamen, 2023; Alshehri, 2024; Gurrieri, 2021; Hasan, 2024; Hill, Richards, & Savigny, 2023; Krook, 2022; Nser, AL-Tkhayneh, & Ziani, 2025; Yarosh, 2023).

## 2.2. Symbolic Violence Theory

Symbolic violence can be linked with authority, dominance, and community, where the State uses its official and legal institutions, such as media means, religion, education, art, and press to practice symbolic violence against individuals and groups. This means that the ruling group uses symbolic violence against other individuals, where this type of violence is more dangerous than physical violence. In this vein, Pierre Bourdieu suggested that "symbolic violence may achieve better results as compared to political violence. The most important weakness for Marxism is that it didn't give much attention to this type of soft violence that could be effective and influential even in the political domain" (Wafra, 2009). Symbolic violence is practiced against social actors under their consent and complicity, where it affects intellectual discussion about the extent of imposed authority and the dominated person's acceptance of such a situation. In this vein, individuals realize the restrictions imposed on them and contribute to setting the restrictions that are imposed on them. The effect of dominance is derived from interaction and balancing between the imposed restrictions and the way of recognizing them (Bourdieu, 1994).

There is negligence to the violence to which individuals are exposed without recognizing it due to people's acceptance to the social axioms that impose themselves on people spontaneously without the need to learn them. Therefore, analyzing the way through which we spontaneously accept the beliefs prevalent in our community is viewed as the actual basis for a realistic theory about dominance and policy, given the direct correlation between objective and mental structures. Indeed, the silent forms of persuasion take place within the natural and usual system of life activities. Accordingly, we can see that symbolic violence is more dangerous than the other types of violence, since it is insensible and invisible, but it is accepted and ignored by community. People consider this type of violence as ordinary, and thus they don't resist it despite its negative effects at the psychological, social, cultural, political and economic levels. Furthermore, Pierre Bourdieu focused on TV as a dangerous media means that uses violence against citizens, where TV introduces the issues that satisfy the demands of the dominant authority that employs media means to achieve its interests and objectives. Therefore,

TV manipulates people's minds and publishes the ideas that serve the interests of the ruling class. This represents a real threat to culture, art and democracy. The same context applies to press which has become a dangerous media means used by the ruling groups to practice symbolic violence against others (Weininger, 2002).

Symbolic violence emerges as a result of variation in capital styles among community members who differ in their social status, where some dominant social classes dominate other social classes. Also, symbolic violence may result from variation in interests of individuals and groups in the various life domains. Pierre Bourdieu investigated symbolic violence, which is non-physical violence implemented through education, knowledge transfer and ideology. This type of soft violence is insensible and invisible to victims. Bourdieu criticized the Marxist thought that didn't pay sufficient attention to the types of symbolic violence, but mainly focused on physical and economic violence. Bourdieu suggested that symbolic violence may also affect the economic domain, as its effect surpasses the physical or political violence (Ismail, 2018). Symbolic violence is practiced by social actors under their consent and complicity, as "it is the coercion that is only established through the medium of attachment". Also, "the dominated party can only approve the dominance of the dominant party, as the dominated party only has the tools that force him to think of a certain issue, of himself, or of his relationship with the dominant party based on their common affairs" (Bourdieu, 1997). Therefore, the dominated individuals don't recognize this as violence, where it is integrated within their axioms via social upbringing methods and means of communication in the community. From this point, we can understand the actual basis upon which the political authority is based to establish its dominance. Bourdieu suggested that the authority intelligently exploit the mechanisms through which symbolic violence is implemented, and the targeted objectives are achieved with less cost and more effectiveness, especially with the existence of harmonization between the prevalent objective system and the existing mental system. The symbolic authority is the invisible power that can only be practiced under conspiracy by those who don't want to know that they undergo its effect or even practice it (Bourdieu, 1992).

