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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## The Stigmatized Linguistic Discourse Used Against Women: Moroccan Films and Sitcoms as Study Cases

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**ABSTRACT**

The stigmatized language in Moroccan films demonstrates gender attitudes and social conventions when treating gender biases and inequalities. Moroccan cinema, in general, contributes to the reinforcement of traditional gender roles through the use of sexist language and stigmas in dialogues tied within narrative scenes. Sexism in Moroccan films and sitcoms is depicted in several ways, portraying women's inferiority and submissiveness. Such gender inequalities represent women as primarily responsible for the domestic sphere and removed from public interests. The current research aims to investigate the representations of the stigmatized linguistic discourse used against women by undertaking a study about how the stigmas strengthen social and cultural stereotypes. The research studies the linguistic derogatory terms, gender stereotypes, reification or terms that treat women as sexual objects, and dismissive attitudes and the way they are depicted within cultural norms, along with their effect on cultural perspectives. The study utilizes a mixed approach of selected Moroccan films and sitcoms through the analysis of dialogues, as well as interactions among characters. It aims at discerning the representations of sexist language and the way gender inequalities are maintained. The research data is collected from a variety set of films that treat sexism from different understandings and interpretations and the way language portrays and depicts stigmatized discourses. The data analysis stands up at pointing out various ways in which gendered stereotypes or negative, derogatory terms are used against social groups, typically women. The present research comes up to reveal that these gendered depictions aim at strengthening social biases and cultural recognitions of gender stereotypes. The results unveil salient interrelations between gender representations and the reinforcement of gender biases. The research concludes that Moroccan films and sitcoms play a significant part in structuring prerequisite linguistic stigmas. Through drawing the salient ways in which sexist language is used in films, the research points out the significance of raising awareness through media interpretations of gender discourses. The findings display that the Moroccan cinema and the way its gender discourses are represented reinforce gender portrayals.

**KEYWORDS**

Sexist language, discourse, stigmatization, gender representations, language, Moroccan cinema.

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**1. Introduction**

The stigmatized linguistic discourse perpetuated in Moroccan films and sitcoms, typically drama and comedy, translate what social and cultural realities represent as gender stereotypes and inequalities. The cinematic narratives are proved to be overemphasizing the traditional gender roles in social and cultural practices. Previous research has revealed gender representations and biases within films and the way narrative elements tied within dialogues and character interpretations play a significant role in reinforcing gender stereotypes. The Moroccan comedy tends to depict gender inequalities in a more indirect way, which elicits laughter at what is deemed to be conventionally ingrained within social rules and norms. The public audience's perception of Moroccan comedy is not grounded in critical thinking. It is, therefore, accepted as free from gender biases. The sexist linguistic discourse

used in Moroccan comedies manifests in several aspects: they are markedly represented in the form of derogatory terms, gender stereotyping, reifying women's bodies, and dismissively treating gender attitudes.

## **2. Literature review**

Hall (1997, p.17) defines representation as the way the meaning of concepts is generated in our brains in the form of linguistic terms. Language and concepts are, therefore, interrelated and pave the way for our understanding and interpretation of real or fictitious worlds. The social construction theory unravels how meaning people uncover about social attitudes is socially constructed. People perform according to social rules and norms. The social institutions, mass media, the music we hear, school courses, and even the people we interact with shape our understandings and perceptions of the world. Mills (2008, p. 18) argues that language intersects with social institutional structures: institutions exert power over society as a whole. The mass media as an institution plays a salient role in shaping and manipulating people's attitudes and beliefs. The mass media creates images through the construction of meaning. TV programs, therefore, hold a pervasive potency and control over reality as a whole.

The mass media's massive power contributes to the creation of certain truths (Foucault, 1995), which are based on misogynist discourses whose aim is to promote patriarchal systems and beliefs. Foucault (1995, p.27) argues that "we should admit that power produces knowledge." Power and knowledge are, therefore, two sides of the same coin: the mass media then holds power over its viewers, who unconsciously adopt what is dictated as the unique and only knowledge that exists. Mills (2008, p.144) argues that the media creates gendered social realities by depicting women as lacking seriousness, immaturity, and irrationality. McQuail (2010, p.14) states that the "mass media has been stimulated by the wish to apply norms of social and cultural performance." In this sense, the mass media's role is determined by social rules and conventions catalysed by patriarchal systems prevailing within social traditions and beliefs.

