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An Analysis of Media Representation of Arab Female Athletes: The Case of *Al-Jazeera*

Israa Hasan Ajeel^{1,2,*}, Debbita Tan Ai Lin¹ & Farhana Abdul Fatah¹

¹School of Languages, Literacies and Translation, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 Penang, Malaysia

²Department of English, College of Humanities, Al-Muthanna University, 66001 Muthanna, Iraq

*Corresponding Author: israa@mu.edu.iq

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Abstract: The coverage of female athletes in sports media has been claimed to exhibit prejudice in favor of male athletes. Therefore, they promote the dominance of traditional masculine hegemony. Accordingly, the present study examines *Al-Jazeera's* coverage of Arab female athletes participating in the Rio Olympics. The study, therefore, aims to identify *Al-Jazeera's* strategies for covering Arab female athletes in selected online stories and their ideological perspectives in terms of "Self" or public and "Other" or private dichotomy. Furthermore, it aims to examine the feminist critical discourse analysis perspective in the gendered social practices of the Eastern world. This study analyses two *Al-Jazeera* news stories using feminist critical discourse analysis. Feminist critical discourse analysis challenges social practices related to gender stereotypes. Occasionally, gender inequalities are manifested explicitly as well as implicitly. Patriarchy persists in many social institutions and among women (and men) globally. The researchers implement Lazar's (2018) Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis. Thus, sports news ideological methods are analyzed using positive "in-group" and negative "out-group" dichotomy. The current research findings indicate that the patriarchal society has been transformed with respect to women's empowerment. Arab female athletes take place in public life as their male counterparts. However, the analyzed data demonstrated Arab women's gender resistance to the stereotypical gender norms. However, the current research is essential for revealing the progress of gender-based hierarchal social norms. Deconstructing conventional unequal gender roles is a key component of this research project's contribution to developing and promoting gender equality in Arabic culture.

Keywords: Arab female athletes; media representation; Al-Jazeera; feminist critical discourse analysis; in-group and out-group dichotomy

Introduction

Media are influential and powerful forces in modern societies. Media have indispensable significance in the contemporary world (Talbot, 2007). Furthermore, Hassan (2018) stated that media molds audience perception by maintaining its vested interest intact. However, certain ideologies are broadcasted to provide the public with objective information. Additionally, media content is sometimes ideologically shaped to produce and shape the social relations of exploitation and oppression. Furthermore, media ideological constructions are naturalized, and the public perceives them as a part of their common-sense knowledge.

Moreover, a reciprocal relationship exists between media and sports, whereby they are mutually reliant and interconnected (Dziubin'ski, Organista, & Mazur, 2018). Sport is a universal language and communicative, interactive, and dialoguing tool. It helps athletes to be involved in interaction and interpersonal communication with people from different cultures and backgrounds. In addition, competitions

and sporting events help individuals from different nations and countries to be familiar with each other's specialties and cultures (Ubaidulloev, 2018).

Female athletes have been discursively constructed, reflecting the ideology of some media news reports towards them. In this respect, researchers on sports media revealed that female athletes, as compared with male athletes, are much more likely to be trivialized and underrepresented in media coverage (Capranica, Minganti, Billat, Hanghoj, Piacentini, Cumps, & Meeusen, 2005, Godoy-Pressland, 2014 & Turner, 2014).

Furthermore, the current study shows a dearth of academic research dealing with the representation of female athletes in general and Arab ones in particular from a feminist critical discourse analysis perspective. Such scrutiny necessitates the implementation of FCDA to examine the written discourses of *Al-Jazeera* channel. Thus, the present study aims at presenting a feminist critical discourse analysis of Arab female athletes' coverage on *Al-Jazeera* channel, mainly focusing on the 2016 Olympics to show how Arab female athletes are represented in the written discourses of *Al-Jazeera* and to scrutinize the ideological representations of Self and Other of Arab female athletes participating in the 2016 Olympics. The researchers of the current study show such ideological representations by implementing Lazar's framework for FCDA.

Accordingly, the researchers of this study concentrate on answering the following research questions:

1. What are the ideological strategies used by *Al-Jazeera* in covering Arab female athletes who participated in the 2016 Olympic Games? 2. How have gender social practices been changed in Arabic society due to feminist critical discourse analysis? 3. What are the representations of 'Self' and 'Other' by *Al-Jazeera* in its discourse on Arab female athletes in the 2016 Olympic Games?

