Social Media Representation of Moroccan Women in Compulsory Military Service: A Critical Discourse Analysis

Mohammed Derdar
Chouaib Doukkali University, El Jadida, Morocco
Applied Language and Culture Studies Lab (ALCS)

Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of women's participation in compulsory military service and the ways social media represent female participation. The study is mainly concerned with some YouTube comedy videos which deal with gender representation in Moroccan military service which became mandatory for both sexes in August 2018. The ultimate goal of the study is to examine the ways social media portray female's participation, and the ideology which lies behind this representation. Nine YouTube videos on compulsory military service were selected and analyzed using a critical discourse analysis. The findings show that there is a persistent negative representation of the female recruits who are represented as physically and mentally uncapable of doing the military service like their male counterparts. This gender bias is underpinned through a satiric manner to target a large number of YouTube users. It is hoped, therefore, that this study will raise awareness about the problem of undermining women's contribution to compulsory military service and other civic women's rights. A major recommendation of the study is related to the promotion of a Moroccan digital feminism capable of fighting such gender inequalities through adopting a counter narrative.

Key words: social media, gender, representation, military, Morocco

0. Introduction

Social media have proved to be powerful means in bringing social issues to the forefront, enabling citizens to voice out their demands, denouncing social injustices, and hence forcing policy makers to act. In particular, social media have played a crucial role in bringing gender issues to the attention of a wider public. In Morocco, a bunch of violence against women issues have been brought to the spotlight, especially through Facebook and YouTube. Incidents of rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence, and child sexual abuse have been made viral and Moroccans, from all walks of life, could speak their opinion of such crimes. This marks the positive side of social media regarding advocating women's rights. However, social media have recently dealt with women's access to certain civic rights with bias and discrimination.

One area where Moroccan social media have treated women negatively relates to women's participation in compulsory military service. The service was made mandatory for both sexes in 2018; however, social media have presented a gender biased image on female's participation in this civic duty. A flood of videos, photos, memes, blogs, and other materials have been posted and circulated among social media users. Most of these materials have presented a negative portrayal on female' participation in compulsory military service.

This study focusses on the issue of Moroccan women's participation in compulsory military service and the ways they are portrayed by social media. The study is mainly concerned with the YouTube comedy videos that deal with the issue. This study addresses two main research questions: (1) Do such YouTube videos represent female military recruits on an equal footing with their male counterparts? (2) What discursive and semiotic strategies do the text producers use to underpin their ideology? To answer these questions and others the remainder of the paper is structured as follows: section one provides the background of the study; section two is about the framework of analysis; section three deals with the methodology; section four presents and discusses the findings; finally, section five concludes.

1.Background

On 20 August 2018, which marks the 65th anniversary of the Revolution of the King and the People, the Moroccan Ministerial Council approved the Compulsory Military Service Bill. The new draft law stipulates that both men and women, aged 19 to 25 are subject to a 12-month compulsory military service. Moroccans who are over 25 years are eligible for an exemption; however, they can still be called upon until the age of 40 if the reason for their exemption is no longer relevant. The bill grants exemptions for citizens with health problems, married people, and those supporting their families financially (Kasraoui, 2018). In 1999, Morocco reduced the length of the service to 12 months, but in 2007, king Mohammed IV abolished mandatory service.

King Mohammed IV gave instructions that 10000 male and female conscripts be called to mandatory military service in the year 2019, before bringing this figure to 15000 in the next year (Al Arabia English, 2019). Conscripts are to be paid a sum of 2000 dirhams per month. Refusal to abide by the law calling for the service is punishable by up to three months in prison and a fine (Al Batyawi, 2018). According to Abdellatif Loudiyi, the delegate minister in charge of the National Defense Administration, the new law comes under the king's instructions and is in line with the provision of article 38 of the Moroccan Constitution which states that all citizens should contribute to the defense of the homeland and its territorial integrity.

The Moroccan public opinion is divided over the return to compulsory military service. Some people see it as a gainful employment for the youth, others view it as a tool to curb increasing protest movements. In this vein, Soumaya Nouamane Guessous, a Moroccan sociologist, said that the military service works in a structural framework complementing the education system, which is undoubtedly deficient; she thinks that the service will convey citizenship, civil values and social cohesion that the youth massively lack (as cited in Guerraoui, 2018). In the same line of thought, sociologist Abdelkarim Belhaj said that the compulsory military service is part of an effort by the state to mobilize the youth to take side with the state's policy and be patriotic citizens (as cited in Guerraoui, 2018).

