Manifestation of Persona Dealing with Misogyny as Reflected in Qahera the Superhero

Riana Permatasari*, Destary Praptawati
English Literature Department, Universitas Islam Sultan Agung, Indonesia
*permatasari@unissula.ac.id, destary@unissula.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, there are a growing number of Muslim woman superheroes in literature; one of them is a webcomic entitled Qahera the Superhero. Qahera is portrayed as a veiled Eqyptian woman superhero dealing with misogyny throughout the story. This study is a qualitative study aimed at finding the manifestation of persona as reflected in Qahera and its relation to misogyny. In collecting the data, there were three steps taken, including reading the webcomic, identifying the data, and classifying the data in a table consisting of the data, the page/part of the comics, the references supported the data, and the analysis. The collected data were analyzed using the theory about persona by Carl Jung as the underlying theory in this study. Based on the research, there are two points concluded. First, the outward manifestation of persona in Qahera is a woman superhero wearing a hijab who is strong and brave. Second, her persona is built to fulfill society's expectations on how a woman should wear and protect women from misogyny in her community. She fights against misogyny by challenging the negative stereotypes about Muslim women, combating sexual harassment, and not supporting misogyny in various forms, including in arts. In short, Qahera built her persona to protect Muslim women and showed the persona manifestation of how a woman superhero can challenge the negative stereotypes of Muslim women without neglecting Islamic values inside her.

Keywords: personality theory; persona; misogyny; Qahera the Superhero

INTRODUCTION

Superhero themes are common themes found in literary works. People are familiar with superhero stories created by DC and Marvel as famous superhero creators worldwide. Characters in these superhero stories are not only male characters but also female characters, such as Wonder Woman, Cat Woman, and others. However, nowadays, there is a growing number of literary works highlighting a *hijabi* woman as the main character in a superhero story in various literary works, including comics.

Hosein (2020) states that Muslim characters have been part of literary works, especially comics, for many years. However, they significantly get more attention after the 9/11 tragedy. Shaheen (1994 in Hosein, 2020) found that before the 9/11 tragedy in Northern America, there were comics representing Muslim women that constructed stereotypes such as being oppressive and not having a significant role in the stories. However, after the 9/11 tragedy, Muslim women took a more substantial part in many American comics, including comics that Marvel and DC published.

Besides Marvel and DC, some other comics talk about Muslim women as the main characters; one is a webcomic entitled *Qahera the Superhero,* illustrated and created by Deena Mohammed. Mohammed (2013), on the website, explains that this comic was created to fight misogyny in Egypt and Islamophobia in general.

Srivastava (2017) states that misogyny was derived from an ancient Greek language, *misogyny*. This word means hatred toward women (Srivastava, 2017; Ussher, 2011). Misogyny is manifested in various forms, including male privilege, patriarchy, gender discrimination, sexual harassment, bullying of women, violence against women, and sexual objectification (Srivastava, 2017). Ussher (2011) adds other forms of misogyny, such as disgust, intolerance, or entrenched prejudice, to legitimize women's oppression. These forms of misogyny can be found in various cultures and societies depicted in movies, mass media, and other literary artworks.

Rieder (2012) explains that in the 20s century, researchers fundamentally found medieval societies as misogynistic societies. Misogyny is not only used to describe hatred towards women but also as attitudes and practices toward anti-feminine. Misogyny exists in patriarchal societies that uphold patriarchy, defined as the manifestation and institutionalization of male domination of women and children in a family and community (Lerner in Rieder, 2012). Further, Lerner (in Rieder, 2012) explains that patriarchy is related to the abuse and commodification of women.

Discussing abuse towards women, American Psychology Association wrote in its report in 2007 about a misogynistic continuum of hatred and abuse toward women, including sexualized imagery in western societies. For example, the data shows that 84% of prime-time programs on TV show sexual harassment. It is represented in sexist comments, sexualized body language, and offensive stares men give to women. From this report, it can be concluded that misogyny can be manifested in sexual harassment, such as sexual jokes, comments, gestures, looks, and others.

In order to fight misogyny, this study regards the representation of Qahera as the main character in the study's object as fundamental. Her appearance and personality are the keys to how a Muslim woman superhero is represented. Personality is defined as the pattern of behaviors and attitudes shown over time in a specific time and place (Revelle, W. & Scherer, 2017). Analyzing

personality in literary works can be done using the psychoanalytic theory by Carl Gustav Jung. Carl Gustav Jung is well known for his psychoanalytic theory, so he was one of the experts in personality theory. His theory highlights the concept of conscious and collective unconsciousness that shape personality.