Literature Review

Female athletes' reportage in the media has been tackled by a number of researchers from different perspectives. Thus, it is of great importance to discuss the scholarly research related to the status of female athletes in the media to show the way they are represented in the media sector in a more critical way and highlight the gap in these studies. Therefore, the present section reviews the previous studies dealing with female athletes in the media.

Xu, Billings and Fan (2017) conveyed that previous studies on media portrayal of athletes have revealed that the media tried to represent men and women athletes in the light of hegemonic gender expectations. In this light, the media focuses on the masculine qualities of males, like power and strength, and feminine qualities, like physical appearance and family relations. Thus, women have been continuously underrepresented in the media (Bruce, 2015; Coche & Tuggle, 2016; Dafferner, Campagna & Rodgers 2019; Dziubinski *et al.*, 2018; and Xu and Armstrong, 2019).

Numerous researchers have realized that the media gives male athletes much more coverage than their female counterparts. Moreover, sports media coverage of female athletes relies heavily on individual sports rather than team sports. Among those researchers and scholars is Kane (1988). Through his content analysis of 1.228 episodes of *Sports Illustrated* from 1964-1987, he conducted this methodological strategy because it is ideal for studying media content to infer society's attitudes and values toward a specific topic. He chose the years 1964-1987 since they cover three 8-year periods: before the passage of Title IX (1964-1971), during it (1972-1979), and after it (1980-1987). He found that females were significantly covered in individual or sex-appropriate sports (such as figure skating and tennis) in the magazine's feature articles than in team or sex-inappropriate sports (such as softball and basketball). This conclusion seemed consistent with Adams & Tuggle (2004), who examined 807 stories presented on the hour-long program collected from 30 broadcast dates of ESPN's *SportsCenter*. They implemented chi-square analysis and (ANOVA) analysis of variance tests. They found that through the 30 days under investigation, ESPN broadcasted 778 stories about males (i.e., 96.4%), 16 stories about females (i.e., 2.1%), and 13 stories about both sexes (i.e., 1.5%). As for the 16 stories reporting females' achievement, 9 stories were devoted to the French Open Tennis tournament, 3 stories to females' golf, 2 reported basketball, 1 reported softball, and 1 covered females' track. In sum, thirteen out of the sixteen females' stories were devoted to individual sex-appropriate sports, and only three were devoted to team sex-inappropriate sports.

Furthermore, in their gender analysis of NBC's coverage of the 2012 London Summer Games, Coche & Tuggle (2016) employed quantitative content analysis to analyze NBC's prime-time coverage of the 2012

Olympics. They used the broadcast segment as the unit of analysis. In this study, coding includes the sport covered, the segment duration, coverage type (interview, event, award, etc.), the participants' sex, the quoted sources' role, and sex (sports officials, coach, athlete, etc.), as well as speakers (reporters, anchors, commentators, etc.), whether the presented segment is live or edited form as well as whether team or individual medals were at stake. They concluded that NBC's prime-time reportage of the 2012 Summer Olympic Games supports the assumption that female athletes' involvement should be restricted to limited socially acceptable sports. Furthermore, this coverage shows that females are only approved as athletes when they preserve a typically feminine appearance and behavior.

In addition, after completing their study via questioning 423 Chinese respondents regarding their gender perspectives of 16 sports by applying Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986), Xu, Fan, and Brown (2019) concluded that men tend to evaluate sports as much more masculine than feminine. Likewise, according to the findings of this study, sports were divided into four categories: masculine, feminine, neutral, and lifestyle. Along with analyses focused on printed and broadcasted media, researchers have analyzed new media coverage (internet) of athletes. Among those researchers, Jones (2004) conducted content analysis of the ABC News Online Website during the 2000 Olympic Games. She concluded that through this online website, females received more coverage than in traditional media outlets. Yet, their stereotypical portrayals in the conventional media persist.

1. Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis is fundamentally discourse analytical research that primarily tackles how inequality and social power abuse are enacted, legitimated, reproduced, and resisted by talk and text in the political and social context. Therefore, analysts working on critical discourse take an explicit position and want to understand, challenge, and expose social inequalities. That is why CDA could be considered as a "social movement of politically committed discourse analysis" (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 466).

2. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis concentrates on "how gender ideology and gendered relations of power are (re)produced, negotiated and contested in representations of social practices, in social relationships between people, and people's social and personal identities in texts and talk" (Lazar, 2005: p. 11). Such approaches focus on critically analyzing how men and women gender or create specific gendered relationships and identities via discourse (Litosseliti, 2006). Additionally, it is a social perspective that deals with the diverse and complex strategies through which gender ideologies that reinforce power disparities become "common sense" in discourse contexts and particular communities and how they might be challenged. This encompasses discursively sustained inequalities and assumptions, ranging from overt to subtler forms of sexism (Lazar, 2018).