In fact, the period 2017-2018 was characterized by widespread public discontent. It started in October 2016 in the Rif region, then the protests moved to the province of Jerada in January 2018. The authorities responded with violence to these protests and arrested hundreds of activists (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Also, in April 2018, the boycott campaign succeeded in mobilizing hundreds of thousands of citizens to boycott three large companies (Sidi Ali, Central Danone, and Afriquia). Moreover, during the second half of 2018, the phenomenon of protests inside football stadiums was intensified. Therefore, it is evident that the main motives behind the decision to restore compulsory military service are essentially of a political and social nature. Politically, the decision came in the wake of growing social protests, of which youth are the main fuel (Hamoudi, 2019).

2. Critical Discourse Analysis as a Theoretical Framework

This study takes critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a theoretical framework. It tends to explore and analyze the relationship between discourse, gender and ideology in comedy YouTube videos on women's participation in compulsory military services. According to Van Dijk (1993), the study of "the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance" is the crucial way through which CDA examines issues of social inequality. Going beyond linguistic analysis, CDA is politically committed and takes the sides with oppressed groups through unveiling power abuse with a view to changing it (Wodak, 2002; Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk 1993).

CDA is concerned with analyzing how those in power make use of language to shape opinions, justify their privileged positions, and hence maintain their socio-economic and political dominance. It is 'critical' in the sense that it aims to uncover the role of discursive practice in the maintenance of social world order, including those social relations that involve relations of power like gender relations (Jorgence & Phillips, 2002). Using Foucault's (1980) words, it is concerned with exploring the relationship between meaning, power, and knowledge. Therefore, its major focus is political because it aims at dismantling hierarchical power relations which polarize the world order into privileged and oppressed groups (Huckin 1997; Van Dijk, 2001).

CDA is founded on the idea that there is unequal access to linguistic and social resources that are controlled institutionally. In fact, it is primarily concerned with institutional discourses which control areas such as the media, education, politics, and gender. One of the key concepts of CDA is the analysis of the 'naturalization' of certain representations as 'common sense' (Fairclough, 1989); a common-sense discourse entails being seen as dominant so that other alternative interpretations become entirely suppressed or ignored. CDA is, thus, concerned with such normalized representations and hidden agendas which impact people's life.

To uncover hidden ideologies, critical discourse analysts consider texts as artifacts which do not exist isolated from social-cultural, economic, political, and historical contexts. Consequently, an interdisciplinary approach is seen as the best method to reckon with ideologically loaded texts. In the case of media texts, for example, it is practically crucial to base text analysis on a combination between van Dijk's socio-cognitive model, and Fairclough's socio-cultural method. Van Dijk'd approach of CDA involves cognitive/mental structures which entail both personal and social cognitions, beliefs and goals as well as emotions and evaluations which polarize world views into the positive US and the negative Them (van Dijk, 1995).

Like van Dijk, Fairclough's (1995) model is based on three levels of analysis. The first level is "text analysis", which includes both micro and macro levels of text structures. The second level is analysis of "discourse practice," through which texts are produced and received; this dimension involves analysis of the process of production, interpretation, distribution, and consumption. It is concerned with how people interpret and reproduce or transform texts. The third level relates to analysis of "social practices", focusing in particular on the relationship between discourse, power and ideology; that is, this dimension of analysis deals with the impact of the text within a societal context.

CDA is of vital importance for feminist theory as well. It is deployed in terms of digging into texts to unveil those ideologies which tend to naturalize and justify gender power relationships. Taking this as a springboard, some feminists (Cameron, 1998; Lazar, 2005) offer a rationale for highlighting a feminist perspective in CDA and call it feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA). Feminist critical discourse analysts put their energies into the theorization and analysis of the "particularly insidious and oppressive nature of gender as an omni-relevant category in most social practices" (Lazar, 2005, p. 3).

The major aim of FCDA is to provide a critique of the discourses which reproduce, maintain and justify gender power relations in which men are systematically privileged as a dominant social group, and women are disempowered as an inferior social category (Lazar, 2005). In this regard, Lazar (2005) states that FCDA aims to "show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities" (P.142). Therefore, feminist discourse analysts share much in common with CDA practitioners in terms of analyzing the connection between discourse, power and ideology. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model, Fairclough's socio-economic method, and Halliday's systematic functional grammar are of paramount importance for FCDA.