It is evident that violence is manifested in two main forms. The first type is physical violence with its various characteristics, and the second type is symbolic violence and the way through which it enhances the State's structure and political power. Hence, it could be difficult to talk about human societies free from violence, as it is a phenomenon attached to the history of humanity. It is suggested that a person may be devastated without being noticed by the surrounding others, by using innocent words and signs, or simply by getting away from him. This type of frequent and invisible violence affects the psychological domain of one's personality, and leads to more isolation and introversion which, in turn, deprives that person from experiencing his maximum potentials. Therefore, such treatment affects the way of dealing with others and could direct that victim towards extremist behaviors and violence (Mounier, 2001). Bourdieu suggested that symbolic violence is invisible, but influential. This type of violence is selected, since it is not noticeable, but affects individuals considerably. Symbolic violence is based on determining the individuals' concepts, knowledge and preferences without considering their personal experience and suffering. In a similar vein, we can notice that there are important political phenomena that are closely related to symbolic violence, such as the discourse against foreigners and using superior titles illegally. Such phenomena result in more decline in identity and affects the collective self-representation, and thus makes that group as a source of violence and discrimination.

Bourdieu also suggested that effective actors can control their symbolic and cultural manifestations, such as their artistic taste as well as the way of sitting or laughing. Symbolic violence has a prominent role in Bourdieu's thought, where he revealed that the majority could legitimize those symbolic features. In this vein, those living in cities, and even peasants would consider a certain dialect as polite and

elegant, whereas the rural dialects would be viewed as tough. Therefore, citizens are more inclined to prefer the dialect of the ruling class that includes political and cultural groups, and underestimate the dialect of rural areas. This process influences the less confident individuals, as they underestimate their own dialect and hope to imitate the language or dialect spoken by the ruling class (Bourdieu, 1970). The masculine dominance is instilled in our subconscious mind to the extent that we hardly notice it; it has become harmonious with our expectations, as we cannot doubt it. The ethnographic description of the tribal community provides us with a strong instrument to explore the symbolic structures of masculine dominance. In fact, there are two editions of Pierre Bourdieu's book entitled "Male Entitlement" that were published in 1990, and 1998. The author rewrote the first edition, as it included more discussion about gender. However, by investigating both editions, we can reach a better understanding for what is important, or what is secondary, we can notice the things that can't be defended from the author's perspective. Bourdieu suggested a robust theoretical foundation for a proposal concerning relationship sociology between both genders. For a long period of time, feminist sociologists criticized the classic concept of gender role, considering it as incapable of demonstrating the sexual factor, where the concept of feminine or masculine role refers to certain situations; for example, between spouses, parents or within the domain of sexual interaction itself. As for gender, it is a social act dimension that always exists. Suggested that practicing gender roles always takes place in workplace, home, during stroll, and at school. They used the analysis of tribal community that is characterized by a social system based on dividing things and activities according to contradiction between males and females. Bourdieu explained how such a gender practice, or more accurately, male entitlement, serves as a daily activity. In this vein, the concept of "Habitus" provides us with the theoretical basis for analyzing the division of work between both genders; indeed, it is the best context for understanding the social world, and how the physical body is limited within the boundaries of sexual reality (Bourdieu, 1996). This concept is particularly useful to analyze social relationships between both genders, since it investigates a whole group of phenomena that would be away from methodological analysis without introducing this concept. Even though physical violence and intimidation can't be underestimated in the interactions between men and women, it will be difficult to explain the social power related to male entitlement without utilizing symbolic violence. This type of violence isn't viewed as such, since it is only an application of a social system to see the world in the frame of dominating and dominated Habitus. Also, we may confirm the brutality and semi-complete exclusion of women from men's social games, and thus their social world that is mainly based on competition (Al-Tkhayneh & Nser, 2019). This content has been written from the inside of a masculine entity, from the perspective of a person who knows it and takes part in the games that provide sexual desire and possible domains of work (Bourdieu, 1996). I don't think that any women will manifest such clarity and understanding to this social world that claims to be masculine. Based on Bourdieu's analysis, it is obvious that the issue is related to the perspective of a male person who is well-known as a strict analyst of the social world; however, while addressing with this topic, he still holds a masculine perspective; indeed, the social tribal world is defined based on a masculine point of view (Bourdieu, 1998).

### 2.3. The Previous Studies

In their study entitled "Mobilizing resilience to symbolic violence with Chinese international research students in Australia: a Bourdieusian perspective", Xing, Mu and Henderson (2024) suggested that psychological studies concerning international research students' resilience in facing mental distress have attracted more academic attention. However, sociological researches about the ability to face 'invisible' pressures such as power imbalances are still limited. Based on Bourdieu's relational



sociology, we may redefine the psychology of resilience into the sociology of resilience in relation to symbolic violence. The study sample consisted of (220) international Chinese students in the Australian universities. The study used a self-designed instrument and data were analyzed by using Multiple Correspondence Analysis. The results revealed that the international Chinese students were attracted towards an area of forces saturated with the symbolic violence by the supervising authority, English dominance, and neo-liberalism. However, those students ventured into this domain of struggles mainly characterized by symbolic violence that is reflected on them by this culture. Practicing resilience was complicated based on their autonomy and habitual dispositions, which contributed to their perceptions of symbolic violence and their ability to encounter it.

