

Unfiltered Truths The Poetics of Authenticity and Digital Womanhood in Faliha Hassan's Modern Verse

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حقائق غير منقحة: شعرية الأصالة والأنوثة الرقمية في الشعر الحديث لفليحة حسن

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المستخلص

تستكشف هذه الدراسة فكرة الصوت الأنثوي الأصيل في شعر فليحة حسن وعلاقته بالأنوثة الرقمية والهوية وتمثيل المرأة لذاتها. تحلل الدراسة قصائد مختارة لتوضيح كيف تُعبّر حسن عن المشاعر الداخلية للمرأة، وصراعاتها مع الهوية، وواقعها المعيشي باستخدام لغة واضحة ومؤثرة. يُسلط البحث الضوء على كيفية تناول شعرها لمواضيع مثل التقييد والذاكرة والانتماء والتعبير عن الذات، مُبيناً أن هويات النساء تتشكل بفعل التجارب الشخصية والضغط الاجتماعي. بالاستناد إلى النظرية الأدبية النسوية ودراسات الثقافة الرقمية، يُشير البحث إلى إمكانية ربط الصوت الشعري لحسن بأشكال التعبير عن الذات الرقمية الحديثة. وكما يُوضح كتاب "الثقافات الرقمية ما بعد النسوية"، تُشكّل النساء في الفضاءات الإلكترونية هوياتهن من خلال الظهور والأداء، في حين يواجهن في الوقت نفسه توقعات الجمهور والمجتمع. وبالمثل، يُقدّم شعر حسن شخصيات نسائية تُصارع بين التعبير عن ذاتها الحقيقية والتعامل مع القيود الثقافية. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن شعر حسن يُعدّ مثالاً قوياً على التعبير الأنثوي عن الذات الذي يُقاوم الصمت والتقييد. كما يُظهر ذلك أن الشعر والمنصات الرقمية على حد سواء فضاءات تُعيد فيها النساء صياغة هويتهم باستمرار، مُوازاتاً بين الأصالة والتوقعات الاجتماعية والثقافية. الكلمات المفتاحية: فليحة حسن، الصوت الأنثوي، الهوية، الأنوثة الرقمية، التمثيل الذاتي، الشعر النسوي

Abstract

This study explores the idea of an authentic female voice in the poetry of Faleeha Hassan and its relationship to digital womanhood, identity, and female self-representation. It analyzes selected poems to show how Hassan expresses women's inner emotions, identity struggles, and lived realities using clear and emotional language. The research highlights how her poetry deals with themes such as restriction, memory, belonging, and self-expression, showing that women's identities are shaped by both personal experiences and social pressures. Drawing on feminist literary theory and digital culture studies, the research suggests that Hassan's poetic voice can be connected to modern digital forms of self-expression. As Postfeminist Digital Cultures explains, women in online spaces construct their identities through visibility and performance, while also facing expectations from audiences and society. Similarly, Hassan's poetry presents female characters who struggle between expressing their true selves and dealing with cultural limitations. The study concludes that Hassan's poetry is a strong example of female self-expression that resists silence and limitation. It also shows that both poetry and digital platforms are spaces where women continuously negotiate identity, balancing authenticity with social and cultural expectations. Keywords: Faleeha Hassan, female voice, identity, digital womanhood, self-representation, feminist poetry