Moreover, he explains archetypes, including anima, animus, shadow, and persona, that he asserts as the psyche forms that can be found in each character and their nature in general. Similarly, (Fleer, 2014), in his research, found that archetypes were pervasive images found in each character and do not depend on a specific classification. In addition, Daniels (2011) asserts that "Archetypes of the collective unconscious, these primordial images reflect basic patterns or universal themes common to us all which are present in the unconscious. These symbolic images exist outside space and time." From the quotation above, it can be concluded that every human being has their archetypes, so archetypes are general and can be found in every person. These archetypes further shape the person's personality. In this study, the archetype chosen as the focus of the study was the persona, as the persona significantly shows the person's public face.

Persona is defined as a mask that people use when they are taking part in society (Jung, 2014). He also points out that persona is not a simple case, but it is a complicated system to make an impression on other people. His definition further is developed by other experts, including (Zhu, J. & Han, 2013), who assert that persona is the public face displayed to get social permission. Similarly, (Tyagi, 2008) also states that persona is the fact that you show to society, and it is a mask that helps people to hide their selves. Persona deals with how people offer their images in a community based on time and space, whether they need to show their true self or hide it. There is an adjustment by them in what and how the society perceives them.

In addition, persona indicates conscious ego with its all variations. A persona is a form of adaptation to society and how they act (Daniels, 2011). By forming their persona, they try to fulfill the existing norms in the community and can be a criterion of how an individual should work in society.

Moreover, the persona is also built on a specific reason, or what (Stein, 2005) calls the source of persona. Stein (2005) asserts that persona is a social and psychological construction further adopted for a specific reason. First, the source of persona is the demand of expectations of the society. The assertion supports (Feist, J. & Feist, 2009), stating that the persona has its function to fulfill a particular role set by the society. A specific community usually has a standard or expectation on how each community member should behave. For example, a Muslim community expects women to wear long clothes and a veil or headscarf. In addition, in a patriarchal society,

they define a good wife as someone obedient, submissive, passive, and inferior to men. They create demands on how women should dress and behave. Second, it is based on individual ambitions. An individual has their ambition that becomes the reason for their persona. For example, based on the study conducted by (Raharto, R. D. & Permatasari, 2019), the main character in the Phantom of The Opera built his persona because of his ambition in which he intentionally displays himself as a mysterious, creepy ghost so that people are afraid of him. Therefore, people may use their persona because they are forced by the community or for their purpose. Thus, a persona is a fundamental aspect to analyze to picture how the character is represented throughout the story.

Based on the explanation above, this study intended to analyze the manifestation of persona reflected by the main character in *Qahera the superhero*, concerning misogyny, especially for Muslim women. *Qahera the superhero,* was chosen as the object of this study because its setting was in Egypt, where misogyny is still an issue, as explained by the illustrator, Deena Mohammed.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

This study was qualitative, as the data analyzed were not in the form of numbers. The data were in the form of sentences and illustrations taken from a webcomic entitled *Qahera the Superhero*. The illustrations were also considered as the study's object was a webcomic with verbal and non-verbal language. Chandler (2007) states that codes can be communicated by verbal and non-verbal language. In this study, the verbal language was represented by sentences, and the illustrations represented the non-verbal language. Thus, these verbal and non-verbal data comprehensively built the meaning in the object of the study.

In collecting the data for this study, there were three steps taken. First, read the webcomic entitled *Qahera the Superhero* by Deena Mohammed several times to understand the story. Second, the researchers identified the data from the comic by highlighting the sentences or giving marks on the illustrations. Third, the data were classified into a table consisting of four columns, including the data, source of the data, reference to support the data, and comments or arguments for the data.

After collecting the data, the next step was analyzing the data based on the underlying theory of this study. The theory used in this study was Jung's theory about persona and misogyny. The data for persona were contrasted and compared with what the theory says. Then, the researcher connected the persona displayed by Qahera with misogyny.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The findings are divided into two subchapters, including the persona found in Qahera and its relation to misogyny. The following is the detail of each subchapter.