What particularly differentiates FCDA from CDA is that the former has developed a more critical theory of gender, a theory which has been influenced by third-wave feminism and post-structuralism. Here, gender is seen as a fluid and multiple variable which is continuously constructed as a range of masculine and feminine identities within and across individuals of the same biological sex. Put differently, gender is both socially and individually constructed and it interacts with other aspects of identity, such as ethnicity, age, class, sexual identity, and with power relations, thus gender is not discursively enacted in the same way for women and men everywhere (Butler, 1990; Lazar, 2005).

3. Methodology

This study is based on a critical discourse analysis of 9 social media comedy videos drawn from YouTube TV channels. The videos deal with the theme of Moroccan compulsory military service. The aim of this study is to explore the ways females are depicted when it comes to taking part in the compulsory military service which has become a mandatory duty for both sexes. Table below presents the selected YouTube channels and the titles of the videos.

Name of channel	Video titles
Tarik et Rachid	Dariat wa lmsharmline fi tajnid al ijbari (Girls and delinquent boys in compulsory military service) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FZhHjqeRZ8
L3alwa & Fartout	Awel juj jahom tajnid ijbari (The first two boys invited to compulsory military service) Youtube.com/watch?V=xlXAe1v5iFO
Taxi TV	Kahlush msha ltajnid alijbari (Kahlush went to compulsory military service) Youtube.com/watch?V=64-3TP1e-UB
Badr Tahir	Al Marrakchiyin fi tajnid al ijbari (The Marrakechis in compulsory military service) Youtube.com/watch?V=qronjsByggM&t=66s
BS One	Maqleb tajnid ijbari lil fatayat (Hidden camera on compulsory military service for girls) Youtube.com.watch?V=qT_OMWPqrFU
Hassan & Mohsine	Atajnid al ijbari (Compulsory military service) Youtube.com/watch?V=ac9gotDihAA&t=29s
Amine Filali TV	Fash katamski ltajnid al ijbari (When you go to compulsory military service) Youtube.com/watch?V=COWRS-3x1o1
Ghwila	Atajnid al ijbari (Compulsory military service) Youtube.com/watch?V=G7UWCZEad3g
Sparta vevo	Atajnid al ijbari fi Al-maghrib (Compulsory military service in Morocco) Youtube.com/watch?v=LRn-ok_oh54
Abdo valogs	Labnat fi tajnid al ijbari (Girls in compulsory military service) Youtube.com/watch?V=WMdvfejuKxE

After watching these videos, I embarked on transcribing them, and then analyzing them within a CDA framework. While reading the transcribed texts in meticulous detail, a number of CDA tenets came to surface. Some of these tenets which seem to be predominant in the selected texts include semantic macro-structures and lexical choices.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Semantic macro-structures

Semantic macro-structures - also called macro-propositions - are the topicalized issues used to systematize or make explicit the thematic notions of a particular discourse. Such notions are presented explicitly or implicitly, and they are meant to lay emphasis upon certain global meanings of text and talk. In the case of the selected videos, the most predominant macro-structures which address Moroccan women's participation in compulsory military service include: (1) compulsory military service is uniquely a man's job (tajnis al ijbari lrjel); (2) compulsory military service requires men's strength (tajnid khasscu sahet rjal; (3) women are good at singing and dancing, but not at military service; (4) military service for boys, cosmetics for girls.

A fine-grained meticulous analysis of these texts lead to the assumption that the text producers aim at stressing the binary opposition Us versus Them; the 'us' represents men and the 'them' represents women; the us/men are capable of undertaking military service while the them/women are not capable of doing so; even when they take part, they are represented lacking the necessary requirements. Indeed, the texts are laden with a gender ideology that excludes women from the realm of military service. According to this ideology, the military space is a male's space par excellence and women should not strive for it. This ideology of inclusion/exclusion is reinforced through the use of direct semantic macro-structure like the above-mentioned ones, and it is also stressed indirectly through the use of male agency.

Almost all the participants in the texts are male characters; the only video where there are female recruits is the one by Abdo valogs, "Labnat fi tajnid al ijbari" (women in compulsory military service). However, the roles of the female recruits in this video are played by men. This shows that women are excluded not only from taking part in the military service, but also from acting this role through social media.