Feminist scholars have deeply criticized biological explanations for natural gender differences for perpetuating gender stereotypes, myths, and inequities that ultimately harm men and women (Litosseliti, 2006). Among the new directions in critical discourse analysis is analyzing gender semiotics, or what is called feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA). FCDA aims to explore the relationship between language and gender and primarily investigates depictions of power by males and females in the public sphere. Victimization, sexism, emancipation as well as the construction of identity are the main issues in this field of CDA. Moreover, the role of gender in the media, politics, school, and workplace contexts has been extensively researched by feminists (Tenorio, 2011). A feminist perspective has a critical view of gender beyond simply focusing on disparities, and differences must also be conceptualized (Cameron, 1997). A critical perspective on gender acknowledges that we must concentrate on the relations between femininity and masculinity and expand our interest in women beyond those stereotypically considered feminine, such as white, heterosexual, middle-class women (Litosseliti, 2006). Through FCDA analysis, the focus has been on the public/private sphere dichotomy in many societies. The public sphere is associated with the traditional concept of males as superior whereas the domestic or private domain is associated with the stereotypical female image as subordinate (Lazar, 2018).

Still, the issue of asymmetrical gender relations, specifically in the sports domain, continues to be a global concern. This study will employ Lazar's feminist critical discourse analysis and its principles as the theoretical framework. The selection of this theory is based on its pertinence to the subject matter of the portrayal of Arab female athletes in *Al-Jazeera's* coverage. The achievement of gender equality between women and men in the Arab World is impeded by several factors, including traditional customs, societal norms, and the prevailing patriarchal ideology. The prevailing attitude of women in traditional Arab societies has transformed. Accordingly, such transformations in the sports atmosphere will be explained in data analysis.

Methodology

1. Research Design

This paper is a qualitative study of the representation of Arab female athletes at the Rio Olympics. The corpus consists of two news items taken from *Al-Jazeera*. Besides, the researchers will employ Lazar's (2018) feminist critical discourse analysis. Lazar (2018) asserted that gendered expectations as well as patriarchal roles in societies, must be defied by empowering women in society. She also pointed out the importance of power transfer and deconstruction of negative stereotypes, saying one does not adhere to gender-predetermined roles.

2. Data Collection

In a qualitative study, according to Flick (1998), the main criterion for collecting and selecting data is the relevance of the items studied. In accordance with the present study, it was discovered that *Al-Jazeera* covered a wide range of issues through its news items, particularly in its depiction of Arab female athletes participating in the Rio Olympics. Among these themes are patriarchal roles, challenging the pre-existing societal stereotypes, Arab sportswomen's hijab, family life, and appearance. However, the issues raised in this channel are relevant to the topic of the present study. Therefore, the researchers selected two news stories published on *Al-Jazeera* website.

Furthermore, the research corpus is selected via purposive sampling since it effectively fulfills the objectives and addresses the questions (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Qualitative researchers prefer intentionally non-random sampling, as it allows them to focus on particular aspects of research and gather a unique set of data sources. This purposeful sampling approach aims to produce and develop the relevant and required data set (Zghayyir, 2016).

3. Data Analysis

The selected news items depict several themes, including gender hierarchy, asymmetrical gender roles, prejudices related to women, the transformation of social structure, and social practices, particularly in different Arab countries. The present study employs Lazar's (2018) Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, which centers on criticizing and challenging gender hierarchy, as well as addressing many forms of gender inequalities. Moreover, FCDA places particular emphasis on examining the experiences of marginalized women and the perpetuation of stereotypes within discourse. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis has led to transformative shifts in the patriarchal system and conventional social structures.

Results and Discussions

This section will show the analysis of two news reports published by *Al-Jazeera* channel, using the framework of Lazar's (2018) Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis. These news reports are published on *Al-Jazeera* website in its portrayal of Arab female athletes who participated in the Rio Olympic Games:

1. Rio 2016: Saudi Runner Aims to Break Barriers

The first news item tackles a Saudi Arabian runner who is 23 years old. She graduated from Pepperdine University in California and embarked on full-time training as a long-distance runner. Sarah Attar is presently situated in Rio de Janeiro, partaking in her second Olympic endeavor, assuming the role of squad leader for four Saudi women.