Persona found in Qahera

This subchapter discusses the persona found in Qahera, as the main character, in Qahera the Superhero. Based on the data, there are three points derived related to persona. First, in Figure 1, Qahera dresses like a typical Muslim woman in that she wears a *gamis* (long dress) and a hijab. Sometimes, in some parts of the story, she also wears a niqab. Her appearance fulfills society's expectation of how a Muslim woman should dress, so in this case, the source of her persona is society's demand. It is aligned with what (Stein, 2005) explained that persona could be built for the social demand. It was supported by the claim that the persona has the function of fulfilling a particular role in society (Feist, J. & Feist, 2009). In this case, Qahera's role is a Muslim woman, so she dresses like a typical Muslim woman. The following figure shows her appearance.

Figure 1. Qahera's Appearance

Figure 2. Feminist pointing to Qahera

By wearing a hijab, Qahera shows that she firmly believes that wearing a hijab is not oppression. She disagrees with the feminists who have an opinion that a hijab is oppression. It is illustrated in Figure 2 when many feminists who do not wear hijab are demonstrating. They claim they try to protect women. They think the hijab oppresses Muslim women and needs to be saved. It is indicated from the following utterances from one demonstrator, "*Look there, it is a Muslim woman. That is why we are here. We have to save her,*" by pointing to Qahera. Then, the demonstrators say, *"Please, let us rescue you."* The words *we need to save her* and *let us rescue you* indicate that the demonstrators think that Muslim women are weak and need to be saved. The gesture of pointing at Qahera also indicates that her dressing style is why a Muslim woman needs to be saved.

In addition, in Figure 3, a demonstrator says, "*Sister! Take off your oppression! Join us,*" while pulling off Qahera's hijab. It is clear from this statement that feminists think the hijab is a form of oppression, so they want Qahera to take off her hijab and join them in this protest. Joining them means she takes off her hijab and does not dress as expected by the Muslim community. However, she clearly states, *"You may constantly be undermined and ignored women. You seem unable to understand that we do not need your help, and I doubt there is much I can do to teach you."* This statement shows that she has a different perspective from feminists. She chooses the dictions *'undermined'* and *'ignored'* to show that, in her view, what the feminists do does not empower women but makes them weak. In this case, she supports the social agreement that Muslim women should wear a hijab and that the hijab is not a form of oppression. Her persona has a role in this social agreement because the persona is a social and psychological construction (Stein, 2005). In terms of society, the society where the majority of the people are Muslim constructs an ideal image of a woman wearing a hijab, whereas, from a psychological point of view, Qahera psychologically does not feel oppressed for wearing her hijab.

Figure 3. One of the Feminist Tries to Pull-off Qahera's Hijab

In the comic, it is also illustrated that Qahera's public display is as a superhero who has superpowers, as shown in Figure 4. She is standing and looking at many people gathering in an open space. She says, *"I am a superhero because I have superpowers."* Thus, consciously she forms her persona as a superhero. It is aligned with what Daniels (2011) states: persona indicates conscious ego with its variations. The public face she wants to display is a superhero.

Figure 4. Qahera is Standing Looking at the Crowds

This public display is built in order to protect Muslim women. It is aligned with the assertion that a persona is formed for a specific or particular reason (Stein, 2005). In this case, her reason is to protect women as she states, "*I do my best to protect women from harassment. A light word, all things considered.*" The words '*I do my best to protect women*' explain her reason for building a persona as a superhero. She wants to protect women from harassment that she usually finds in daily life. The words '*As they like to call it. A light word, all things considered,*' reflect that harassment is regarded as something familiar in the community but is a significant matter. Moreover, the illustration shows some women showing sad expressions as their reactions to harassment happened to them. These women are the representations of women that she wants to protect.

Figure 5. Some Woman Look Sad

The following figure also shows the reason for her persona. In figure 6, it is stated, "*But I do what I can. They threaten women in every way.*" This statement shows that she must protect the women as the community constantly threatens them with many things. She believes that women lose their voice in the community. The society where she lives also upholds patriarchal values that sometimes put women in an inferior position. The illustration shows that Qahera tries to suffocate a man who has threatened a woman in front of Egyptian society.