Other macro-propositions are stressed through depicting the female recruits using their bodies as weapons to fight 'the enemy.' For instance, in Tarik and Rachid's video, two female recruits are depicted in a negative way. One said to the other that a bomb went off and wiped out her make-up. This incident, albeit funny, is meant to relegate the female sex to a body rather than a mind. In other words, women are here reduced to a passive category that is far from fighting in the battle field like males do. According to this YouTube video, women are shown to have a unique tactic in military fighting which has to do with using their body parts. "What shall I do with the enemy? One girl asks another. "Just raise your hands and show him your bosom; he will fall down," her partner answered. Therefore, the notion of using the female's body as a weapon to fight the enemy/man is topicalized.

Depicting the female recruits as a superstitious category is also topicalized in the video by abdo vlogs. In this video, the military chef asks the girls to show him how they can kill 'the enemy' in the battle field; the girls then sat around a smoky fire and started practicing superstition through cartomancy. Upon seeing this, the colonel asked in astonishment, "what are you doing?" "We are fighting the enemy; this is how women fight the enemy!", the girls responded. The chef then got raged and shouted at them: "you witches! you superstitious women!" This functions as a metaphor that superstition is a woman's job per excellence. Women, according to this metaphor, are superstitious even during military service. It seems that the producers of this text aim at propagating a sexist attitude to female's participation in compulsory military service. Another argument used in Abdo vlogs' video is related to women's interest in entertainment rather than in military training. At the end of the video the colonel wants them to have a break, but instead of having a break they start dancing and singing popular music in a delirious manner.

Another macro-proposition relates to the metaphor of the military uniform and its feminine signification. Ghwila's video presents six male recruits in the military camp. One of the military rules the trainees have to abide by is safeguarding 'the chastity' of the uniform they wear. "Sliman, this military uniform should be treated like your wife!", says the military chef. This statement connotes that the uniform is a wife that requires the protection of her husband. In this context, the macro-proposition of treating the uniform as a woman has a deep social structure which relegates the military uniform to femininity and the act of wearing it to masculinity. So, the relationship between the male soldier who wears, and the worn uniform/wife hints to sexualizing the female body. When the chef asks another male trainee what the uniform represents for him, the trainee replies: "Sliman's wife, my chef!". The right answer should be "my wife, my chef!". This role reversal incident may be interpreted as a sign of prostitution and infidelity when it comes to women's presence in the military service.

Lexical choices

From a feminist critical discourse analysis perspective, the prevailing conception of gender is understood as an ideological structure that divides people into two groups, men and women, based on a hierarchical relation of domination and subordination, respectively (Lazar, 2015). In the same line of thought, Weedon (1997) asseverates that patriarchal gender ideology is structural; it is enacted and renewed in society's institutions and social practices, which mediate between the individual and the social order. In the case of the10 elected comedy texts, Lazar and Weedon's feminist arguments are at play as reflected in the language of the texts.

In the comedy text by Tarik et Rachid, titled "dariyat wa lmsharmline fi tajnid al ijbari" (girls and delinquent boys in compulsory military service), the theme of the text, as reflected in the title, is that corrupt boys in particular and girls in general do not fit for military service. Here, the two words 'lmsharmline' and 'girls' are used in an equivalent semantic context. The word msharmal (corrupt guy) has a negative connotation in Moroccan culture; a 'msharmal' is a criminal, a drug dealer, a robber, a rapper; he is a good-for-nothing person and most of his life is spent in jail.

Such a person is dangerous and a constant threat to himself, let alone to society. The 'lmsharmline', according to the text at hand, should not have a place in the military service, and since the word 'girls' is put in the same context, the latter should be excluded from the military task as well.

To justify the idea that girls are not fit for military service, the same text by Tarik et Rachid, depicts two female recruits in the military camp; they are getting irritated because a bomb has exploded and ran-down their make-up. On another occasion, one female recruit asks her friend: what shall I do when the enemy appears? The other female recruit answers thus: "Just raise your hands; show him your bosom and he will fall down." Here the used vocabulary (make-up, raise, hands, bosom) showcases the female body in a dismembering sexy manner. This means that women are not good at using weapons to fight the enemy, but they are experts at using their body parts. The pronoun 'him' refers to the 'enemy' who is male; this male is depicted as an experienced fighter, yet he loses power and falls down when he sees denuded woman's breasts.

Another relevant example where language is used to avouch women's inferiority and uselessness as military recruits is found in the comedy text by Abdo Vlogs. The text/video depicts six head- covered women standing in line in front of a male military chef who gets out of his tent and asks the female recruits: "What do you want?" "We want to enlist in the compulsory military service", they replied. The chef seems astonished upon hearing their answer. He only keeps shouting "yalatif yalatif yalati …!" (damned damned damned…!) Then, he asks these questions as if he is sure of a negative answer: "Are you sure you want to do compulsory military service? Don't you know this is a tough task?

