



## Woman in Culture and Arts

### Representation of Cultural Identity of Women and Girls in the Cover Designs of Children's Stories in Arab Countries

Ghufran Brimo<sup>1</sup> | Effatolsadat Afzaltousi<sup>2</sup>

1. PhD Candidate of comparative and analytical history of Islamic arts, Department of Research of Art, Faculty of Art, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: [brimoghufan@gmail.com](mailto:brimoghufan@gmail.com)
2. Corresponding Author, Full Professor, Department of Research of Art, Faculty of Art, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: [afzaltousi@alzahra.ac.ir](mailto:afzaltousi@alzahra.ac.ir)

Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Article type:</b> Research Article</p> <p><b>Article history:</b> Received: 25 August 2023 Received in revised form: 8 October 2023 Accepted: 10 August 2024 Published online: 30 December 2024</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>Arab countries,</i> <i>Children's book covers,</i> <i>Cultural identity,</i> <i>Girls, Women.</i></p>	<p><b>Introduction</b> Cultural identity, which encompasses values, beliefs, traditions, and cultural elements that influence individuals within a society, is significantly influenced by children's stories (Muhammad, 2019: 128). Children internalize cultural values by establishing connections with characters and events through literature. The significance of images in children's literature is also noteworthy, as they have evolved into fundamental cultural units that necessitate no linguistic expertise for communication (Benkrad, 2006: 31). Critics underscore the cultural significance of book cover designs, which not only safeguard the book but also reflect and advance cultural values associated with individuality and gender (Drew &amp; Stenberger, 2005: 8). The following issues are the focus of this research, which attempts to address the cultural identity of girls and women in Arab countries: In Arab countries, how are the cultural identities of girls and women depicted in the cover illustrations of children's stories? What are the similarities and differences between the cultural identity symbols of girls?</p> <p><b>Methodology</b> With a comparative approach, the research method is descriptive-analytical. The objective of the investigation is to emphasize the strengths and shortcomings in the portrayal of cultural identity among Arab-speaking women and girls, taking into account both Arab and Islamic cultures, in order to derive a comprehensive understanding of Arab culture. The investigation concentrates on the covers of children's illustrated books from a prominent publisher in Arab countries, such as Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, that were published between 2000 and 2021. These books are particularly designed for the 5-10 age group. A total of 249 cover designs were chosen for analysis. Initially, qualitative analysis was implemented to recognize cultural symbols, including "facial features, clothing, symbols (Arab and national), ornaments and decorations, and religious symbols." The subsequent phase involved a quantitative analysis of the similarities and differences using a comparative approach.</p> <p><b>Results</b> Islamic decorative motifs are prevalent in pedagogical stories in Egypt, appearing in 18.51% of the cases. Women are depicted in traditional and local attire, along with Islamic decorations. The hijab is worn by females in religious stories in Iraq at a rate of 33.33%, which is higher than that of other Arab countries. For example, the Saudi Arabian narrative "Eid Fi Abriq" and the UAE's "Tariqati Al-Khasa," which emphasizes the hijab, do not depict girls donning it, despite their religious content. Historical symbols from ancient Egypt and Iraq are prominently featured in local and religious legends, accounting for 29.41% of the representation of adult women. This represents cultural pride. Geographical symbols are even more prevalent, comprising 47.05% of the total. The palm tree is represented by five of the eight symbols. Historical symbols are present in 51.8% of educational stories that feature females in Lebanon, while geographical symbols are present in 38.6% of both cultural and</p>

educational stories. Although they are absent from the covers of previous countries, Arab symbols are present in pedagogical stories at a rate of 25.4%.

The majority of illustrations of females in educational, cultural, and patriotic stories in Syria include geographic symbols at 67.4% and Islamic decorations at 17.3%. Many of the cover illustrations are devoid of diverse cultural symbols, as these stories are published by the Ministry of Culture. This is significant because specific motifs have the potential to emphasize Syria's rich history and heritage. In the patriotic narrative "Sizhar al-Yasmin," for example, the inclusion of jasmine flowers and the architectural style of Damascus could strengthen the theme's appeal to children. In Saudi Arabia, the illustration of girls and their environments, along with Islamic decorations in religious stories, religious symbols in educational stories, and regional decorations and traditional clothing in educational stories, is observed with a frequency of 3.03%. Manga-like faces are notably used in story covers. For adult and middle-aged women's environments, traditional clothing in cultural stories are present 33.33% of the time. In the UAE, religious stories contain the illustration of girls and their environment, as well as historical symbols, at a frequency of 1.75%. Geographical symbols are featured in religious and political stories at a frequency of 3.50%, Arabic symbols are featured in religious and cultural stories at a frequency of 5.26%.

### Conclusion

Illustrated children's stories are an effective method of imparting cultural norms during the critical period of childhood. This investigation investigates the representation of the cultural identity of women and girls in 249 cover designs of children's stories in Arabic-speaking countries. The research query is as follows: To what extent do the cover illustrations of children's stories in Arab countries reflect the cultural identity of girls and women? The results indicate that the identity of Arab girls is represented through Islamic decorations, whereas the identity of adult women is represented through plant designs, historical symbols, and the veil. The display of the veil emphasizes the identity of elder women.

The UAE is the most abundant in cultural visual symbols among the story covers, while Syria is the least so. The majority of Arab girls and women are depicted with dark tresses, and older women frequently wear veils, particularly in Iraqi publications. Across all age categories, this symbol is less prominent in Syria and Lebanon.

The tulip is a prominent motif in Islamic art, and it is depicted in narratives from three Arab countries. Geographical symbols, such as palm fronds, are also featured in cover designs. The palm tree, which is depicted on eleven covers from the UAE, Lebanon, and Iraq, is essential for the representation of Arab identity. This suggests that Arabs prefer symbols that reflect their geographic characteristics as a means of expressing their identity. Islamic architecture is symbolized by religious symbols like minarets and mosques, while Ramadan symbols amplify cultural sentiments in cover designs. Arabic symbols are less predominant among cultural icons, despite the richness of Arab culture. Cover designs of illustrated stories from Arab countries frequently incorporate Islamic symbols, such as traditional attire, to reflect the cultural identity of women and girls, despite the fact that Arab identity is distinct from Islamic identity.

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