Introduction

In today's digital world, social media has changed the way people present their identities, especially women. Online platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter give women opportunities to express themselves, share their opinions, and make their voices heard. At the same time, these digital spaces create pressure on women to present ideal images of beauty, success, and happiness. Because of these expectations, many women experience conflict between showing their real selves and trying to meet the standards created by society and digital culture. As a result, authenticity has become an important issue in feminist and literary studies, especially in relation to how women express truth and identity in online spaces (Gill, 2007). In recent years, feminism has become more visible in popular culture, especially in places such as North America and Europe. Feminist ideas can now be seen in social media, television, films, music, and advertising. This visibility is often called popular feminism, which means that feminist messages are widely shared and easily recognized by large audiences. Popular feminism encourages women to feel strong, confident, and independent. It gives women the chance to speak openly about their rights and to challenge unfair treatment (Banet-Weiser, 2018). However, the spread of feminism in public spaces has also created strong reactions against it. Alongside the rise of popular feminism, there has been an increase in popular misogyny. Misogyny refers to hatred, disrespect, or unfair treatment toward women. In the digital age, misogyny spreads quickly through social media and online platforms. It appears in many forms, such as body-shaming, harassment, gender stereotypes, and attacks on women's voices. As feminist ideas become more visible, misogynistic responses often become stronger. This creates an online struggle where feminist voices and anti-feminist reactions compete for attention. Social media has become a space where both empowerment and hostility exist at the same time (Banet-Weiser, 2018). This conflict between feminism and misogyny has made digital spaces complex for women. On one hand, women are encouraged to be confident and empowered. On the other hand, they are judged, criticized, and pressured to fit unrealistic standards. Because of this, women often struggle to maintain authenticity in the digital world. They are expected to appear confident and perfect while hiding fear, weakness, and emotional truth. This tension between real identity and performed identity has become an important subject for feminist criticism and literary analysis (Gill, 2007). Literature, especially modern poetry, provides an important space for exploring these tensions. Poetry allows writers to express emotional truth, personal experience, and resistance to social pressure. Through poetic language, women writers can challenge false representations and create honest expressions of identity. Modern poetry becomes a powerful way to speak about women's experiences in a world shaped by media images and digital expectations. It allows women to express pain, strength, resistance, and truth in ways that challenge the pressures of both patriarchy and digital culture (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979). Feminist literary studies have shown that women's writing often resists the systems that try to control women's voices and identities. In digital culture, these systems are strengthened by social media, where women are often judged by appearance, popularity, and public approval. Poetry gives women a space to resist these pressures and to express their realities beyond digital performance. Through poetry, women can present identity as emotional, complex, and authentic rather than artificial or socially controlled (Showalter, 1977). In this context, the poetry of Faliha Hassan is important because it explores women's identity, voice, and emotional truth. Her modern poetry reflects the feelings, struggles, and lived experiences of women in contemporary life. Her poems show how women experience emotional pain, social restrictions, and the pressure to conform to idealized images. By expressing honest emotions and rejecting false images of femininity, Hassan uses poetry as a form of resistance against both social expectations and digital pressures. Faliha Hassan's poetic voice is especially significant because it presents women not as passive images but as real individuals with emotions, struggles, and agency. Her poems reveal the tension between inner truth and outside expectations, showing how women attempt to protect their identities in a world that often values appearance more than authenticity. Through simple but powerful poetic language, she gives voice to women's hidden feelings and challenges the forces that try to shape female identity according to social norms (Al-Saadi, 2023). This study examines how Faliha Hassan presents authenticity and digital womanhood in her modern poetry. It explores how her poems express women's voices, challenge the pressure of digital identity, and use poetic language to reveal emotional truth. The study aims to show that Hassan's poetry presents authenticity not only as a literary style but also as a form of feminist resistance to the digital shaping of women's identities.

Theoretical Framework

The present study follows the theoretical framework of feminist literary criticism, with a focus on authenticity, digital womanhood, and the representation of female identity in contemporary poetry. This framework is used to examine how Faliha Hassan expresses women's voices and emotional truth in her modern verse while resisting the pressures created by digital culture and social expectations.

The study also draws on Sarah Banet-Weiser's concept of popular feminism and popular misogyny to understand how women's identities are shaped and challenged in the digital age. Banet-Weiser explains that while digital media gives women greater visibility and opportunities for self-expression, it also creates spaces where women face judgment, pressure, and hostility. These ideas help explain the tension between authentic identity and performed identity in women's digital experiences. In addition, the study uses Rosalind Gill's ideas on postfeminism and self-representation in digital culture. Gill argues that women are often encouraged to appear empowered and independent while still being controlled by social expectations related to beauty, confidence, and public image. This perspective helps analyze how poetic expression can resist these pressures and reveal women's emotional realities. The study examines how Faliha Hassan's poetry presents authenticity as a form of resistance. It investigates how her modern verse challenges idealized digital images of women and gives voice to real female experiences. The study aims to show how Hassan's poetry reclaims women's identity and emotional truth in the digital age by applying feminist literary criticism together with digital feminist theory.