Again, the lexicon used by the chef relegates the female characters to an inferior other that is uncappable of undertaking the military job. Even the names given to the female recruits (roles played by males) in this text is worth pondering upon. One is named Khadija Chouwafa (chouwafa means fortune teller in Moroccan Arabic); another one is named Nisrine Hnaiqza (hnaiqza means a reckless trouble maker woman); a third one is called Fatima Hamaqa (hamaqa refers to a good-for-nothing idiot woman); a forth one is called Ito Flifla (chili pepper). Therefore, the choice of these names is not random, but aims at serving the patriarchal ideology, an ideology that employs language to maintain men's supremacy in all domains, and the military realm is no exception. The text consumer is forced into wondering whether the holders of such names as Chouwafa, Hnaiqza, Hamaqa, and Flifla are capable of undertaking the military duty. At the end of the video when a bomb goes off in the battle field, all the female fighters disperse in panic. This incident is meant to confirm the idea that women are uncapable of undertaking the military service.

5. Conclusion

This paper has dealt with the social media's representation of Moroccan women's participation in compulsory military service. The findings show that social media, especially YouTube comedy videos depict female military recruits in a negative manner. Using CDA as a model of text analysis, it has been found that the domain of military service is treated as a masculine realm in the 9 selected videos. The analysis of the videos through text macro-structures and lexical choices has made it clear that the task of military service remains a male's job in the popular mind and social media tend to reproduce and reinforce this stereotypical belief. Despite making the duty of military service mandatory for both sexes, individuals still look at female's contribution as secondary. Therefore, it is very important to put a resistant strategy into action. This strategy should first and foremost raise awareness about the repercussions of gender misrepresentation in social media. This should occur in sync with adopting a counter narrative model, a model that has to be undertaken within a digital feminist framework. The latter should be the ultimate goal of a Moroccan digital feminism that should undertake, amongst other gender empowerment tasks, fighting all forms of symbolic violence against women and replacing the negative images with progressive ones as a form of counter narrative resistance.

References

Al Arabia English. (2019). Morocco officially restarts compulsory military service. Retrieved from http://english.alarabiya.net/news/north

Al Batyawi, H. (2018). Reinstates military service for women, men, August 2018. Retrieved from https://aawast.com/english/home/article 1370221

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity.* London: Routledge

Cameron, D. (1998). Gender, language and discourse: A review essay. *Signs: Journal of Women   in Culture and Society,* 23 (4), pp. 945–973

Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. London: Longman.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. London: Longman.

Guerraoui, S. (2018). Morocco brings back compulsory military service, but details are scarce.   Retrieved from https://thearabweekly.com/morocco-brings-back-compulsory-militaryservice-details-are-scarce

Hamoudi, S. (2019). Compulsory military service aims to absorb youth dissatisfaction, yet it is   unlikely to succeed in achieving this goal. Retrieved from https://mipa.institute/6451

Huckin, T. (1997). Persuasive rhethoric in linguistics: A stylistic study of some features of the language of Noam Chomsky. In S. Hunston & G. Thompson (Eds.), *Evaluations in Texts*.   Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Human Rights Watch. (2018). Torture suspects disfigure collective trials. Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/en/news/2018/11/30/324664

Jorgensen, M. & Phillips, L. (2002). *Discourse analysis as theory and method*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Kasraoui, S. (2018). Morocco's house of representatives passes mandatory service. Retrieved from https://moroccoworldnews.com

Lazar, M. M. (2005). Politicizing gender in discourse: Feminist critical discourse analysis as political perspective and praxis. In M.M. Lazar (Ed.), *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Gender, Power and Ideology in Discourse*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Van Dijk, T. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. Discourse and Society, 4 (3), pp.249-   284.

Van Dijk, T. (1995). Discourse analysis as ideology analysis. In C. Scheffner & A. Wenden (Eds.), *Langue and peace* (pp. 17-33). Aldershot: Dartmonth Publishing.

Van Dijk, T., A. (2001). Multidisciplinary CDA: A plea for diversity. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis*, pp.95-120.

Weedon, C. (1997). Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory (2nd ed.). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Wodak, R. (2002). What CDA is about- a summary of its history, important concepts and its developments. In R. Wodak and M. Meyer (Eds.) *Discourse Analysis*, (pp. 121-138). London: Sage.