

THE DEPICTION OF GENDER IN MOROCCAN POP LYRICS

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Abstract. The aim of the study is to investigate song lyrics within the most popular Moroccan Pop music from a cultural and a gender perspective, focusing on the depiction of both women and men. More specifically, the question that motivated the present study was: What cultural messages about women and men have been depicted to society through Moroccan song lyrics? Listening to music is the dominant hobby of a great majority of the population, as well as the fact that the lyrics of some popular songs are highly restrictive of gender roles (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009). The study questions the way the Moroccan Pop music reflects and constructs gender in society. The study used content analysis approach and analyzed twenty Moroccan popular pop song lyrics from 2016 to 2018 based on most watched music videos on YouTube. The investigation focuses on the gender of songwriters, and the nouns the songwriter use to refer to the concept of WOMAN and MAN.

Keywords: *Music, Morocco, Pop, Gender, Culture*

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INTRODUCTION

The Moroccan music industry has been improved through the years and all songs produced have some kind of message to it that is forwarded through the lyrics. Music is linked with the context in which it is produced, consumed and taught and the inter-relationship between music, society and culture has been researched for many decades. The current research investigates the depiction of women within the Moroccan pop music. This investigation is based on questions that convey the image of gender within pop Moroccan music and the cultural messages it conveys.

The most popular and vast music genre in Morocco is pop that has got millions of fans in Morocco and in the Arab world. A person may interpret that the aim of the pop music might not be to make a statement or convey a clear message, but to reach as many people as possible and gain popularity. Nevertheless, interesting aspect regarding the lyrics is the way certain things are depicted. The research paper raised the following research question: What cultural messages about women and men have been depicted to society through Moroccan song lyrics? The pop Moroccan music has different ways of expressing the image of gender. Thus, the way lyrics are structured and the

words the songwriter uses to describe certain things naturally have an impact on the song as well as the interpretation of it. In agreement with Citron (2000), the songwriter is affected by cultural circumstances that naturally affect the written piece.

Besides, the study will theoretically be based on cultural and gender perspectives. Green (1997) suggested that the general significance of art changes over history and differs between cultures. Bryman (2011) tackled the concept of constructionism in relation to culture in which he argues that culture is not a reality which affect humans, but the other way around. It is a reality that humans construct and constantly reconstruct; hence humans create culture and not the opposite. The category of "masculinity" is a type of social construction which is maintained through people's interaction with each other.

Social construction therefore varies with time and space. This approach also includes the type of language that is used to describe the different categories within social construction, such as masculinity and femininity. It is very crucial not to confuse between "sex" and "gender", since there is a difference between the two patterns. Sex is the biological classifications of humans into men and women however, gender refers to multiple ideas and values of culture originated from culture. According to Connell, (2009) the feminist movement's idea of power as a dimension of gender is relevant to discuss, and explain for instance the image of men as the ruling gender and the portrayal in media of women as passive and stupid. It also aims to discuss how the image of woman is portrayed into different categories through different cultural contexts.

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1. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1.1. Culture and music

The production of music has been an activity of human beings, both as individuals and collectives for thousands of years. Written texts, pictorial representations, and folklore sources provide evidence that people from all over the globe and from the beginnings of recorded history have created and performed music for religious rituals, civil ceremonies, social functions, storytelling, and self-expression. Music evokes diverse beliefs, views, and theories that explore its nature and meaning. According to Harris (1980, p.19), culture is “learned and shared behavior”, something in which feeling is expressed through a number of factors including “language, art, and religion”.

Radocy and Boyle (1979, p.27) claimed that “culture clearly affects musical behavior and that music may influence the culture in which it is produced”. There is a unique relationship that exists between music and culture. In other words, music can tell us many things about a particular culture through its instrument, instrument makers, and its performance structures that encompass the interaction between performers, audience and/or composers.

Furthermore, music reflects the cultural characteristics of a society. It is often the expression of idea, opinion, emotion, and mentality. Music is a medium through which to perceive the world, a potent instrument of knowledge. It is the language that has been traditionally linked to Man’s need to communicate feelings and experiences that cannot be expressed through common language (Hormigos, 2010).

Henceforth, music constructs our sense of identity through the direct experiences offered up by the body, time and sociability, experiences which enable individuals to situate themselves within imaginative cultural stories (Frith, 2003). Musical structures derive from specific cultural standards; that is why each society classifies sounds according to their functionality, thus we have music for dancing, for sensual pleasure, music that is light, religious, for prayer and consumption.

In today’s society, however, it is very hard to determine music’s true place in the world of culture, due to the rise of mass culture which has led to a massification of music in certain genres. Musical expression is a fundamental pillar of all societies. All human communities have musical expression as a

structural and integrating element. Music possesses an important value that derives from the nature of its language and its capacity for communication (Hormigos, 1988). The language of music is not that of common speech as it has no conceptual character but, even so, it can also express emotions and feelings.

1.2. Definition of Pop Music

Cambridge dictionary defines Pop music as “modern popular music, usually with a strong beat, created with electrical or electronic equipment, and easy to listen to and remember” (Dictionary.cambridge.org 2013). Pop music is also defined as the ever changing music favored by the people and although not specifically spread until the 20th century (Shinemusic.com 2013).