In a study entitled “social interaction and enhancing the manifestations of Symbolic Violence in a virtual environment, a reading in the image of symbolic violence on Facebook”, Kashairi and Bonoqta (2023) addressed symbolic violence in a virtual environment by investigating its forms on Facebook, considering it as a smart violence style and an advanced sociological form. This violence type is an implied one. The study analyzed some images and comments published across Facebook pages that hold symbolic violence in its content. In a similar vein, Badri and Moghni (2023) conducted a study entitled “the role of culture dialogue in reducing symbolic violence practices across social media sites, a survey study for the opinions of Facebook users’ sample”. The study addressed the issue of dialogue culture and its role in reducing the practices of symbolic violence that are widely-spread due to the privacy of digital environment. The sample consisted of (160) individuals, where an electronic questionnaire was distributed during February (15-25), 2022 to different virtual groups. The results revealed that the culture of dialogue has a prominent role in reducing the practice of symbolic violence on Facebook, especially as this virtual space witnesses increased violation to the privacy of users. However, training on adopting communication skills and commitment to the conditions of dialogue, in addition to conducting studies about the causes of symbolic violence have the potential of reducing the effects of symbolic violence, such as insulting or slandering other users by either written words or symbols.

In their study entitled “Gender and politics in a digitalized world: Investigating online hostility against UK female MPs”, Esposito and Breeze (2022) addressed digital hostility against women in UK politics based on quantitative and qualitative analysis of a set of Twitter data collected over a period of (3) weeks prior the UK General Elections in December 2019. The study used quantitative-semantic analysis to compare the large number of tweets about female and male parliamentary members to detect the possible gender patterns. The results of quantitative analysis revealed large inter-individual differences. The results showed that female members received comments containing more words related to sexual history, appearance and violence, in addition to more emotional or extreme language, and abusive messages against women, considering that their political activity is a breaching to the rules of gender performance.

Another study entitled “Semiotic Violence against Women: Theorizing Harms against Female Politicians”, Krook (2022) suggested that there are variations in the definitions of violence ranging from simple conceptions that privilege physical abuse to more comprehensive methods related to a wide range of sexual, and psychological, physical and economic violations. The study introduced semiotic violence as a fifth form of violence against women since it mobilizes sexual expressions and images to injure and subjugate women. Even though these actions are committed against individual women, they enhance gender inequalities against women. Based on research in multiple disciplines, and a global database of news items collected during (2014-2019), the study identified two patterns of semiotic violence: women are invisible and women are incompetent. The first one aims to neglect women as political actors and object to their right to speak during political debates, while the second implies that women aren’t qualified to serve in political roles based on gender issues related to

knowledge, temperament, sexual issues, and femininity. The study suggested that Semiotic violence is not a part of a large continuum of violence, but it is the most widespread style of violence against women. Therefore, semiotic violence should be widely addressed in feminist research, as it creates new vocabularies to express women's experiences and structural inequalities.

In a study entitled "Normalizing misogyny: hate speech and verbal abuse of female politicians on Japanese Twitter", Fuchs and Schdfer (2021) suggested that social media platforms, such as Twitter gained increased political importance during the last years. Since they are considered as platforms for organizing popular political movements, social media sites have been widely criticized as being attempts to manipulate public opinion or election outcomes and provoking racist speech. Concerning the case of Japan, despite the wide investigation of hate speech opposing to foreigners, such as (ni-channeru) "channel" or Twitter from various domains, verbal abuse against females on social media, particularly female politicians received less attention in research. This article presented the results taken from an explorative analysis of cases of hate speech and abusive language against female politicians on Twitter. In a study entitled "Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women and Girls in Public and Private Spheres: Moving from Enemy to Ally", Marganski and Melander (2021) suggested that while research about digital risks is growing, studies concerning their solutions aren't coping with that. The nature of technology demands paying more attention to the harm associated with interconnectivity, and technology's ability to combat offenses." This chapter addresses technology as a weapon and a shield in issues related to violence against women in public and private areas. The study reviewed the complex manifestations related to technological gender violence, ranging from using technology to exploit and harm women in public places, to the offenses which take place in closed doors. Then, we discuss responses related to justice. In this vein, innovative ways were developed to respond to the offenses committed against them by utilizing technology to combat the adverse effects of harm and cooperate with others in order to achieve justice.