The title of this report is "Rio 2016: Saudi runner aims to break barriers". The title of a news item might express the themes. Ideologically grounded preconceptions and prejudices can be highlighted by their semantic role as a central theme that defines a discourse's semantic framework and by their schematic emphasis at the beginning of a narrative (Van Dijk, 1998). Thus, the title here represents a challenge to the predetermined social hierarchy based on gender. This news item focuses on women's empowerment and involvement in the sports domain. Sarah Attar is a Saudi athlete who deconstructs gender inequality in the conservative Arabian Kingdom, Saudi Arabia. Women are usually portrayed negatively in this patriarchal society, yet this news item advocates gender equality and women's positive roles. In this news item, Sarah Attar challenges the prevailing gender norms inside her patriarchal community and dedicates significant efforts to empower herself and Saudi women in general. The title and the subsequent sentences:

"Rio 2016: Saudi runner aims to break barriers. Marathoner Sarah Attar has inspired other women in Saudi Arabia to take up running as a serious sport. Many things have changed for Sarah Attar since London 2012".

As mentioned above, the extract supports the transformative impact of feminist critical discourse analysis on societal norms and practices in Arab regions. These extracts indicate that there were barriers in Saudi society. These barriers impede females' involvement in the public domain. Besides, they perpetuate the stereotypical image of females' domestic sphere. Marathoner Sarah Attar tries to challenge these barriers by participating in the most important global athletic event, i.e., the Olympic Games.

"For starters, the 23-year-old pioneering Saudi Arabian runner with an infectious smile graduated from Pepperdine University, in California, and began training full-time as a long-distance runner. Attar is now in Rio de Janeiro for her second Olympic experience, leading a team of four Saudi women who were given wildcard entries".

Al-Jazeera's goal in revealing the female athlete's age is to show how Saudi women reject strict societal conventions. The inclusive Saudi is shown well in this passage. The study emphasizes female education to show progress in empowering women. In this context, she advocates for Arab women, particularly Saudi women. Individual intellectual growth depends on education. Thus, Sarah Attar exemplifies this. She may challenge her country's patriarchal social order and rise to power due to her education. Since this essay discusses Arab female athletes' major obstacles, feminist critical discourse understanding is necessary.

"In London, Attar and judoka Wojdan Shaherkani were the first two Saudi women to participate in an Olympics – so simply appearing at the starting blocks of her 800-metre heat was enough to garner global attention. But as a marathon runner, Attar had only a few months to prepare for the shorter distance and fell 32 seconds behind the pack, although she crossed the finish line to a standing ovation from 60,000 people".

The aforementioned excerpt demonstrates that the 2012 Olympics saw the historic participation of two Saudi women, Sarah Attar and judoka Wojdan Shaherkani. Merely being there at the starting line of her 800-meter heat was sufficient to attract worldwide recognition. However, due to Attar's background as a marathon runner, she had a limited timeframe of a few months to adequately train for the comparatively shorter distance. Consequently, she finished the race 32 seconds behind the leading group. Nevertheless, her remarkable achievement was acknowledged with a standing ovation from an audience of 60,000 people. This suggests that she assumes a prominent role and presents herself to the public in a position of authority, gaining global attention.

"Fast forward to this Sunday, and Attar will be racing in her 10th marathon, trying to break her best time of three hours and 11 minutes set in Chicago last October. Attar has been running up to 86 miles a week with a running club under the guidance of coach Andrew Kastor in Mammoth Lakes, California, where the 2,400-metre altitude provides an optimal training ground".

This extracted text shows that Attar is scheduled to participate in her tenth marathon to surpass her record of completing the race in three hours and eleven minutes, which she achieved at the Chicago marathon

in October of the previous year. Attar has been engaging in a weekly running regimen of up to 86 miles in the company of a running club in Mammoth Lakes, California, under the supervision of coach Andrew Kastor. This location, situated at an elevation of 2,400 meters, offers an advantageous training environment. *Al-Jazeera* highlights her athletic status and training activities through this text. Moreover, her coach, Andrew Kastor, is mentioned here, indicating another deconstruction of pre-determined ideals. In Saudi Arabia, cultural norms restrict women from engaging in social interactions with males, limiting their interactions to those within their immediate familial circle, such as their father, brother, son, and other close relatives.

"Although Attar's family is based in California, where her father works as a civil engineer, representing Saudi Arabia at the Olympics has brought her much closer to her homeland, Attar told Al Jazeera. Sitting beside her, Attar's father described how he encouraged all three of his children to take up sports throughout their youth – especially football, as he is a licensed coach. But running is what Attar took to the most.