Literature review

The chosen poet in this study is Faliha Hassan's Modern Verse. There are some studies conducted on this poet and her poetry that tackle different views and subjects. One of these studies titled *Women take issue: Aspects of women's subordination* by CCCS. (1978), shows that women are often in unfair social positions, and these problems are not natural but made by society. It explains that the media has an important role in shaping ideas about women, and it often shows them in traditional ways, such as being weak, staying at home, or having less power than men. In this way, the CCCS says that media is not neutral, but it supports the ideas of powerful groups in society. Another important idea in this work is that women's experiences should be studied seriously in cultural research. Angela McRobbie (1978) in her study *Jackie: An Ideology of Adolescent Femininity* examines how girls' magazines shape the way young women think about identity and femininity. She focuses on the magazine *Jackie* and shows how it teaches teenage girls what it means to be a "proper" girl in society. McRobbie explains that the magazine presents clear ideas about how girls should look, behave, and feel. It encourages them to focus on romance, beauty, and relationships, while ignoring independence or critical thinking. In this way, the magazine gives a limited image of femininity and supports traditional gender roles. She also argues that media like girls' magazines do not just reflect reality but help create it. Judith Williamson (1978) in *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* studies how advertisements create meaning and influence people's ideas. She explains that ads do not only sell products, but also sell ideas, values, and lifestyles. Williamson shows that advertisements use images, symbols, and language to send hidden messages. These messages shape how people think about success, beauty, gender, and happiness. In many cases, ads connect products with emotional feelings, making people believe that buying something will improve their identity or life. She also argues that advertising supports social ideologies. While *Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility* by Rosalind Gill (2007) explains that modern media culture shows a type of postfeminism. In this idea, women are told that they are strong, free, and independent, but they are still controlled by social rules about beauty, confidence, and how they should look. Gill also says that digital media puts more pressure on women to always manage and improve their image. Because of this, it becomes harder to show a real and natural self in today's world. The current study *Unfiltered Truths: The Poetics of Authenticity and Digital Womanhood in Faliha Hassan's Modern Verse*, examines how the poetry of Faliha Hassan presents authenticity and digital womanhood in modern life. It focuses on how her poems express women's real emotions, identity, and experiences in a world influenced by social media. The study also looks at how her poetry shows the pressure women face to present perfect images online and how it reveals their hidden emotional truth.

Section one: Authentic Female Voice

Women writers in earlier centuries often struggled with self-doubt and social pressure when trying to write. Many female authors were taught that femininity meant silence, modesty, and emotional weakness, which made them feel that writing was "improper" or even "unfeminine." As a result, women often feared being seen as "mad," "inferior," or intellectually weak when they tried to express themselves in literature (Showalter, 1979). Showalter indicates Writers such as Anne Finch, Anne Bradstreet, and Anne Killigrew often expressed anxiety about their role as writers. They sometimes felt their creativity was weak or "sick," because society taught them that women were naturally less capable of artistic achievement. Even when these women wrote poetry, they were often forced to be modest and self-deprecating, presenting their work as small or unimportant. This shows how women's writing was shaped by social expectations that limited their confidence and voice (1979). These women still resisted silence by writing at all. Even when they apologized for writing,

they were still expressing their identity and emotions through poetry. In this way, their work shows the beginning of a female literary voice, where women slowly begin to speak about their experiences, feelings, and inner struggles despite social restrictions. The idea that women's writing is a form of identity formation and self-expression, even when it is shaped by doubt and limitation (Showalter, 1979). Women writers historically faced social restrictions that shaped their literary identity and voice. Women who wrote openly and refused modesty were often labeled as "mad," "unfeminine," or morally improper, which shows how patriarchal culture controlled female expression (Showalter, 1979). Because of these pressures, women writers were forced into limited choices: silence, modest domestic writing, or public rejection. Writers such as Aphra Behn, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Emily Dickinson, and Louisa May Alcott had to present their writing as modest or secondary in order to gain acceptance. This created a conflict between artistic ambition and social expectations of femininity (Showalter, 1979). She also argues that women were trapped in what Virginia Woolf called a "double bind," where they had to choose between being "only a woman" or trying to be equal to men (Showalter, 1979). As a result, women's writing often reflects themes of confinement, anxiety, and restriction, showing how deeply cultural norms shaped female expression. Despite these limitations, women writers still developed ways to express identity and voice through literature, revealing both resistance and constraint in their work (Showalter, 1979). Showalter argues that women writers in patriarchal culture often experienced deep psychological conflict because creativity was defined in male terms, forcing women to feel that writing was unnatural or "masculine" (Showalter, 1979). Women such as Aphra Behn expressed this tension by describing a "masculine part" within themselves, showing how female authors had to negotiate between gender identity and artistic identity (Showalter, 1979). Nineteenth-century women writers faced even stronger pressure, often using male impersonation or "male mimicry" to gain authority in literature, but this frequently led to psychological confusion and artistic tension (Showalter, 1979). Showalter explains that writers like Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Charlotte Brontë illustrate this struggle. Barrett Browning's depiction of George Sand shows the conflict between being "woman" and "man" in literary identity, while Brontë's use of male narration reflects the attempt to access male literary authority (Showalter, 1979). However, these strategies often resulted in what Showalter calls "technical falseness," because adopting male forms could distort female experience and create tension between authenticity and imitation (Showalter, 1979). Women writers faced a "double bind": they could either remain modest and confined to domestic genres or attempt to enter male literary traditions and risk rejection or self-contradiction (Showalter, 1979). As a result, many women developed alternative strategies, such as embedding hidden meanings or expressing female experience indirectly within acceptable literary forms. These strategies allowed them to express identity and voice while still working within restrictive cultural conditions. Showalter concludes that women's literary tradition is marked by both constraint and creativity, where female writers gradually developed their own voice despite patriarchal limits (Showalter, 1979). Also, Gilbert and Gubar argue that nineteenth-century women writers struggled to express their identity and literary voice in a male-dominated literary tradition. They explain that literature was shaped by patriarchal ideas, where male authors defined creativity, authority, and artistic value, while women were often seen as secondary or limited in intellectual ability (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000). Women writers often experienced a conflict between self-expression and social expectations. Because society expected women to be passive, modest, and obedient, female authors had to either suppress their creativity or find indirect ways to express it (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000). As a result, many women writers used hidden meanings, symbolism, or double voices in their texts to communicate their real thoughts and emotions. Women writers were often trapped in a "split identity," where they were forced to see themselves through male literary images. This led to feelings of anxiety, self-doubt, and fear of artistic failure. However, the authors argue that women still developed a strong literary voice by challenging these restrictions and rewriting traditional male narratives from a female perspective (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000). Faliha Hassan's poetry expresses an authentic female voice by openly presenting women's emotions, identity, and lived experiences through clear and direct language. In contrast to the historical restrictions discussed by feminist critics, her modern poetic style enables women's expression to become more independent and self-determined. This shows how women's writing has moved from silence and limitation toward greater visibility and personal self-expression. Faleeha Hassan is an Iraqi poet, educator, editor, writer, and playwright born in Najaf in 1967, who currently resides in the United States. She is recognized as the first Iraqi woman to write poetry for children. Hassan holds a Master's degree in Arabic Literature and has authored around twenty books. Her poetry has been widely translated into many languages, including English, French, German, Italian, Kurdish, Korean, and others. She has received several literary awards in Iraq and across the Middle East for her contributions to poetry and short fiction. In addition, her works have appeared in various