Furthermore, in a study entitled "symbolic violence across social media sites: the explicit and implicit", Baqour and Saber (2017) suggested that Algeria witnessed an increased usage to social media sites, particularly Facebook, where its users exceeded (3) million subscribers in 2012, increased to (7) million subscribers in 2014 and (15) million subscribers in 2016. With the increased number of subscribers, the forms of symbolic violence increase by users; indeed, this type of volcano could be in the form of image, connotation, or a word either intentionally or unintentionally. This invisible violence accumulates in the minds of users and results in adverse effects on some users. Since the principles of media education and digital education require educating the recipient about the forms of violence and its adverse effects, this study investigated those violence forms against Facebook users in Algeria to describe and determine their dimensions, and develop an educational strategy that enable users to overcome violence forms, and enhance adopting the ethics of communicating with others. In the same vein, Aisha's (2015) study entitled "symbolic violence across social media sites, a reading in some violence images across Facebook" suggested that violence took several public and invisible direct or indirect forms, ranging from physical violence to symbolic violence, which has more diverse and comprehensive dimensions, including all non-physical violence forms related to language and the different expressive forms. Since social media sites are free platforms to express opinions and discuss issues freely away from the restrictions imposed by community, these platforms are viewed as an important space for investigating the youth behaviors and thinking styles as well as assessing the extent to which violence is practiced. This can be done through an array of value assumptions that investigate the relationship between internet as a dynamic mediator and the youth as active users of the internet. Finally, in



a study entitled "Cultural Industries and Symbolic Violence: Practices and Discourses that Perpetuate Inequality", Menéndez-Menéndez (2014) suggested that symbolic violence is an analytical category that allows exploring the practices which contribute to increasing violence against women. However, due to the accuracy of performing these practices and other factors, it is difficult to perceive them as oppressive. Such a concealment for the message and discourse of cultural industries that is based on sublimating stereotypes and tolerance towards certain aggression types and legitimizing certain power relationships will, ultimately, enhance a discriminatory message that becomes a fertile ground to violence against women.

### 3. THE STUDY METHODOLOGY

The study used the descriptive approach that describes the phenomenon of verbal and nonverbal symbolic violence against the Libyan woman on social media sites. The main objective of descriptive research is to obtain sufficient and accurate information about the targeted phenomenon- describing the existing events from different areas to achieve the targeted objectives from the investigated phenomenon (Bin Morsili, 2010). Since the current study depends on the virtual environment, we aim to describe the phenomenon at the virtual level. In this vein, we made a virtual survey for the phenomenon on social media sites, since virtual surveys are characterized by being more practical and cost-effective in collecting information directly from their resources. Also, virtual surveys facilitate obtaining information, where they allow downloading adjustable and addable data (Bin Amar & Bakhoush, 2021). Accordingly, we will use semiological content-analysis based on Roland Barth's approach that mainly focuses on descriptive studies with regard to communicating the symbolic content and implied meaning, while paying less attention to the apparent meaning of the message (Laramée & Vallet, 2009). In order to give an accurate description for the indicators of symbolic violence, we will analyze their content by using content-analysis instrument. In this study, we will focus on understanding the symbolic indicators of the blogs published on the Libyan websites and demonstrate the symbolic violence included against woman, by analyzing the apparent meanings in order to reach the implied meaning. Semiological content-analysis based on Roland Barth's method depends on explaining images and understanding their meaning through independent analyses. Indeed, Roland Barth focused on two basic concepts for understanding images:

First, Denotation, and second, connotation.

Here are the basic steps for analyzing images based on Roland Barth's method:

1. The descriptive level: in this stage, more focus is given to a direct and accurate description of the blog, without signs or indicators.
2. The interpretative stage: in this stage, we continue recognizing the symbols and meanings implied in the blog based on the cultural and social contexts, and the importance of these images concerning certain conceptual domains is explored (Barthes, 1977).