"I'm very proud of her," said 57-year-old Jeddah native Amer Attar, who made the trip to Rio along with his wife and two other children. "She's focused, and we're here just to give her all the support she wants, to make it as comfortable as possible for her to pursue her passion."

The above text emphasizes familial and patriarchal themes. This excerpt contrasts the conventional patriarchal culture with the modernizing Arab patriarchal community. Unlike the traditional approach, the favorable image of patriarchy is offered from an open-minded stance. Women were typically considered inferior during patriarchy. Men shape cultural conceptions of women, affecting their behavior, intelligence, and daily communication skills. Here, patriarchal hegemony is changed so males cannot impose their judgments on women. Sarah's father, Amer Attar, encouraged her athletically without pressuring her to follow the type in which he was a licensed coach. He said that he supported and was proud of her.

"Representing your country in the Olympics will connect you to it tremendously, because you become a symbol for it on a global stage and you are proud to do that, she said in an interview inside the lobby of a hotel crowded with international delegates, just a few steps from the Olympic Park.

It's been very cool to put them in touch with people who have supported me, she said.

Among the most important advice that Attar gave her teammates was how to deal with harsh criticism on social media – a forum that can be unnecessarily cruel to women from conservative countries who are taking steps into the public sphere.

One of the biggest tips that I gave them was not to read anything, and just focus on what you're doing and the positivity of it," Attar said. "Don't focus on what people are going to say, because there's always going to be people who are not happy when you're doing something that's changing things".

The excerpt elucidates Sarah Attar's comments. In an interview in a hotel lobby near the Olympic Park, the interviewee claimed representing one's nation in the Olympics creates a profound connection. The individual's status as a symbolic representation of her country evokes a sense of pride. She appreciated connecting with her assistants. Attar emphasized the need to refrain from reading any external material, instead directing one's attention only to the task at hand and maintaining a positive mindset. One should not place undue emphasis on the opinions of others since there will always be those who express discontent while engaging in transformative actions. This emphasizes the theme of power transmission through which individuals can practice power in society. Sarah has the power and authority to speak to other females to participate in the public sphere, particularly in the sports domain. Furthermore, doing othering theme is highlighted in this text when Sarah advised other females to direct their attention to pursue their tasks and concentrate on the positivity of such tasks. Another reference to this theme is when she said there are always people who oppose others doing things challenging the stereotypical norms.

This will align with the second principle of the FCDA. The present-day cultures exhibit gendered power systems, as elucidated by Foucault's (1977) concept of power as being widely distributed and acting

diffusely and intimately. Feminist scholars have effectively used Foucault's theoretical framework, elucidating the intricate network of disciplinary systems and prescriptive technologies that normalizing power uses to develop self-regulating human subjects to explain gendered power structures in modern societies. Besides, there is a reference to the theme of being othered in the above-extracted text when Sarah advised her teammate to neglect harsh criticism on social media. This means that certain people with traditional viewpoints about female participation in sports and the public sphere, in general, regarded those athletes as outsiders to the sports domain, and in accordance, they criticized them severely.

"Attar's goal-oriented determination has served as an inspiration for other Saudi women who want to take up running, many of whom have reached out to her with questions about how to get started. Attar has made contact with a running club in Riyadh, serving as a facilitator when called upon".

This excerpt represents Princess Reema bint Bandar Al Saud's comment on Sarah. It displays power transmission, deconstruction of negative stereotypes, and challenge of patriarchal hegemony via Sarah's role as a female role model. When she registered with a Riyadh running club, she made her judgments. This supports Lazar's viewpoint that Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis should transfer power. Lazar argued that negative preconceptions, patriarchal hegemony, and gender-predefined roles must be dissolved to establish an equitable society.

"One of the issues brought to her attention has given Attar an idea for a modesty-oriented athletic clothing line that would benefit her fellow nationals. I've had the opportunity to connect with girls who run there daily and speak to them about what they would require to run more comfortably and more consistently, and that mainly comes down to attire," she said. So that's something that's been on my mind – how we can make that happen for women in Saudi Arabia".

Female athletes' appearance and clothes are emphasized in this excerpt. Previous studies on female athletes concentrated on the media's attention to portray them in terms of their appearance and sexuality. On the contrary, the present study endeavors to how female athletes' appearance and attire are represented positively. Sarah talked to other female athletes about females' requirements, saying that achieving a higher level of comfort and consistency in running mostly hinges on the appropriate choice of clothes. The issue of enabling women in Saudi Arabia to achieve this objective has been her concern. In this respect, sports women's clothing is presented to facilitate their athletic engagement, not how to be attractive or covered, which is unrelated to the sports domain.