American literary magazines such as *Philadelphia Poets*, *Harbinger Asylum*, and *The Brooklyn Rail* (Jabbar, 2019). The poetry of Faliha Hassan represents a contemporary continuation of this struggle, where female identity is no longer entirely suppressed but actively articulated through direct emotional expression and modern poetic language. Her work reflects a shift from the historical "anxiety of authorship" toward a more open and self-defined female voice in contemporary literature. The poetry of Faliha Hassan demonstrates an authentic female voice through its emphasis on emotional honesty, personal identity, and lived experience. Her poetic language is often direct and unfiltered, allowing women's inner feelings to be expressed without the traditional constraints of silence or modesty described in earlier feminist literary theory. Hassan expresses female identity through direct self-reclamation. In the poem *Black Iraqi Woman*, Faleeha Hassan explores different layers of identity, especially collective and personal selfhood. At the beginning of the poem, she emphasizes shared identity through a memory of her father's final words to her. He gives her an object, telling her to keep it because it represents her connection to family heritage. However, when she receives it, she finds that it is a stone covered with unknown inscriptions and mysterious markings. This image reflects the idea that identity is shaped by shared cultural and historical elements such as land, language, tradition, and civilization. The poem highlights how belonging to a community is built through these common features. Hassan also suggests that the loss of this inherited meaning leads her to write the poem, showing how personal loss and cultural disconnection become a source of poetic expression (Jabbar, 2019). In *Black Iraqi Woman*, the poet reflects a deep sense of identity shaped by place, memory, and inherited experience. She describes herself as belonging to Najaf, Iraq, not only physically but also spiritually and emotionally, stating that "I am a native of alNajaf, Iraq—spiritually, mournfully, and poetically! My father said" (Hassan, 2016, pp. 23–24). This suggests that identity is formed through surrounding influences such as family, history, and environment. The poem also raises questions about how far a person is aware of the forces shaping their identity, and whether the poet can resist or challenge these imposed aspects of the self. Hassan further uses imagery of cities, history, and inherited memory to show that identity is not individual only but also collective, as even places carry a sense of self. She implies that her own identity is partly shaped by her father's emotions, concerns, and the cultural environment around her. The poem also expresses a sense of loss and fragmentation, suggesting that separation from one's roots can create inner conflict and raise questions about happiness and belonging (Jabbar, 2019). In the concluding part of the poem, she questions her emotional and spiritual state, asking "Has my Lord forbidden me to be happy?" and continues, "Am I forbidden to preserve / What I have left / And sit some warm evening / Averting my ear from a voice that doesn't interest me?" (Hassan, 2016, pp. 23–24). These lines reflect emotional exhaustion and a desire for peace, showing how identity is connected to both personal struggle and cultural expectation. Similarly, in *I Whisper in My Room*, Hassan reflects on the contrast between her past life in Iraq and her present experience in a different cultural environment. She questions the restrictions placed on her childhood freedom, asking, "Why, my father, / Every time I asked you to buy me a bicycle, / You argued the streets are too narrow?" (Hassan, 2018, p. 26). This question highlights the limitations imposed on women's mobility and independence. The poem suggests that such restrictions are not only physical but also symbolic of wider cultural boundaries affecting women's identity. Through this reflection, Hassan shows awareness of gender roles and social expectations, revealing how personal identity is shaped by cultural norms and family beliefs. After the earlier poetic references, the poet again returns to the idea of the "labyrinth" to suggest confusion and fragmentation of identity. She questions her father, wondering whether he believes that her "roots have been torn asunder" (Hassan, 2016, pp. 23–24), which symbolically reflects her separation from her earlier self. This raises a deeper concern about whether breaking away from one's origins leads to an inner disorder or loss of identity. She also reflects on happiness, belonging, and emotional wholeness, linking these ideas to the construction and fragmentation of the self (Jabbar, 2019). These reflections appear clearly in the closing lines of the poem where she pleads emotionally, saying, "I need you. I ask you: Has my Lord forbidden me to be happy? Am I forbidden to preserve / What I have left / And sit some warm evening / Averting my ear from a voice that doesn't interest me? Answer me, Father! Or change the face of our garden / So it changes...to what they believe" (Hassan, 2016, pp. 23–24). These lines express emotional tension, longing, and a desire for change, showing how personal happiness is restricted by cultural and familial expectations. In *I Whisper in My Room*, the poet reflects on the contrast between her present life and her past in her homeland. The poet reflects on her past life in her homeland and compares it with a different cultural environment that does not match her original background. The poem shows strong cultural contrast and highlights how this difference affects her sense of identity. She does not accept the explanations given by her parents, which shows a deeper "hidden self" influenced by personal experience and memory. This hidden identity also shapes her "visible self," showing how internal feelings and