Semiological approach isn't only a reporting description, where it investigates the suggestive indicators to get to the ideological context that controls this type of indicators (Thani, 2008). In addition to depending on the instruments of observation in observing the general Libyan Instagram accounts during the last six months, we determined the posts that include images of symbolic violence against women.

#### 3.1. The Study Population and Sample

This study used the public Libyan Instagram accounts that are characterized by being more followed

and publishing various recreational, service, advertising, and political posts. Based on observation, the following accounts were used:

**Table 1:** Public Libyan Instagram Accounts.

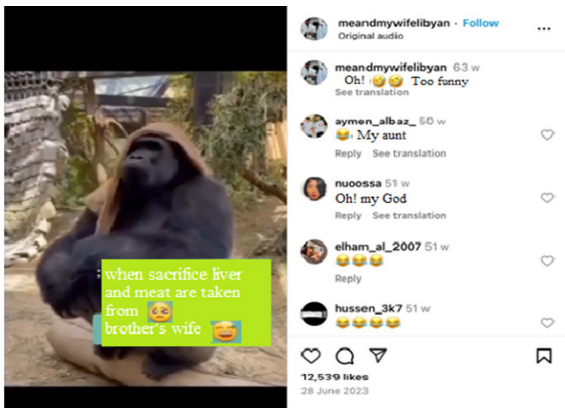
| Account           | Joining Date   | Number of Followers | Number of Posts |
|-------------------|----------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| New Libya         | February, 2014 | 890.000             | 8251            |
| libya_community   | April, 2018    | 271.000             | 3163            |
| alkal.libya       | November, 2016 | 1.2 million         | 19.000          |
| Meandmywifelibyan | May, 2017      | 1.2 million         | 7521            |

The blogs were selected based on their relevance to the study topic, where posts that include symbolic violence images against Libyan women in various life domains were selected. Given the high number of such content, we will use the purposive sampling method in selecting the most prominent images that include symbolic violence and obtain more interaction by subscribers on the website.

### 3.2. The Semiological Approach of Symbolic Violence Across the Libyan Instagram Accounts

Analyzing the images of symbolic violence across Instagram accounts is related to giving verbal or nonverbal meaning of both of them. However, those meanings may simulate themselves or simulate the social interactions resulting from them.

#### 3.2.1. The Semiological Analysis of Image (1)



Source: an account named (Meandmywifelibyan), published on June, 28, 2003, number of likes (12.539), comments (716), share (9995).

The image's title and nature: Symbolic violence against the brother's wife on Eid Al-Adha, a social dimension that mimics reality.

#### 3.2.2. The Denotation Level

The image entitled "symbolic violence against the brother's wife includes verbal semiological indicators (when sacrifice liver and meat are taken from the brother's wife), accompanied by non-verbal semiological indicators represented by ridiculousness. As for the image's description, it includes a gorilla wearing a headscarf and sitting beside a tree in a state of irritation. The image includes a ridiculous expression written on a green background in the Libyan dialect (when sacrifice liver and meat are taken from the brother's wife), she looks like this.

### 3.2.3. *The Connotation Level*

The image shows visualization for the brother's wife in Eid Aladha. According to the Libyan customs, the family members gather and practice the rituals of Eid, where each family donate a part of the sacrifice to be cooked for dinner and donate a part of that sacrifice to other families. The violence directed against the brother's wife is manifested in the shape of a wild gorilla feeling angry due to the act of taking her meat- this is a direct image of symbolic violence. Despite the presented ridiculous style, likening a woman to a wild animal is a non-verbal indication of symbolic violence, where it shows the conflict rooted in society between the family and the son's wife within the domain of a social context in religious and social occasions. As for the verbal level, the enclosed image shows the cause of sadness and rage that affected the gorilla (the brother's wife), implying her refusal to taking her own portion of meat and describing her as a mean person. Also, the used colors reflects the desire to practice symbolic violence, where using the negative side of the white color refers to isolation (Nasab & Kawri, 1997), (the green color refers to imbalance (with reference to negative emotions, such as jealousy, and envy)) (Nasab & Kawri, 1997), and it also refers to the meanings of conservation and self-defense. By considering the relationship between the various indicators in the previous image, we can see negative indications about the brother's wife, such as misery, lack of cooperation, and wildness. This image also takes us to another social context related to the relationships in the Libyan family in social and religious occasions. Within the expressive limits in the post, we can notice the inferior view towards the brother's wife within social relationships.