"Princess Reema bint Bandar Al Saud, who was recently appointed as the head of women's affairs under Saudi's General Sports Authority, applauded Attar's mission".

"I think it's really smart of her to have tapped into her celebrity to be able to do something that will benefit others, Al Saud told Al Jazeera, adding that it is important to be respectful of people who are slightly more conservative who want to exercise".

"Al Saud also encouraged Attar to act as a role model for the other three Saudi women at the Games: fencer Lubna al-Omair, sprinter Kariman Abuljadayel and judoka Joud Fahmy, who pulled out of her event because of an injury".

"Once the wildcard slots were announced in early June, a team-building workshop was arranged in Riyadh, which Attar described as a "pretty intensive three days".

"We really used her as an example to sit and talk to the other girls about her experience at the last Olympics, Al Saud said. I absolutely respect her professionalism".

"The workshop included sessions on media training, social media etiquette and engagement with other athletes at the Games".

"Sarah was very instrumental to impress upon them the seriousness of the situation, Al Saud said. Not only the fun side of it, but also having been there and done that, what does this really mean? "

"I truly believe that she's going to be an athlete that represents us for the long term, Al Saud said".

Princess Reema bint Bandar Al Saud, the head of women's affairs under the General Sports Authority of Saudi Arabia, is another reference to female empowerment and deconstruction of male dominance in sports. This indicates that Saudi female athletes have improved. This demonstrates the potential for power to be transferred across genders, as well as the possibility of deconstructing cultural stereotypes and standards. Attar was motivated by Princess Reema Al Saud to model for the other three Saudi ladies in the Games. Reema Al Saud organized a workshop with multiple sessions on media training, social media etiquette, and connecting with other athletes. Al Saud praised Sarah Attar's professionalism and claimed she was employed as an expert to discuss her involvement in the Olympic Games with other women. In Al Saud's statement to *Al Jazeera*, she praised her for using her fame to help others. Al Saud stressed the need to respect traditional workout enthusiasts. Al Saud also believed Sarah might represent their sporting community long-term. In this excerpt, Sarah Attar deviated from conventional gender norms by actively exerting her power and ultimately achieving success in her quest. She challenged predefined gender norms in accordance with Lazar's perspective and became an example of female empowerment in the Saudi athletic atmosphere.

2. Rio 2016: Bittersweet Olympic Dream for Kuwaiti" Swimmer

The second news item concerns an Arabian athlete's participation in the Rio Olympics. After being invited to her second straight Olympic Games in Rio, the 21-year-old Kuwaiti swimmer, Faye Sultan, experienced a range of emotions. Kuwait was banned by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), creating a complex and challenging situation. Consequently, Faye participated in the Olympic Games as an independent athlete representing the Olympic flag. The story also discusses women's marginalization and male privilege. However, she spent a lot of her time practicing in a toddlers' swimming pool. She recalled that her height made this unsuitable. She also had short use of Olympic-sized pools at 5:15 a.m., two hours before men's training. In Kuwait, Olympic-sized swimming pools are predominantly located within semi-professional athletic clubs that are primarily male-dominated. These clubs do not have female swimming teams.

The achievement of gender equality between women and men in the Arab world in general and the Arabian Gulf in particular is restricted by cultural conventions, social standards, and the prevailing patriarchal ideology. Implementing gender equality in the Arab world still lacks sufficient adherence to principles of justice. The prevailing attitude of women in traditional Arabic societies has undergone a gradual transformation. The phenomenon under consideration might be seen as a manifestation of cultural transformation pertaining to feminism in the Arab world. This will be shown by employing the framework of feminist critical discourse analysis to challenge and address issues related to gender inequality and the patriarchal system. Beginning with the title and the succeeding sentences:

"Rio 2016: Bittersweet Olympic dream for Kuwaiti. With Kuwait banned by the IOC, Faye Sultan will participate alongside other displaced athletes at the Rio Games.

Sultan says she hopes to galvanize more women from the Gulf to get active [Courtesy of Faye Sultan]

When Kuwaiti swimmer Faye Sultan finally got the call-up to compete in the Rio Olympics, the feeling was bittersweet".

