



## The evaluation element in the Moroccan narrative of women subject to marital violence

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### Abstract

*This article addressed the following question: how do talk shows represent women subjected to marital violence? It concerns the way in which the media text acts to construct these women's identities. The extract we analyzed, which constitutes the media text that we reduced to the bare minimum to get access to the messages transmitted by one of the women subjected to marital violence, was accessed in a Moroccan talk show called Qesst Nnass (the story of people) in the Moroccan TV station Medi I TV. We treated this text as a narrative because it acts like a cognitive tool that mediates discourse and society. Dealing with this media text as a narrative has given us a chance to see how it is structured and how each part of this structure serves a definite purpose(s). A special focus was set on one structural element: evaluation. Its importance emanates from the insights it affords to the researcher about the psychological, cultural, social, economic, legal, etc variables of discourse.*

**Keywords:** Violence; women; discourse; evaluation; Labovian structure

## Introduction

In our analysis of the discourse of women subjected to marital violence (WSMV), we treated the texts they produced as narratives because they act like cognitive tools that mediate discourse and society. We will focus on one important element in the structure of the narrative, namely evaluation, which is one component of the narrative structure that consists of six elements: an abstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution, and coda (Labov, 1972). To accomplish this, we chose one of the stories of the WSMV in a Moroccan talk show called "Qesst Nnass" (the story of people), on the Moroccan station Medi I V, which was aired from 9/4/2013 to 2/10/2015. The "protagonist" of this painful story was Fatima and her story represents hundreds of similar stories of violence against women in Morocco.

For Toolan (1988), the evaluation is instrumental in founding the significance of the story as it rationalizes the narrative and the narrator's main message. It may involve a temporary suspension from the telling of the story proper and heighten the audience's interest at any time during the narrative (Labov, 1972; Mullins, 2012). In other words, opinions on the events of the story, alternative outcomes, or adding credibility to the story on the part of the narrator are evaluative options up the narrator's sleeves in case they are needed to make the story more persuasive.

As far as this narration component is concerned, the answer to the question "So what?" is key because the narrator finds it necessary to stop telling the story "what's going on" i.e.,

suspending narrative action and interrupting the sequence of temporally ordered clauses of the core narrative's complicating action in order to make a point (Labov, 1972; Mullins, 2012). Below, evaluative remarks made by Fatima are underlined and explained within the Moroccan sociocultural system and within feminist theory.

## The story of Fatima

*They spent three years of a calm marriage before the child was born, but when the child was one year and six months old, her husband started to beat her after his two brothers came to live with them for no reason and in front of them and then disappeared. He did not pay the bills. She was patient just for the sake of the baby as the husband used to leave her without money.*

This external evaluation, mentioned by Labov (1972), is meant to raise questions on the part of the audience as the narrator points toward the strange fact that the beating started to take place for no apparent cause. This violation of the narrative's cause-effect logic acts as an intensifier that is intended to attract the audience's sympathy. We have to clarify that Labov sees that external evaluation takes place when: a. the narrator stops the narrative to say what the point is, or b. when the narrator tells the listener what he/she thought at the moment of the events (indirect discourse addressed to the listener).

The theme of patience is advanced in this narrative segment as a response to the audience's implicit question about the rationale behind the decision to live with a violent husband

who beats his wife for no apparent cause. Mixing patience with the child's interest also intensifies the tempo of the narrative as we are all bound to believe that women sacrifice themselves to protect children, and addressing the pathos by referring to the family, children, mothers, the nation, religion, etc... has been proved as an efficient tool to persuade the general public about the legitimacy of any action although sometimes the cause-effect relationship is violated as in the case in hand.

*After a period, her husband beat her savagely, took away the child from her, and kicked her out of the house. She went to her aunt, who took her to the hospital and brought her the child. Her aunt told her to wait to see what would happen. After that, she realized that he sold all the furniture in the house; taken the money from the lease, and left for an unknown destination. She complained, but they told her that there is no theft between husbands and wives. After four months, in the tribunal, he beat her again and took her child. In the police station and in the tribunal, the authorities told her there was nothing they could do for her.*