external reality are connected. She questions her father, asking, "Why, my father, Every time I asked you to buy me a bicycle, You argued the streets are too narrow?" (Hassan, 2018, p. 26). This question does not expect an answer, but it reflects her awareness of how women's freedom is limited in her society. It also shows her understanding of gender restrictions and cultural control. She continues by imagining a different reality for women, saying: Look at the women from my window! / They are riding horses, piloting airplanes, skating, Dancing on water, sailing boats, and ... / They are laughing. / Laughing and laughing. / But, whenever I try to smile, I get slapped by a war! (Hassan, 2018, p. 26). These lines show a contrast between freedom and restriction, where other women appear free while she experiences limitation and conflict. Finally, she addresses her mother and questions the social environment shaped by customs and traditions. This shows that the poet is aware of how cultural norms restrict women and influence their identity (Jabbar, 2019).

SECTION TWO : Digital Womanhood

Girls and young women create and express their identities through digital media. Women online usually practices such as social networking, posting personal photos, sexting, and video sharing. These activities are often viewed negatively, but they are also important forms of communication and self-expression for young women in the digital age. Social media gives women more visibility and a public voice. Through digital platforms, girls can present themselves, share their experiences, and shape how others see them. This gives them more control over their identity and creates opportunities for empowerment. Online spaces can help women express confidence, individuality, and independence in ways that were not easily possible before. At the same time, Dobson argues that this visibility comes with pressure. Social media often pushes women to present an ideal image of femininity, beauty, and success. Young women may feel the need to look attractive, confident, and socially accepted in order to gain approval online. Because of this, self-representation on social media is not always fully free; it is influenced by cultural expectations about how women should appear and behave (Dobson, 2015). Dobson also explains that these online identities are shaped by postfeminist culture, where women are encouraged to appear empowered and independent while still following traditional standards of beauty and femininity. This creates a contradiction: women seem to have freedom to express themselves, but their choices are often guided by social norms. In this way, social media can both support and limit female identity. Another important idea is that young women are not passive users of media. Dobson shows that they actively create and manage their digital identities. They make choices about what to post, how to present themselves, and how to interact with others. However, these choices happen within systems of power that influence what kinds of self-representation are accepted or valued. Dobson shows that digital culture is a complex space for women. It offers opportunities for self-expression, visibility, and empowerment, but it also places women under pressure to meet social expectations. Therefore, digital self-representation is both a source of freedom and a site of modern struggle for female identity (Dobson, 2015). (Wickens & Haughton, 2023) indicates that women often create their online identity on Instagram based on how other people may judge them. The researchers show that femininity on social media is often a kind of performance. Women choose carefully how to present themselves online, thinking about what their audience expects to see. Female users often check their photos before posting them to make sure they match common ideas of femininity. This means that online identity is influenced by audience pressure, because women want to be accepted and viewed positively by others. Their online self-presentation is not only personal choice but is also shaped by social expectations. Women often present an "ideal" version of themselves online. They may hide some parts of their real life and show only the parts that fit accepted feminine images. This creates what the study calls a "put-together self," where online identity is carefully managed to appear attractive and socially acceptable (Wickens & Haughton, 2023). Women use social media to control how others see them. They manage their online image by showing certain behaviors and hiding others. This shows that femininity on social media is influenced by cultural ideas about beauty, behavior, and gender roles. Women's online identities are strongly affected by audience expectations. As a result, femininity on social media becomes a performed identity shaped by social pressure and the desire for approval (Wickens & Haughton, 2023). Arab women in fiction are often represented through traditional and cultural stereotypes, where their identity is shaped by social expectations rather than personal freedom. Many literary works describe Arab women as obedient, silent, and restricted by family or religious traditions. These representations often focus on women's suffering under patriarchal systems, making them appear as passive victims instead of independent individuals (Al-Ali, 1994). At the same time, literary critics explain that this image is changing in modern Arab women's writing. Women writers have started to present female characters as more aware of their oppression and more determined to resist it. Instead of showing women only as powerless victims, these writers portray them as individuals searching for identity, dignity, and freedom.