Women are overwhelmed by gender traditional discourses (Sunderland 2007, p.219). Their bodies are regarded by social and cultural factors as a source of sexual cravings. As referred to by De Beauvoir's "the second sex" (1949), women are not born but rather become women through social constructions: the social roles and norms already dictated by societal beliefs that depict feminine and masculine traits. Sunderland (2007, p.216) claims that the mass media manipulates individuals' thinking through humorous contexts where the sexist language appears to be natural and gender free. The contexts where humour manifests are within comedies and advertisements. The mass media creates social ideologies as a tool to persuade its viewers that the truth lies in the way women are depicted and portrayed.

Several studies were conducted on the sexist linguistic discourse used against women in the mass media. Mills (2008, p.144) studied the British Television sitcom "Men Behaving Badly" which was created and written by Simon Nye. She concluded that in such a program, women were addressed with sexist derogatory terms such as "Totty," a term used to describe childish behaviours. Such stigmatized term reinforces the gender stereotypes that women are immature and irrational. The mass media, however, do not only shape the viewers' understandings of the gender roles through sexist terms, but more importantly, contributes to the overall promotion of gender ideologies through not being embarrassed by the stigmatized linguistic discourse utilized in their TV programs as they already know that if challenged as sexist, that will be interpreted as only one's personal reading that does not represent the view of the majority (Cameron 2006, p.41).

## **3. Methodology**

In this section, a sample of Moroccan sitcoms, films, and advertisements were selected. The sample consists of two sitcoms, three films, and two advertisements that were broadcast on 2m. The data were collected in two months during which the TV shows were presented. The selection of such TV programs was based on the idea of revealing that sexist language representation in mass media is not specific to one type of TV show but embraces various programs. The Moroccan films and sitcoms that were chosen are "Lalla Fatima, seasons 1,2 and 3" by Nabil Ayouch, "Kolna Mgharba" by Safaa Baraka, "Khnefist R'mad" by Sanaa Akroud, and "Souk Nsa" by Fatima Ali Boubakdi. The advertisements that were chosen are Afia and Delicia.

Based on a qualitative approach, the data were analysed in the light of feminist studies. The current paper unveils the sexist language embedded in humorous contexts where sexism tends to be natural for viewers. Four main themes were treated: sexist derogatory terms, gender stereotypes, reification of women's bodies, and dismissive attitudes.

## **4. Results and discussion**

This section presents a discussion of the findings and provides a general overview of the stigmatized linguistic discourse used against women in the three Moroccan sitcoms "Lalla Fatima, seasons 1,2 and 3", "Kolna Mgharba" and "L'auberge." An illustration of the sexist language addressed to women in the three Moroccan films, namely "Khnefist R'mad," "Souk Nsa," and "3ors Eddib," is also provided. The last type of TV shows are the advertisements "Afia" and "Delicia," where sexism prevails.

The Moroccan movies present many aspects of the stigmatized linguistic discourse used against women. Such discourse is depicted in diverse ways, among which we cite the following: derogatory terms that address direct insults to women, gender stereotypes: women receive explicit gendered expressions that reduce them to traditional gender roles typically defined as devoted housewives and mothers. The linguistic stigmas also address women as sexual tools that elicit men's sexual desires. Women are taken total responsibility for seducing men. Their bodies are, therefore, reified and presented as objects of sexuality. The fourth aspect of sexist language represented in Moroccan TV shows is that of trivializing women's interests, social activities, and speech. Such a category is named dismissive attitudes.