Referring to the authority's proposition is yet another argument to justify her helplessness. We mentioned before that she was helpless because of her child and after she was helpless because the authorities did not have any measures to implement to get her rights. The embedded evaluation shows, among other things, the impotence of the system to protect women; thus the discourse of the official documents is contradicted and considered null and void in reality. As a matter of fact, we flagrantly realize, as with the other women, that there is no continuity between the two opposing types of discourse as the official one idealizes the situation and the women's discourse marks the total helplessness of this fragile category. Concerning embedded evaluation, Labov (1972) posits that it contains the following elements:

- a) The narrator quotes what he/she was thinking at the moment of the events.
- b) The narrator quotes his/her words to someone else in the story.
- c) The narrator introduces a third person/character who evaluates the actions, quoting that character's words.
- d) The narrator uses evaluative action, telling what people/characters were experiencing vs. what they said (often with the verb "to be" –"they were screaming"—vs. the narrative/complicating action—"they screamed.").
- e) The narrator departs from basic narrative syntax, using:
  1. Intensifiers: Gestures in the spoken narrative, quantifiers, repetition, ritual utterances.
  2. Comparators (negatives, futures, modals—auxiliaries): Negatives--comparing what happened to what could have happened, modals (would, could), futures—(will, won't), questions—(as speech acts), imperatives (implies that something different will happen if not followed),

comparatives—(comparative and superlative--as big as, higher than, the highest; similes, metaphors).

3. Correlatives progressives (be. . .ing), appended participles (sequence of verbs with -ing), double appositive.
4. Explicatives (add information looking forward or backward in time).

*Later she filed a complaint, and the authorities sent her to bejje3d (a Moroccan small town). At that time, she was not divorced yet. She made medical certificates that did not exceed eighteen days of disability, which means that they were judicially useless.*

This evaluative remark made by the woman refers to this crucial point in the current conflict between men and women, namely the interference of the medical institution with the judicial one. Giving an eighteen days disability certificate is like telling the court that nothing happened; in other words, doctors cover wrongdoers and the court's reaction to these medical documents in a passive way is a factor that promotes violence. It is like telling the violent husbands to beat, but not to kill!

*They told her that she had to be divorced in order to sue him. She did not find any solution. Later, she was divorced and she begged him to give her the child, but it was in vain. Before divorce, she had been battered four times but she forgave him at the police station because her family told her to be patient. His brothers were the cause as they used to tell him things about her; he told her that she was responsible for holding him in Laayoune (A southern city in Morocco).*

The evaluative remark refers us to the other stories in the show where women refer to the husband's family as accomplices and who form a clan to make the wife and the children suffer. Understanding this phenomenon is complicated in a Moroccan context as families negate the borders between the personal and the familial. Even when a man is married, he has to give priority to his old family at the expense of the wife who is generally perceived as a stranger, a person who comes to steal the husband from his mother, sisters, brothers, etc. In the Moroccan mentality, a man who sides with his wife for whatever reason is generally conceived as 'not a man, a man who listens to his wife, a man who is under the spell of the evil wife.

*She looked for him; they jailed him for two months only! She said, "I haven't been able to see my child for eight months now." She was battered four times and the last time he beat her, he used a construction tool, but she forgave him in the police station. Her aunt told her to forgive him because it was the first time, but he became even more violent afterward. Her family used to tell her to be patient. The judge told her that theft accusations between a husband and a wife are not taken into account in the Moroccan law. After that, he took the child away from her with the furniture. She said, "I think only about my child, not money."*

The direct quote summarizes the rationale behind her patience: the child. The child, under the current family law,

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should be under her custody, but the problem in Morocco has mainly to do with the implementation of the laws and this is an issue that should be debated publicly to find a quick solution if we want to call ourselves a country that aspires to be democratic.

*When she went to the authorities, they told her to go away. She found no solution and she even sent a letter to the former prime minister, Mr. Benkirane. "My solution is you.", she said. She could not find him as he was always escaping with the child because he lived in different houses of his family. He accused her of adultery too and his family was his witness, but his complaints were null and void. She suffered so much that she had to take drugs to sleep because the child was young. The police and the authorities told her to look for him, how! They were far away from her and if she went there, they would kill her. Nobody wanted to accompany her in her search. "Authorities are corrupt; they took money to cover him.", she said. She continued, "These people take money from him; I have no money; all I have is the option of death."*

This accusation of the judicial system is direct and unambiguous. In another country, this allegation would open a quick investigation. Bribery, another impediment that hinders the normal evolution of Morocco towards democratization, helps in the process of leaving the woman alone in her struggle to have her rights. The confessions of women like Fatima prove that the phenomenon is omnipresent, but as it is the case with all sorts of illicit practices, they are very hard to prove. This leaves women subject to violence in a dilemma as the only organism capable of solving their problems and making an end to their suffering sides with the person who can pay, and knowing that the Moroccan woman is in most cases materially deficient, the result is clear: despair and depression that push them to hope they would die. The question that comes to the surface in this type of situation is: where are human rights associations? The answer given by Fatima is clear.