Figure 6. Qahera was Angry in Front of Many People

In Figure 6, Qahera shows her disagreement with harassment in front of many people. The act of suffocating the man is a way to build an image that she is brave and strong to fight anyone who does harassment towards women. The need to display her brave and strong side is inevitable as she wants to portray herself as a superhero. The image of being bold and strong also can be seen from the illustration that she is holding a sword as a symbol of strength and bravery because it is usually used for attending a war.

As a superhero, she also shows her persona as someone who likes helping others. One day she helps a woman by giving her some goods. However, the woman does not like what she has done to her. Surprisingly, she says that Qahera is only a superhero who flies here and there but cannot help her. She wants to meet her brother, and if her brother could fly like Qahera, she would meet her brother anytime. Hearing this statement, Qahera thinks deeply and finally decides to buy a flight ticket to her so that she can meet her brother. From this illustration, it is clear that she tries to fulfill the community's expectation of how a superhero should be, in which a superhero should be able to help others.

Figure 7. Qahera Helps a Woman to Meet Her Brother

Based on the data above, it can be concluded that Qahera builds her persona as a Muslim woman superhero wearing a hijab to protect women from any harassment. Moreover, to display her as a superhero, she shows her brave and strong side and helps other people.

The relation between Qahera's persona and misogyny

As explained in the previous subchapter, Qahera's persona is built for a specific reason which is to protect women from harassment. Harassments are a form of misogyny, as stated by Srivastava (2017) and Ussher (2011). This subchapter presents the data related to how Qahera acts towards misogyny.

First, she fights against the stereotype that a good wife is someone submissive and stays at home. This negative stereotype puts women in an inferior position and gives a man privilege. Giving male rights is also a part of misogyny, as stated by Srivastava (2017). Misogyny is manifested in various forms, including male privilege, patriarchy, gender discrimination, sexual harassment, bullying of women, violence against women, and sexual objectification. She shows that she disagrees with the stereotypes by saying, "*No! My super-hearing cannot handle this nonsense!*" when she hears a man says, "*A good wife is an obedient wife! Your Islamic duty is to keep your women at home and in check*." The word *nonsense* here clearly shows that the man's argument is something unreasonable for her. In addition, she gives a surprising response to the man, as presented in the following figure.

Figure 8. Qahera Shows Her Anger Toward a Man

In the figure above, she hangs the man as if he is a laundry. She states, *"You're right, you know. Housework is women's work. Absolutely. I especially enjoy doing laundry."* This statement is a sarcastic statement that she uses to express her disagreement and anger with the man's statement.

Second, Qahera fights against all sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is part of misogyny, as stated by Srivastava (2017) and Ussher (2011). Sexual harassment can be in sexual comments, jokes, gestures, etc. In figure 9, it is illustrated that a woman who gets sexual harassment goes to the police station and reports what she has experienced. However, surprisingly, the policeman states that it is because of how she dresses, and he suggests dressing more politely. However, Qahera, who has dressed in which she is wearing a hijab, also experienced the same act. Thus, sexual harassment is not because of how a woman dresses but because of the personal and societal perspectives about women. Moreover, in Figure 10, it is illustrated that Qahera was very angry when she got sexual comments and defended herself by fighting the man.

Figure 1. Qahera Experienced Sexual Harrasment

Figure 1. Qahera Fights the Man

Lastly, Qahera does not support any misogyny in various forms, including arts, in this case, is a song consisting of misogynistic lyrics.

Figure 11. Qahera's Respons When Hearing Misogynitic Lyrics

In the figure above, it is illustrated that Qahera was asked to listen to a song. However, the song has misogynistic lyrics, and Qahera automatically shows a dislike expression when hearing the song.

In brief, based on the data above, Qahera's public display or persona is closely related to her fights against misogyny in her society. She builds her persona to protect women from harassment and negative stereotypes in various forms, including in arts.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Qahera manifests her persona as a woman superhero wearing a hijab who is strong and brave. The persona shown by Qahera has a purpose of protecting women and fighting against misogyny in the society where she lives. Her fights against misogyny are represented in two points. First, she challenges the stereotype that a good wife is someone who is submissive and stays at home. Second, Qahera fights against all actions related to sexual harassment. Third, she fights misogyny in various forms, including arts. In conclusion, Qahera consciously forms her persona to be a Muslim woman superhero who still dresses as a Muslim woman wearing a hijab and a *gamis*. However, at the same time, she fights against misogyny in the society she lives in.

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