#### 4.1 The derogatory terms used against women in Moroccan TV shows

Sitcom Lalla Fatima seasons 1, 2, and 3 represents a woman named Lalla Fatima, who is the protagonist who married a man, Ahmed Benzizi, and lives with her in-laws in her husband's house with a maid called Aicha. The latter has a love relationship with a man named, Leqfel and a friend called Hlima. Hlima is also in a love relationship with a man named Omar. The sitcom witnesses a frequent use of derogatory terms addressed to different female characters. The derogatory terms can be exemplified as follows: in the sixth episode from season 1, Scene 8, character El haj says to his wife, /ntɪ wɜʒəf lkarwɪla/ (you do not deserve a good car to drive. Your abilities in driving do not go further than a cart). Another example can be given from the second episode of season 1, scene 5: character Ahmed Nqita, the husband of Lalla Fatima's daughter, says, /'lahɔma lbɔlɪs ɔ:la lɜʒalat/ (I can deal with the police than women).

The derogatory terms can also be illustrated in the Moroccan sitcom Kolna Mgharba, episode 1, Scene 6: character Bouazza says to Abdellatif referring to Laaliya, /χəɜʒatək lɜʒalɔ, matɜʒalɜ ɜɜɜha, ndrha tħət ɜɜ'baɜ/ (are you crazy to be afraid of Laaliya? Do not care about her, I can squash her under my feet). Another example of sexist language embeddedness in humorous contexts can be given in the sitcom Kolna Mgharba, episode 3, scene 1, when Kamal refers to his wife saying: /ɜandak iʃħab lɜk ħda χɜ:k rɜdɪ tbdav tɜraɔwtɪ, aɜ'ɜnɜɜɜ ... baraka mɜn lħadra lχawɔya ... ɜɜpɜwɛ ɜɜftɔ fɪ lkɜ:zɪna, ɜɜndak tkɜ:nɪ kaɜavɪ bɜħ, dɜrha had lmrɜ hadɪ/ (do you think that just because you are beside your brother that you will shout at me ... stop this nonsense ... never put my shampoo in the kitchen, do you cook with it? I know you, crazy woman, you do it). This example illustrates the derogatory terms used against women in social life, but because they are embedded in a humorous context, a comedy like Kolna Mgharba, it is regarded as gender free and non-discriminative.

Mills (2008, p.145) studied the sexist media discourse used on a Radio program by DJ Chris Moyles, who describes his female colleague as a "cow," "tart," or "dippy." In the Moroccan context, an example of the derogatory terms which are used against women can be taken from Khnifist R'mad, scene 8, when the judge to Sultan's servant who is acting like Khnifist R'mad's husband, /ɜlħa, fɜk ɜɜɜ had lbɜɜɜ ɜ ɜɜɜ, aɜ ɜɜɜbɜk fɜħa rɜr aɜ ɜɜɜbɜk ħħadɪ/ (divorce her, divorce this shit, just what did you like in her?). To illustrate more, an example of the derogatory terms which are used against women can be taken from Khnifist R'mad, scene 8 when the judge to Sultan's servant who is acting like Khnifist R'mad's husband, / The judge to the man, /ɜlħɜ ɜɜɜ lbɜkɜ:r/ (divorce that shit). Examples of derogatory terms can be given from Souk Nsa Moroccan film in Scene 2: the Imam says, /mɜɜɜ ħmɜd brɜ ɜqra ħarb nsa/ (Moulay Ahmed wants to know about women's cunning). Women are demonstrated as a source of evil. They are described as malicious and the ones who elicit problems in life. Another example is given from scene 4: Moulay Ahmed says to Taja, the protagonist, /lɜ kan ban lɜ ɜr rɜɜɜl mɜamɜn ntkɜlɜm manħadɜɜ nsa wala ndɜ:z bsaħħɜm/ (if I found a man to whom I shall speak, I would never ask women or speak to them). The man presented in the scene describes women as a source of problems. Women are socially depicted as the creators of trouble, which reinforces the derogatory terms used against them and strengthens the gendered idea that the use of such terms is natural. In scene 6, Moulay Ahmed says to Taja, the protagonist, /sɜq nsa sɜq mɜɜɜɜ, a: daɜħ lɜ rɜd balɜk ɜwɜrɜwɜk mɜn rbaħ qɜnɜar wɜdɜw lɜk ras malɜk/ (women's market is illusive, the one who enters it has to be careful, women make you feel you are a winner, but then you lose everything).