Topics or titles may represent introductory components in news stories. Kuwaiti athletes' Rio 2016 Olympic dreams were mixed with positive and negative emotions. Faye Sultan joined other expatriate athletes in the Rio Games after the International Olympic Committee banned Kuwait. Sultan hoped to increase Gulf female engagement. Kuwaiti swimmer Faye Sultan had mixed feelings when invited to the Rio Olympics. The preceding extract illustrates the central themes, which are female empowerment and Arab social structure and gender norm shifts. The Kuwaiti female swimmer deviated from traditional gender norms by disregarding

conventional gender roles and instead asserting her power, ultimately achieving success in her endeavor. This suggests that she could manage herself and make athletic judgments throughout this international sporting event despite her country's penalty. According to Lazar, this perspective challenges traditional gender norms that are socially predefined.

"Although the 21-year-old graduate of Williams College in the United States had endured pre-sunrise swims during brutal Massachusetts winters to appear in her second consecutive Olympics, the offer came with a big hitch. With Kuwait currently banned by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) over alleged government interference – which Kuwait has countered with a \$1bn lawsuit – Faye will participate as an independent athlete under the Olympic flag.

"As the names of more than 200 countries are called out during opening ceremonies on Friday, Faye will be grouped with other displaced athletes, including refugees from South Sudan and Syria, and a Russian pole vaulter granted amnesty from her country's track-and-field sanctions.

Because the IOC does not allow participation by Kuwait of any kind, Sultan paid her own way to Rio from New York, where she was training for her 50m freestyle event, scheduled for August 12".

Al-Jazeera specifies this female athlete's age and education to emphasize that she represents Kuwaiti-educated young women who challenge gender norms by participating in public life despite obstacles and trying to solve their problems. Despite the ban, Faye Sultan represented her nation in the Olympics. She had to swim early in hard Massachusetts winters to compete in her second Olympics. Still, the opportunity presented itself with a significant obstacle. Due to the ban, Faye would compete in the Olympics as an independent athlete under the Olympic flag. Faye will be classified with other displaced athletes like South Sudanese and Syrian refugees. This shows that education is essential to gender equality and female empowerment. This news story showed this female athlete as an engaged individual who spent much of her time on professional and social activities in the public domain rather than inside the confines of her private sphere.

"The Rio Olympics will be a marked contrast from her first opening ceremonies in London, when the 6ft-tall swimmer, dressed in a traditional thawb, struck a chord with proud Kuwaitis as cameras zoomed in on her beaming smile".

This text shows that the Rio Olympics would provide a notable juxtaposition to the first opening ceremonies in London. During the aforementioned event, the swimmer, who stood at a height of 6 feet, garnered attention from the Kuwaiti population as she appeared in a traditional thawb attire. This occurrence resonated with the Kuwaiti community, as seen by the cameras capturing her brilliant smile. This illustrates her exposure to the public sphere and how a conservative Gulf population received a female's involvement in this domain. In accordance, this indicates the shift in this patriarchal society, which increases the representation of women in public situations as opposed to domestic ones.

"I'm going to be wearing a blue [Olympic] uniform. I'm going to be part of a team that is just not from the same country that I am – which is still an honour, and I'm still happy to be able to go and everything, but ... it's obviously very disheartening. You work so hard to represent your country, and it's definitely a blow to not be able to walk [under the Kuwaiti flag]."

This text is extracted from Faye's speech to *Al-Jazeera*, saying that she would be donning a uniform of blue color, specifically associated with the Olympic Games. She felt privileged to join a multi-national team. Despite her eagerness and thankfulness for the opportunity, this circumstance discouraged her. She worked hard to represent her country and was disappointed since she would not participate under her country's flag. This suggests that she had an authority position and the power to make decisions. This strong female athlete defied the preconception that women are weak and dependent. Given her refusal to comply with gender conventions, she demonstrated Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis's transformational influence on Arab social practices and its capacity to break down gendered preconceptions.

"It's a tragedy that the institutions that Kuwait has invested in building cannot run independently when there is a struggle at the top tier," said Alanoud al-Sharekh, a specialist in sociopolitical issues of the Gulf at the London Middle East Institute, and a Kuwaiti herself.

"[The athletes] feel like they have been abandoned," Sharekh added. "There is a vacuum, where the country should be backing them, or reaching out to them, or putting them on a pedestal. Athletes are heroes regardless of any petty issues that we are plagued with in Kuwait."

This news story also highlights Kuwaiti influential and superior female figure Alanoud Al-Sharekh. According to Alanoud Al-Sharekh, a Kuwaiti specialist on Gulf sociopolitical issues at the London Middle East Institute, it is lamentable that Kuwait's institutions cannot operate independently during leadership conflicts. For Sharekh, athletes feel neglected or abandoned. A gap exists in which the country should support or promote them. Kuwaiti athletes are heroes despite little obstacles. Alanoud Al-Sharekh was a worldwide leader and independent woman. Two Kuwaiti women showed that power could be transferred across genders and established values could be dissolved.