### 3.2.4. *The Semiological Analysis of Image (2)*



Source: an account named (New Libya), published on June,18, 2024, number of likes (3.855), comments (649), share (1201).

The image's title and nature: Symbolic violence against the woman wearing men's national Libyan uniform, a social dimension that mimics reality.

### 3.2.5. *The Denotation Level*

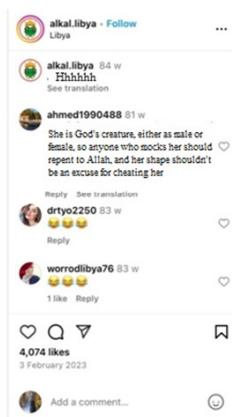
The image shows a symbolic violence against the woman wearing (Alzaboun) men's national Libyan uniform, and includes verbal semiological indicators written in the Libyan dialect (A girl uploading her image with men's clothes (Al-Zaboun) male comments), in addition to non-verbal semiological indicators represented by ridiculousness. As for describing the image, it implies symbolic violence against woman, as it shows a girl wearing the national Libyan uniform for men, without showing her head. The image includes the girl's name at the top of the post beside two symbols of pink hearts, in addition to a sarcastic comment stating "a girl uploading her image in the men's Libyan national clothes=the male's comments".

### 3.2.6. The Connotation Level

The published image shows a Libyan girl wearing men's clothing, and requests comments on it, to know the young men's attitude towards the image. In the Libyan social context, society does not accept a girl wearing men's clothing or a man wearing girls' clothing; therefore, it is viewed as symbolic violence directed against women. As for the verbal level, the enclosed image shows the publisher's implied refusal due to the girl's violation to the prevailing social standards; indicating that the girl exceeded the societal values (a negative indicator). Also, the used colors reflect the desire to practice symbolic violence, where using the black color on a white background refers to contradiction (light, darkness), (clarity, ambiguity) (Rasheed, 2017). It shows the compatibility between the linguistic indicator and the attached iconic indicator, which indicates sarcasm in a provocative way, in showing the negative image of the Libyan girl as a woman who does not respect customs and traditions, or as a rebel. By investigating the relationship between the indicators in the previous image, we can see negative indicators about the Libyan girl, by viewing her as a person who doesn't respect traditions and customs and underestimating her. Indeed, the indicators of colors match with this direction, where the image takes us towards the social context of the Libyan community that has conservative nature and refuses woman's ignorance to the community traditions. The functional limits in the post reflex the inferior view towards the girl who doesn't respect traditions and customs by criticizing her within a symbolic structure by urging the young males to comment the image.

### 3.3. The Semiological Analysis of Image (3)

He goes to the backyard and sees her wearing like this,  
and she says I find him cheating me  
-You should be happy that he even comes to you



Source: an account named (alkal.libya), published on February,3, 2023, number of likes (4.074), comments (485), share (719).

The image's title and nature: Symbolic violence against the woman that doesn't care about her appearance at home, a social dimension that mimics reality.

### 3.3.1. The Denotation Level

The image shows a symbolic violence against the woman whose is careless about her physical appearance, where it includes verbal semiological indicators (He goes back home and finds her wearing like this,. She says I found him cheating me.. You should be happy that he even comes to see you), in addition to non-verbal semiological indicators represented by ridiculousness. As for describing the image, it implies symbolic violence against woman, as it shows a married black girl wearing untidy clothes, a bathrobe on sportswear, where the bathrobe is tied carelessly, and the house's furniture is too humble. The girl's head is hidden. The post includes verbal semiological

indicators written in the Libyan dialect, implying that (when a man returns home, he finds his wife in that appearance. She tells him about his cheating; however, she should be happy that he even comes home). The text is written in a black font on a white background.