This shift helps create a more realistic and complex image of Arab women in literature (Mikhail, 1994). Another important point is that Arab women are often judged by two pressures: the pressure of local patriarchal traditions and the pressure of Western stereotypes. Western feminist views sometimes represent Arab women only as oppressed Muslim women who need liberation. This creates a simplified image that ignores the diversity of Arab women's real experiences. As a result, Arab women writers often use literature to challenge both local oppression and Western misunderstanding, giving women the chance to speak for themselves (Al-Ali, 1994). Therefore, the representation of Arab women in fiction reflects both restriction and resistance. While older or traditional texts may limit women to passive roles, modern literature increasingly presents Arab women as active voices who struggle to define their own identities. This development is important because it moves the image of Arab women from silence to self-expression, allowing literature to become a space for female empowerment and identity formation (Mikhail, 1994). Hassan reflects the complexity of female identity in the digital world, where women negotiate between self-expression and social expectations. In *I Whisper in My Room*, Faleeha Hassan expresses the emotional conflict of a woman who compares her restricted life with the freedom she sees around her, creating a strong connection to the idea of digital womanhood and online self-representation. In the poem, the speaker says, "Look at the women from my window! / They are riding horses, piloting airplanes... / They are laughing. / Laughing and laughing. / But, whenever I try to smile, I get slapped by a war" (Hassan, 2018, p. 26). These lines reveal the contrast between visible female freedom and the speaker's personal limitations. This contrast reflects the experience of women in digital spaces, where social media presents images of freedom, confidence, and independence, while many women continue to face cultural restrictions and emotional pressure in reality. As Postfeminist Digital Cultures argues, digital platforms offer women visibility and opportunities for self-expression, but this visibility is often shaped by social expectations and the need to perform acceptable forms of femininity. Hassan's speaker observes women's freedom as something visible but not fully accessible, much like the idealized identities displayed online. The phrase "I get slapped by a war" symbolizes the forces that interrupt female self-expression, including conflict, trauma, and social control. In the context of digital womanhood, these limitations can be understood as the pressures of public judgment, gender norms, and audience expectations that shape how women represent themselves online (Dobson, 2015). Therefore, Hassan's poem reflects the same struggle seen in digital self-representation: the desire to be visible and authentic while negotiating the restrictions imposed by society. Her poetry reveals that female identity, whether expressed in literature or on social media, is constructed within a tension between self-expression and social limitation, making her work highly relevant to discussions of digital visibility and female self-representation.