The Moroccan film 3ors Eddib illustrates the derogatory terms more specifically in scene 8: Moulay Ismail to his wife, /kant zɜnqa χawɔya ɜ mrat lħɜɜ smɜɜɜɜ χarɜa ka'dɜ:r fɪ znaqɪ, smɜɜɜ a la'la ana ranɪ tɜɜwɜɜt mra baɜ 'dɜg wɜtadħa maɜɜ χɜ'fɜ: d'fɜ: ɪ'dɜwħa nas wɜ ɜɜɜbɜħa bɪ dɜwɜħɜt lχɜɜm/ (the street was empty, and Lhaj Ismail's wife is out rambling out). This example illustrates the derogatory terms used against women in social life, but because they are embedded in a humorous context. Another example taken from the film in scene 4: Moulay Ismail to his wife, /ana rɜr 'mɪ lɜ χɜarɜtɜk lɜ ana lglɜwlat gɜzma kɜɜamrɜ lɜ ɜavɜɜɜ ... matmɜɜɜ ɜ tχɜlɜnɜ mlɜ nkɜ:n kanħdar mɜak ... lɜ tsɜħɜr mɜa drarɜ ɜsbaħ faɜɜr/ (mum who chose you for me for the first time. To me, I do not like short women ... never leave when I am speaking to you ... whoever has Sohour with kids, will wake up having meals). In this example, the man, who is El Kamla's husband, addresses a stigmatized discourse to his wife, emphasizing that her body shape does not please him and shouting at her face when she wants to leave, saying she can't do so unless taking her husband's permission.

#### **4.2 The gender stereotypes represented in TV shows**

Language and Gender are two fields of research that are interrelated. The language we use is never innocent: it rather carries gendered stereotypes, derogatory terms, and reified beliefs that treat women as a source of trouble and their bodies as a disgraceful entity. Feminists defy women's stereotypes spread in social beliefs that categorize women in inferior statuses (Mills, S. 2008 128). The sexist language considered men as the norm and women as deviations from it. Sexist linguistic expressions like: "he plays like a girl" or "she is a second Einstein" unravels the degrading status deepened in social beliefs (Hellinger, M and Pauwels, A. 2007 653) and reinforces the gendered stereotypes that depict men as the source of shrewdness, and seriousness, but women as immature, stupid, childish and unassertive. The data collected from the Moroccan TV shows illustrate the gender stereotypes that depict women in traditional roles. In sitcom *Lalla Fatima*, episode 23 from season 2, Scene 2: character Ahmed Benzizi says to his wife, /wə'zədi lɪnə lʊ:m fɪ mʃəmnaʔ nftɾ bɪfʃum ... rəhna gəlnə lɪ:k wəzdi lɪnə fɪ mʃəmnaʔ lʊ:m/ (prepare some pancakes] for breakfast today... I ordered you to prepare some pancakes today ...). The gender stereotypes do capture women as social beings whose primary responsibility is domestic tasks; therefore, they are highly stigmatized if their interests overcome the domestic sphere (Mills, S. 2008 40). For instance, the character Moha in *Khnist R'mad*, scene 15, in the data above, addresses *Khnist R'mad* as: /mra rəhbətha hɪvə darhə rəzəl hʊwə lɪ χəsʊ ɪmfɪ ɪtərəd rəzə ʒlɑ bəra ... fhəmət [mra nəqma mən bəzɔd məkənət rəzma fɪ darhə wəlat kədu:r tɒz rɪlɑ/ (women have to stay at home, the men who have to work outside... a conscious woman is grudge: she was at home receiving what her husband brings her, now she became a seller of snails). The gender stereotypes are also illustrated in TV commercials. An example can be given from an *Afia* advertisement when the men's voice says, /zɪt zəfɪə mərɪbɪə fərɪ vɑ lɑ'la ... tʌvɪ hətɪ wəzdi ... wɑ:hɑ:hɑ:h ə mʊlɑt dɑr/ (the oil *Afia* is Moroccan and prepared for you, Moroccan woman ... cook, prepare food and place it on the table ... good news for you, the Moroccan housewife). Another example is given from *3ors Eddib* Moroccan film, Scene 6: Moulay Ismail to his wife, /brɪt nərəf fɪn kəntɪ kədu:rɪ fɪ znoqɪ buhdək, məzəndəf lɪmra lɪkɪtχəz/ (I want to know where you were, you were wandering outside alone. Women are never allowed to go out alone). Women's roles are traditionally associated with being devoted housewives and mothers conforming to the rules and norms dictated by social beliefs. Another example can be taken from *Lalla Fatima* sitcom season 2, episode 23, scene 6, when character Ahmed Benzizi says to his wife, /ntɪ d'ɪfjɑ rɪr flmənɪkɪr dɪvələk ʊ nʃəv məʃʊlɪtk/ (look after your beauty, and forget about your responsibility as a housewife). Another illustration is given from *Lalla Fatima* sitcom, season 3, episode 5, scene 4 when the character Ahmed Benzizi addresses his wife who wants to drive; he said to her, /ntɪ mra məkətərfɪ tʃə:ɡɪ/ (you do not drive well as you are a woman). Such an example reinforces the idea that women's full responsibility lies in domestic tasks, and her interests and jobs shouldn't touch tasks and social activities that are already dictated by social norms as purely male oriented.