### 3.3.2. *The Connotation Level*

The published image shows visualization of the Libyan woman wearing funny clothes, and she is held accountable for her husband's cheating due to her carelessness, and that she should feel happy when he even comes home. Generally, within the social context, women take care of themselves while welcoming their husbands back home in order to add a romantic atmosphere inside the house. Careless women are generally accused for their husband's cheating desire; therefore, the image includes a symbolic violence directed towards women, as they hold the accountability for husband's cheating. As for the verbal message, the enclosed image suggested that the woman is responsible for her husband's cheating due to her carelessness about her appearance in an obvious indication to her negative role in family's failure. Also, the used colors reflect the desire to practice symbolic violence, where the black color on a white background implies contradiction (light, darkness), as these colors indicate ambiguity and imbalance (Rasheed, 2017). The post shows the agreement between the written indicators and the enclosed iconic indicators, which indicates the woman's carelessness and responsibility for the marriage failure and man's deviance- this shows the negative image of the Libyan woman as careless and irresponsible. By investigating the relationship between the indicators in the post, we can see negative indicators about the Libyan woman as the untidy one who doesn't care about marriage relationships, in addition to underestimating her in the community, as indicated by the colors. This image takes us towards the social context of the Libyan community that respects women and appreciates her role in building her family and community. Indeed, the functional limits in the post reflect the inferior view towards the careless and untidy woman and hold her the accountability of her husband's cheating and unwillingness to return back home.

### 3.4. The Semiological Analysis of Image (4)



Source: an account named (Libya\_community), published on August,20, 2024, number of likes (1597), comments (170), share (1137).

The image's title and nature: Symbolic violence against a middle-aged woman that talks about her experiences, a social dimension that mimics reality.

#### *3.4.1. The Denotation Level*

The image includes symbolic violence about a woman who narrates her marriage story to younger girls. The post includes verbal semiological indicators written in the Libyan dialect (this type of woman is mostly existing in weddings, gathering younger girls to tell them about relationships how she got married to her husband...), with non-verbal semiological indicators, showing woman's image in midlife age (ridiculousness). The image includes symbolic violence against the woman- a woman in her mid-life age wearing semi-headscarf, while too much makeup is applied to her face. The enclosed text in the Libyan dialect states (this type of woman is mostly existing in weddings, gathering younger girls to tell them about relationships how she got married to her husband...), and is written in black font on a white background.

#### *3.4.2. The Connotation Level*

The published image shows visualization of a middle-aged woman applying too much makeup to her face. The post mocks, since on every wedding occasion, she gathers the girls and tells them about her emotional relationships and the story of her marriage, indicating that despite her advanced age, she is still irresponsible and immature. Generally, within the social context, women in this age are usually mature and do not talk about their private life to younger girls, given the customs and traditions that determine the nature of discussions between middle-aged women and younger girls. Therefore, the image includes a symbolic violence against woman, confirming that she should value her age, privacy and social prestige. As for the verbal message, the enclosed image includes symbolic violence against women, and holds a negative indication written in the Libyan dialect. Also, the used colors reflect the desire to practice symbolic violence, where the black color on a white background implies contradiction (light, darkness), as these colors indicate ambiguity and imbalance (Rasheed, 2017). The post shows the agreement between the written indicators and the enclosed iconic indicators, which indicates the negative image of the Libyan woman that doesn't respect her age, privacy and social prestige.

By investigating the relationship between the indicators in the previous image, we can see negative indicators about the Libyan woman, visualizing her as the irresponsible one who doesn't value her age, in addition to underestimating her in the community, as indicated by the colors. This image takes us towards the social context of the Libyan community that respects women; however, traditions and customs restrict the nature of discussed topics between middle-aged women and younger girls. Indeed, the functional limits in the post reflect the inferior view towards the Libyan woman who doesn't respect her age, privacy and social prestige by mocking her in a symbolic way.

## **4. RESULTS**

The image as a method for expressing symbolic violence: the published images via Instagram accounts reflect images of symbolic violence directed towards woman in the Libyan community, where expressive symbols and images are used to express sarcasm and underestimation of women, either as brother's wife or girl wearing men's clothes which, in turn, reflects certain social attitudes towards women.

1. Assimilating women as the wild animal, where the brother's wife is viewed as an angry gorilla in the first image; Indeed, this implies underestimating her position in social occasions. The woman is considered as not cooperating and mean.
2. Clothes as a symbol of social violation in the second image, where the light is focused on the Libyan



girl who wears national men's clothes, and the young males are asked to comment. This situation reflects woman's rebellion against the social values. The community refuses such behaviors which, in turn, enhances the image of symbolic violence against women who aren't complied to customs.