Self-Expression, Restriction, Identity, and Visibility in Faleeha Hassan's Poetry

In *I Whisper in My Room*, Faleeha Hassan presents a female voice that longs for freedom but is surrounded by restriction. The speaker compares her own life with the freedom of other women when she says, "Look at the women from my window! / They are riding horses, piloting airplanes, skating, / Dancing on water, sailing boats" (Hassan, 2018, p. 26). These images show movement, freedom, and happiness. The women are active and confident. They can move freely and enjoy life. However, the speaker feels separated from this freedom. She watches from a distance, unable to share the same experience. This feeling becomes clearer when the speaker says, "They are laughing. / Laughing and laughing. / But, whenever I try to smile, I get slapped by a war" (Hassan, 2018, p. 26). The repeated word "laughing" creates an image of joy and openness, but the sudden phrase "I get slapped by a war" introduces violence and pain. This contrast shows that the speaker's life is controlled by forces that prevent happiness. War here may represent literal violence, but it can also symbolize social oppression, fear, and cultural restriction. The poem shows that even when women desire freedom, their social conditions may deny them the right to experience it. This idea is important in relation to female self-expression. The speaker wants to smile, laugh, and participate in life, but something stops her. This reflects how women's voices are often limited by external conditions. Amy Shields Dobson explains that women often seek visibility and expression, but their identities are shaped by social expectations and public pressure (Dobson, 2015). In Hassan's poem, the speaker is aware of freedom but cannot fully live it. This creates a tension between desire and limitation. The poem becomes a space where the speaker can express feelings that reality does not allow her to express openly. The poem also reveals how restrictions begin in everyday life. The speaker asks, "Why, my father, / Every time I asked you to buy me a bicycle, / You argued the streets are too narrow?" (Hassan, 2018, p. 26). This question shows how simple desires are limited by family and society. The bicycle represents freedom, movement, and independence. But the father's answer shows that even basic freedoms are denied. The "narrow streets" symbolize the narrow roles given to women. This suggests that women's

limitations are built into everyday social life, where even childhood dreams are controlled. This connects strongly to the idea of digital womanhood. Social media appears to offer women freedom to express themselves and show their identities, but this freedom is often shaped by social judgment. Dobson (2015) argues that digital spaces give women visibility, but they also pressure women to present acceptable versions of themselves. In Hassan's poem, the speaker sees freedom but cannot reach it. Similarly, women online may appear free but still experience social restriction. Hassan's poem reveals the emotional pain behind this struggle for expression. While *I Whisper in My Room* focuses on restriction, *Black Iraqi Woman* focuses on identity and belonging. In this poem, Hassan connects identity with family memory and cultural heritage. The speaker remembers her father saying, "Daughter, treasure this, because it authenticates your heritage to our kinsfolk" (Hassan, 2016, pp. 23–24). This line shows that identity is connected to inheritance and memory. The "stone" given by the father represents roots, history, and belonging. It is a symbol of identity passed from one generation to another. However, this identity is not simple or secure. The speaker says, "There's no one I care about! / My life surrounds me the way prison walls surround suspects" (Hassan, 2016, p. 24). This image shows that identity can also feel like imprisonment. The metaphor of "prison walls" suggests that social and cultural identity can become restrictive. While heritage gives meaning, it can also create limitation. The speaker feels trapped by the very identity she has inherited. This struggle becomes even stronger when the speaker asks, "Father, do you believe that—the roots have been torn asunder?" (Hassan, 2016, p. 24). The "roots" symbolize connection to family, homeland, and identity. To say they are "torn asunder" means that these connections have been broken. This line expresses loss and fragmentation. The speaker feels separated from her past and uncertain about her place in the world. Hassan presents identity as something fragile that can be damaged by war, displacement, and social pressure. The speaker continues this emotional questioning: "Has my Lord forbidden me to be happy? / Am I forbidden to preserve / What I have left?" (Hassan, 2016, p. 24). These lines show deep emotional pain. The speaker questions whether happiness and self-preservation are even allowed. This reflects the struggle of women who feel they must fight to protect their identity. The poem suggests that female identity is something women must actively defend against loss, silence, and restriction. This idea links to digital visibility. Women today use online spaces to make their identities visible through language, images, and self-representation. But this visibility is often vulnerable to judgment and pressure. Dobson (2015) notes that digital visibility can empower women, but it also exposes them to control by public expectations. In *Black Iraqi Woman*, poetry becomes a way of making identity visible. The speaker uses her voice to preserve memory and resist erasure. In digital spaces, women similarly use visibility to claim identity and resist invisibility. Both poems show that voice is central to identity. In *I Whisper in My Room*, the speaker uses questions to express restriction: "Why, my father...?" (Hassan, 2018, p. 26). In *Black Iraqi Woman*, the speaker uses questions to express loss: "Has my Lord forbidden me to be happy?" (Hassan, 2016, p. 24). These questions reveal emotional struggle and a search for understanding. They show that female voice is a way of resisting silence. Even when the speaker has no power to change her situation, speaking becomes an act of self-assertion. This supports feminist arguments that self-representation is a form of empowerment. The Madwoman in the Attic argues that women writers use literature to challenge silence and create space for female identity (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000). Hassan's poems do exactly this. They create space for women to express pain, memory, desire, and identity. Her poetry turns private struggle into public voice. Therefore, Hassan's poetry can be read as a reflection of the same issues women face in digital spaces today. Women seek to express themselves and make their identities visible, but they do so under social pressure. In *I Whisper in My Room*, the main conflict is between freedom and restriction. In *Black Iraqi Woman*, the main conflict is between identity and loss. Together, these poems show that women's voices are shaped by both personal desire and external limitation. Hassan's poems demonstrate that female self-representation is both necessary and difficult. Women need to express themselves in order to preserve identity, but this expression is often limited by war, culture, and social expectations. This is true in poetry and in digital life. As Dobson (2015) explains, digital spaces allow self-expression, but they also demand performance. Hassan's poems show that behind every visible identity there may be hidden struggle. In this way, Hassan's poetry connects strongly with ideas of digital womanhood. Both poetic and digital spaces allow women to speak, but both are shaped by modern pressures. Women seek visibility, voice, and authenticity, while facing judgment, restriction, and vulnerability. Hassan's poetic voice captures this struggle with honesty and emotional depth, making her work important for understanding female self-representation in both literature and digital culture.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Faliha Hassan uses modern verse to express authentic female identity and to portray the realities of digital womanhood. Her poetry reveals the emotional and social challenges faced by women