Another aspect where the gender stereotypes manifest is in society' use of titles that replace women's names by their husbands' when they get married (Mills, S. 2008 62). In the Moroccan contexts, women are addressed as /madam flan/ or /mrat flan/ (the wife of a man). The example can be taken from *Kolna Mgharba* sitcom, episode 1, scene 8 when Bouazza says to Abdellatif referring to KENZA, Abdellah's wife, /mrat ʃɪ Abdellah məʃɪbɑ kəhla/ (Abdellah's wife is a huge catastrophe). The woman loses her name after getting married: she is always called after her husband's name. This proposal is remarkable as sexist since the man keeps his full name even after marriage.

#### **4.3 Reification in Moroccan TV shows**

Mills Sara (2008 26) argues that women are addressed as a "bitch". Such a proposal strengthens the data found above that consider women's bodies as the source of sexuality and adultery if they are not controlled by their husbands' authority. This idea can be illustrated by the example given from *Lalla Fatima* sitcom season 1, episode 6, scene 6, when the character Omar says to one of the female singers, /Rɑ'nɪ lɪvɑ 'səlbənɪ/ (sing the /'səlbənɪ/ song for me). Crawford (1995 133) argues that sexual, humorous contexts are made by men as a way of keeping women under their authority. The men, therefore, are the dominant of the public spaces, but women are always seen as sexual tools of public criticism (Crawford 1995 146). This can be well illustrated in *Lalla Fatima* comedy season 1, episode 7, Scene 7, when character Omar says to Hlima, his beloved, /ʃ'χəftɪnɪ wəqfɪ rɪr nfdɑr mə:k/ (you made me feel fainting, just stop there, I need to speak to you). The woman, according to social norms and rules, is regarded as a sexual being, and the sexual harassment illustrated in this scene is treated as normal as the male in the social, traditional belief is right to sexually harass women and treat them as sexual objects. Women are culturally described as: /fɪχɑ/ (slut), and women's marriage to men is understood as an obligation since the man is seen as the one who covers the woman. This is well illustrated in *Khnist R'mad* Film, Scene 21, when character Moha said to Laoud Lqari, /mʊlɑv brɑ ɪtʒwəz bɪhɑ bɑf fɪkəmhɑ wɪrɑ'bɪhɑ/ (Moulay wants to marry her in order to control and to discipline her). The woman is always regarded by social beliefs and norms as a child who needs to be raised and disciplined by her husband. The latter is depicted by social conventions and traditions as the one who is responsible for correcting women's behaviour.