3. Social interaction and community attitudes: both images reflect the social values in the Libyan community, where the woman who challenges those values is exposed to symbolic violence either by sarcastic simile or by asking others to mock her in their comments.
4. Distorting the image of the Libyan woman: the images published on social media sites include symbolic violence against the Libyan woman, where there is more focus on the negative domains, such as carelessness, lack of self interest, and not respecting age category and social status. These images introduce a stereotype that underestimates woman and places her in an inferior position.
5. The woman is held the accountability for family problems: the semiological analysis shows that woman are held totally responsible for the failure of the marital life by blaming her for being careless which, in turn, allows men to justify negative behaviors, such as cheating their wives.
6. Exploiting customs and traditions in enhancing symbolic violence: customs and traditions in the Lybian community are used as a tool for enhancing symbolic violence against women, where the women who talk about their experiences are visualized in a sarcastic way which, in turn, enhances the inferior view towards them in the community.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the issue of symbolic violence against Libyan women on social media, several steps can be taken. First, awareness campaigns should be launched to educate the public about the harmful effects of such content and challenge existing stereotypes. Media literacy programs could also be introduced to help users critically analyze and resist harmful posts. Additionally, policymakers should advocate for stricter regulations on social media platforms to prevent the spread of the content that perpetuates symbolic violence. Support systems, such as counseling and legal aid, should be established to assist women affected by online harassment. Encouraging positive representations of women through influencers and content creators can also help counter negative stereotypes. Finally, collaborative research with local organizations can provide deeper insights into the cultural factors driving symbolic violence and inform culturally sensitive interventions.

### 5.1. Limitations

The study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, it focuses on a specific visual and a limited number of social media posts, which may not fully represent the broader issue of symbolic violence against Libyan women. Second, the analysis is deeply rooted in Libyan cultural norms, limiting its applicability to other societies. Third, the study is confined to Instagram, and the findings may not extend to other platforms, where different forms of symbolic violence might occur. Fourth, semiological analysis, while insightful, is inherently subjective and may be influenced by the researcher's biases. Lastly, the lack of quantitative data means the study cannot provide statistical evidence of the prevalence or impact of symbolic violence, which could strengthen its conclusions.

### 5.2. Future Research Directions

Future research should expand on this study in several ways. Cross-platform analysis could investigate symbolic violence across multiple social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok, to identify patterns and differences. Longitudinal studies could examine how symbolic violence evolves over time and its long-term effects on women's well-being. An intersectional approach

could explore how factors like age, class, and regional differences intersect with gender to shape experiences of symbolic violence. Comparative studies could also analyze the portrayal of women in Libyan social media alongside other Arab or Middle Eastern societies to identify commonalities and differences. Additionally, research could assess the psychological and social impact of symbolic violence on women, including its effects on self-esteem and mental health. Finally, the role of men and masculinity in perpetuating or challenging symbolic violence should be explored to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.

### 5.3. Implications of the Study

The study has significant implications for Libyan society and beyond. It highlights the need for cultural reflection on norms and traditions that perpetuate gender inequality and symbolic violence against women. Social media platforms must take greater responsibility for monitoring and regulating harmful content that reinforces negative stereotypes. Empowering women to challenge and resist symbolic violence, both online and offline, is crucial for fostering gender equality. The findings also call for the development of policies and legal frameworks to address online harassment and protect women's rights in digital spaces. On a broader level, the study contributes to the global discourse on gender equality, advocating for cultural change that values women's autonomy and challenges traditional gender roles. By addressing these issues, the research paves the way for meaningful societal change in Libya and beyond.

### 5.4. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are paramount in this study, as it involves analyzing human behavior, attitudes, and experiences, particularly those of Libyan women who are subjected to symbolic violence on social media. The research adheres to strict ethical guidelines to ensure the protection and respect of individuals whose content is examined. Since the study focuses on publicly available social media posts, it avoids using identifiable information or personal data without consent. However, the potential for harm remains, as the content analyzed may reflect sensitive or stigmatizing portrayals of women. To mitigate this, the study anonymizes all data and refrains from sharing or reproducing specific posts that could further harm the individuals depicted. Additionally, the research maintains a non-judgmental and objective stance, aiming to understand and critique the cultural and societal dynamics behind symbolic violence rather than targeting individuals. The study also considers the broader ethical implications of its findings, emphasizing the need to advocate for the dignity and rights of women in Libyan society while avoiding the reinforcement of harmful stereotypes. By prioritizing ethical integrity, the research seeks to contribute, responsibly, to the discourse on gender inequality and symbolic violence.

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