"Sultan's frustration is palpable, more so because of the hurdles leading up to London 2012, when she became the first female swimmer to represent Kuwait at an Olympics."

"She spent much of her time training in a pool designed for toddlers – "I'm a pretty tall girl, so it wasn't ideal by any means," she recalled – while stealing precious minutes in Olympic-sized pools starting at 5:15 a.m., two hours before the men practised. Olympic-sized pools in Kuwait are generally found in the semi-professional athletic clubs, which are dominated by men. There are no women's swim teams in those clubs."

"In Kuwait we have beautiful facilities; it's just that for a girl they are so much harder to access," Sultan lamented."

"It was only six months before London that Sultan was granted permission to swim alongside her male counterparts and afforded a reasonable amount of time in a professional setting, she said. "

"In London, Sultan finished seventh in her heat with a time of 27.92 seconds, and did not qualify for the 50m finals. But after four years of rigorous NCAA training and two swimming world championships under her belt, she is eager to display her better form in Rio."

"The idea is not just to challenge the heavily favoured Campbell sisters of Australia, but also to galvanize more women from the Gulf to get active."

This excerpt depicts her struggles before becoming Kuwait's first female Olympic swimmer in London 2012. She spent most of her time training in a children's pool. She said that this arrangement was less than optimal due to her relatively tall stature. She took advantage of Olympic-sized pools at 5:15 a.m., two hours before men's practice. Olympic-sized pools are mostly seen in male-dominated semi-professional sports teams in Kuwait. These clubs have no women's swimming teams. Sultan expressed her dissatisfaction with the accessibility of the splendid facilities in Kuwait, particularly highlighting the challenges girls face in accessing them. Sultan stated she was permitted to swim with men and given decent professional time six months before arriving in London. Sultan achieved a seventh-place finish in her heat in London, completing the race in 27.92 seconds. Her performance was insufficient to advance to the 50-meter finals. Having won two swimming world championships and trained intensively under NCAA rules for four years, the athlete was eager to show off her improved performance at the next Olympic Games in Rio. However, her ultimate goal was to inspire more female participation from the Gulf region.

This excerpt also showed that Kuwaiti male athletes had sports facilities and equipment. Due to the assumption that sports are mainly for males, women have little opportunity to engage. However, by competing in the Olympics, she disproved this idea and confirmed her professional status. This approach follows Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, which advocates for gender equality in public spaces by questioning and challenging gender conventions.

"I really hoped that we would have more female participation in Kuwait, especially in this Olympics, but [that's] another heartbreaking moment for me," she said.

"The way I see it, is that I'm the prototype," Sultan added. "I'm getting the ball rolling. The first of anything, you're not necessarily going to be the best, but I'd like to show people the importance of sport and just how much it can give you."

Sultan expressed a strong desire for more female representation in Kuwait, especially for the Olympics. Sultan considered herself the prototype when she became the first Kuwaiti Olympic female athlete. In the first stages of any endeavor, achieving the highest level of proficiency is not always guaranteed. She stated that she wanted to emphasize the importance of sports and its many advantages. This news item portrays her differently from conventional female athletes, who were portrayed as feminine, attractive and sexual. However, Arab women are empowered to make courageous and unrestricted choices in all aspects of their lives. Arab female athletes prioritize gender equality and empowerment to challenge patriarchal norms.

Conclusion

The analyzed news items are investigated through the lens of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA). FCDA is a research-based method that seeks to examine and interrogate the asymmetrical power dynamics inherent in gender, with the ultimate goal of altering societal norms and behaviors related to gender. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis has demonstrated effective progress in attaining its objectives and fulfilling a valuable function notably, within the Arab world, a patriarchal society. Discernible transformations have occurred, particularly with regard to the empowerment of women in this conservative and patriarchal society. Consequently, women are presently afforded the opportunity to engage in the public sphere. However, the analyzed news items showed how females in the Arab region challenged pre-existing gender prejudices and practices. The emergence of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis has contributed to transformations in the social practices of contemporary Arab society. Accordingly, Arab females possess the agency to exercise independence and make courageous and unrestricted choices in all aspects of their lives. Modern Arab society is characterized by a strong emphasis on gender equality and women's empowerment to oppose patriarchal norms. Accordingly, *Al-Jazeera* portrays Arab female athletes in terms of Self or in-group members of the public domain and the patriarchal stereotypes in terms of Other.

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