#### **4.4 The dismissive attitudes in TV shows**

The stigmatized linguistic discourse is also manifested in trivializing women's interests and social activities. Such discourses are embedded in humorous contexts such as comedies. Sexism can be indirect and tied to humorous speech (Mills, S. 2008, p.140). Such a proposal justifies my option for Moroccan comedies to unravel how sexist language is proclaimed. Humorous contexts are

not made innocently but rather carry gendered stereotypes. Within humorous contexts, men are more invited to make fun of jokes about women, which, in fact, need to be corrected (Sunderland. 2007 213). An example can be given from what Ahmed Benzizi says to his daughter in *Lalla Fatima*, season 3, episode 5, scene 6, /'lɪ rkəb mɜɑ məmɑk fɪ tʃɔmɔbɪl bkɑtrɛt zɔdɪf rɑdɪ ɪwə'li zɑndu 'dɔbəl tʃɑj fɪ zəbɪɑ dɪvɑlɔ/ (the one who got in the car with your mum, with so much crashing, will have a double size in his front). The scene represents men's sexist language against women, but because it is embedded in a humorous context, the TV audience considers it natural and gender free. However, the fact is that it carries gendered stereotypes which depict women as less skilful in male oriented activities such as driving. Another example of dismissive attitudes can be given from sitcom *L'auberge*, episode 3, Scene 1: Kamal to his wife, /zɑndɑk ɪʃhɑb lɪk ɦɑɑ ɧɔ:k rɑdɪ tbdɑy tɛrɑwɪtɪ, aʧɑnsɔjɔ ... bɑrɑkɑ mən lhɑdrɑ lɧɑwɪvɑ/ (pay attention, it is not because you are beside your brother that start shouting at me ... zip it). This example illustrates that women's speech is regarded as nonsense. Trivializing women's talk is also used in commercials. In the *Delicia* advertisement, the man's voice represented in *Tajine* says to *Flifla*, a female character in the ad representing pepper, /flɪflɑ wɑʃ mɑzɪtɪʃ mən nɑmɪmɑ ... fɪn hɪɑ ɦɑfɪdɑ mɔlɑt dɑr/ (Flifla, you are not fed up with gossiping, where is Hafida, the housewife). Women's talk is regarded as a kind of gossip: women, when they speak, are depicted either as speaking for the sake of speaking or as saying bad things about others. In this example, the man is represented as the one wise: he speaks at the right time and place, saying only what is important, but women, as immature, need to be directed by men.

## 5. Conclusion and implications

The mass media's role is not only reduced to informing or entertaining its viewers, but its main objective lies in reinforcing gender stereotypes by creating false gender images and truths. The media, as a social power, serves the social beliefs and traditions that are made to propagate among people by influencing and negatively affecting their consciousness about gender portrayals. The mass media creates gender ideologies (Foucault, 1995) through the transmission of false understandings and interpretations of gender roles. The mass media is dominant and imposes its full control over people through the creation of dominant ideologies (Durham and Kellner, 2006).

The conclusions and implications of the study come to highlight the various linguistic types of gender ideologies depicted by the mass media as a tool for emphasizing traditional gender roles. The following conclusions are an occasion for encouraging readers to reflect on the conducted study and to consider its objective, which mainly lies in raising awareness towards what the media is trying to mislead the audience through making the gender stereotypes addressed in films, sitcoms, or in advertisements seem natural and normal.

The present conclusions play a salient role that is manifested mainly in solidifying the argument being discussed above and making it more convincing and impactful. They also provide insights into upcoming research and pave the way for more exploration in future related topic studies.

### 5.1 Study Limitations and suggestions for future research

The present study uncovers the stigmatized linguistic discourse used against women in Moroccan mass media. Departing from the standpoint that the mass media provides reflections of women's representations in Moroccan society, the paper studies a set of Moroccan films, sitcoms, and advertisements. However, the current study may not deal with all forms of the linguistic stigmatized discourses that exist in patriarchal societies like Moroccan society. Other forms of sexist language daily communicated in Moroccan society may include the use of profane words that are directly addressed to women. The use of such slang generally describes women's adulthood and evil. The profane words are explicitly addressed to women. The current research, for this reason, paves the way for future research to be done in the field of gender and language, more particularly in the stigmatized discourse used to describe women as a source of evil and problems.

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