while maintaining honesty and poetic depth. Hassan's poetry offers a powerful lens for understanding digital womanhood and modern female self-representation. This study has explored the concept of authentic female voice in Faleeha Hassan's poetry and its connection to modern ideas of digital womanhood and female self-representation. The analysis of *I Whisper in My Room* and *Black Iraqi Woman* shows that Hassan's poetry gives voice to women's emotions, identity struggles, and lived experiences through direct and expressive language. In *I Whisper in My Room*, the female speaker reflects feelings of restriction and emotional pain caused by social and cultural limitations, while in *Black Iraqi Woman*, identity is shaped through memory, heritage, and a deep sense of belonging. Together, these poems reveal that female identity is not fixed, but constantly shaped by external forces such as family, society, war, and cultural expectations. The study also shows that Hassan's poetic voice can be connected to contemporary digital culture, where women express themselves through social media platforms. As Postfeminist Digital Cultures explains, digital spaces allow women to become visible and express their identities, but this visibility is often shaped by performance, audience expectations, and social pressure (Dobson, 2015). In the same way, Hassan's poetry reflects a tension between self-expression and restriction, and between visibility and limitation. Her female speakers attempt to speak honestly about their inner experiences, but their voices are shaped by social and cultural boundaries. Therefore, the study concludes that Hassan's poetry represents an early literary form of the same struggles found in digital womanhood today. Both contexts show that female self-representation is a process of negotiation between authenticity and external control. While Hassan's poetry creates space for emotional truth and identity formation, it also reveals the ongoing challenges women face in being fully heard and understood. Ultimately, the study highlights that female voice—whether in poetry or digital media—is a powerful but complex form of expression that continues to evolve under modern social pressures. In *I Whisper in My Room*, the speaker's emotional struggle shows a woman who is aware of freedom but cannot fully reach it, as seen in the contrast between the joyful images of other women and her own statement, "whenever I try to smile, I get slapped by a war" (Hassan, 2018, p. 26). This tension reflects how women in digital spaces often see idealized images of freedom and success online, while still experiencing real social, cultural, or emotional limitations offline. Similarly, in *Black Iraqi Woman*, identity is not only personal but also shaped by family memory, history, and cultural belonging, as shown in the line, "Daughter, treasure this, because it authenticates your heritage to our kinsfolk" (Hassan, 2016, pp. 23–24). This shows that female identity is constructed through inherited narratives, just as digital identity is shaped by both personal expression and external expectations. In this context, Hassan's poetry aligns with theories of online identity construction, where self-representation is influenced by visibility and audience pressure. As Postfeminist Digital Cultures explains, digital femininity is often performed in ways that respond to social expectations, meaning that women adjust how they present themselves depending on how they wish to be seen (Dobson, 2015). This idea helps explain the connection between Hassan's poetic voice and digital self-expression. In both cases, women are not simply expressing identity freely; they are negotiating between authenticity and social control. Therefore, Hassan's poetry can be read as anticipating the dynamics of digital womanhood. Her female speakers seek voice, visibility, and emotional truth, but these are constantly shaped by restriction, judgment, and inherited identity structures. In the same way, women in digital environments construct identities that appear open and self-defined, yet are still influenced by cultural norms and audience expectations. Ultimately, Hassan's work shows that female self-representation—whether in poetry or on social media—is always a process of negotiation between inner truth and external visibility, making her poetry highly relevant to understanding contemporary digital female identity.

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