*She complained in an anti-violence cell in Laayoune (a human rights office), but they did not do anything. "I eat a sandwich and I sleep in a ouali (a saint) because even my sister refused to host me.", she said.*

The evaluation of Fatima is very significant as her case does not only prove that the prevalent discourse in Tamkine (a Moroccan governmental document that seeks to eradicate violence against women), which is the articulation of the official Moroccan discourse on the ground, does not have any positive impact on women, but it also raises a big question about the role of human rights associations in lending a helping hand to this fragile category. This goes contra the discourse of human rights associations too, which is a discourse that criticizes the way the government handles the case. We normally anticipate a different treatment from these organisms. The conclusion we reach is very negative as we are faced with a huge gap between discourse and practice. This confirms what has been written in the feminist literature about women living in a patriarchal system. Kate Millet in her book *Sexual Politics* (1969) made it clear that "... our

society, like all other historical civilizations, is patriarchy. The fact is evident at once if one recalls that the military, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance – in short, every avenue of power ... including the coercive force of the police, is entirely in male hands" (p. 25).

Patriarchy prevails where positions of authority are appropriated by men in all walks of life: the economy, the law, religion, education, etc... (Johnson, 2005, p. 9). Patriarchy is a very important concept that helps in understanding the power relations established in society (Pillay, 2008). This key term in feminist studies is referred to as a means to account for the social and static inequality of women in terms of rights.

To a European feminist, this is really deranging, but in our society violence is naturalized as a taken-for-granted activity. According to Hunnicutt (2009, pp. 554-555), there are five arguments that can help explain violence against women like the case of Fatima :

-A theory of violence against women has to account for varieties in patriarchal structures—that is, a range of different patriarchal manifestations among cultures and clans.

-Men's violence toward women is a product of social structural conditions. To understand male behavior, it is necessary to reveal how men are situated in their own scheme of domination.

-A theory of patriarchy must contend with the potential divergence of structure and ideology. Varieties of patriarchal ideology may exist apart from structural conditions. Patriarchal ideology may endure despite structural gains in gender equality.

-The concept of patriarchy must be developed together with other forms of hierarchy and domination in which it is inextricably embedded.

-There are labyrinths of power dynamics in patriarchal systems. Violence against women cannot be understood as a simple formula of "oppressor and oppressed." Patriarchal systems must be envisioned as "terrains of power" in which both men and women wield varying types and amounts of power." The violence perpetrated against Fatima can be easily understood as we feel that the power network in the house where she lives with her husband's family is a 'terrain of power' where each individual tries to get the maximum benefit from the power relations at play.

A thorough analysis of this case is revealing as we are facing a situation where the woman does not only suffer because of the patriarchal system she is trapped in and the web of power she is caught within but also because of the wrong cultural values that people assimilate. That is why we side with Rodgers & Roberts (1995), and Gelles (1993), who theorize that the explanation of the violence phenomenon should be located within a broader social context and that focusing only on patriarchy and excluding more general factors will not give a clear image of what is really going on

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## Conclusion

We have introduced an example from a range of cognitive scripts related to the threats of a fragile category of women, which is an invitation to think about the need for change to enable them to face all sorts of challenges. The story analyzed, like the other stories narrated in the show, establish the woman subject to violence as the central character, who at the same time features like the recipient of the action, rather than an active participant in the events i.e., she is portrayed as vulnerable and as a problem for which solutions should be found. The violent husband, on the other hand, is presented as the active and dynamic agent. It is evident that the most important section in the story's structure is evaluation as it gives us insights into the cultural variable of discourse in context. The overall effect the woman tried to achieve is to evoke a sense of fear and a hypothetical failure by textually exploiting the evaluation element of discourse as a legitimation tactic.

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