Songs produce multiple messages through lyrics. According to Citron (2000), the songwriter is affected by cultural circumstances that naturally affect the written piece. Klara (2012) investigated in her article “The Depiction of Women in Rap and Pop Lyrics” about a number of song lyrics from two different music genres, rap and pop. The study focuses on the cultural and a gender perspective in which a comparison between the two genres has been made. Her study analyses the nouns that songwriters use to refer to the concept WOMAN and how these differ between the two genres.

1.3. Gender roles in Pop Lyrics

The way gender is constructed today can come from many different cultural aspects. It can come from societal, family, or cultural norms, and in more recent times it can come from the media. Magazines and television have played a big role in how we perceive and construct gender and now popular music is starting to play a part as well. Popular music plays a particularly important role in the way we shape our views because a song on the top of the charts will sell hundreds of thousands of copies and will be played over and over on the radio receiving even more exposure, yet nobody cares about the messages that they convey to the listeners (Yocum, 2010).

Yocum (2010) stated that many hip hop songs are about men using women and having control over them. Others portray women as being property and sex objects or simply show lack of respect for women as human beings. Some songs use derogatory names for wom-

en to show subordination or tell stories about how they beat women up to show that men are more powerful. According to her, there is rarely a song that talks about a woman having more power than a man. Most songs represent a particular image; usually a man with a lot of money has girls all over him and controls them like he owns them, as if they could not think on their own.

Through music it is possible to represent social constructions regarding gender behaviors and roles and maintain traditions. Therefore, music can reinforce and preserve the traditional gender hierarchy. The globalization of world music markets and its profit oriented mechanisms has led to the commodification of the 'gendered otherness'. 'Otherness' is a symbol for an exotic, distant culture or people which is commodified to sell to the Western world (Luis Lemos, 2011).

Popular music today has the power to construct the public's view of each gender. Klara Gronevik's (2012) paper intended to examine this by analyzing the song "Right Round" by Flo Rida and shows how the song portrays the notion of gender, and then decides whether it supports patriarchy, denies patriarchy, or does both. The results show Right round song lyrics represents woman as an object that a man can pay for, a sexual object.

According to Helena Kim (2016), popular music lyrics largely serve two roles - they act as a guide to introduce and educate listeners to emotions, and they also help listeners come to terms with situations and experiences in their lives. For Helena Kim (2016), lyrics can evoke stereotypical model or socialization attitudes, especially for identifying the word gender. For example, the lyrics that little girls are made of "sugar and spice and everything nice" (nursery rhyme "What are Little Boys Made of?") and how boys are made of "snips and snails and puppy-dogs' tails" display a reflection of community culture, since it draws a clear line between girls and boys in the first place, and also assumes each gender has a different characteristic (Kim, 2016). Besides, the fact that children sing and chant such sexist lyrics; it shows that gender is more deeply stemmed in socialization than from biological factors.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This section presents the methodology of research used in the study to achieve the purpose and answer the research questions.

Furthermore, a critical discussion of the methodology will be held.

2.1. Instruments of the Study

The study is based on forty song lyrics from the pop Moroccan music genre (see Appendix1). It is thus a qualitative study where the investigation focuses merely on few of the songs within the selected music genre. To collect the data, the key words pop Moroccan artists were searched on Google, which resulted in lists of different artists within the genre from which they were manually picked out 20 artists. Furthermore, playlists of songs made by the different artists were searched and retrieved from Popnable 40 charts based on the number of viewers on YouTube. Before choosing songs they were examined to make sure that they contained nouns that refer to the concept of WOMAN and MAN. The songs were thus not completely randomly chosen but strategically selected to enable an analysis that would reflect the aim of the study. Importantly, one aspect that was not taken in consideration when collecting data was if the nouns were used in a positive or negative context.

2.2. Methodology

The current study was conducted based on a qualitative method to investigate a small part of one vast music genre. A qualitative methodology refers to research that produces descriptive information such as people's own written or spoken words (Taylor & Bogdan 1998:7). The reason behind choosing the Moroccan pop genre is that it would be reflected in different choices of nouns referring to the concept of WOMAN and MAN. The songs were gathered in a document and the nouns were located and counted with the search function in Microsoft Word. Although the songs contained a number of different types of nouns, some of them were deselected due to the fact that they were not as frequently occurring as the other nouns.

The method adopted in the present study was social construction. Therefore, the procedures that go along with this are first identifying how each gender is described in the songs. Then the next step would be based on the gender roles depicted in the lyrics. The research findings would show that mass media plays a huge role in our construction of gender and that popular music artists need to realize the messages that their songs are sending

out to their audience. This information is key because taking a chart topping song and see how many times it gets played or how many albums were sold would lead to a pretty large number and this number is directly correlated to the number of people who have heard this song and were affected by its portrayal of gender roles.

2.3. Music Selection

The top 20 songs by male artists and top 20 songs by female artists for the years 2016-2018 were compiled by the authors, using Popnable 40 charts (<http://www.Popnable.com>) to ensure that the music lyrics analyzed in this study have a wide audience. Because the Popnable website includes 40 charts month-by-month rather than reporting the top songs per year, the top ten songs for each year were determined by compiling the top ten songs per month, determining their peak position, and the number of months spent at peak position.

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the results and analysis of the investigation, based on the research questions. Firstly, the results are presented followed by an analysis of data. When gathering the data of the song lyrics, multiple types of nouns referring to the concept of WOMAN and MAN were found. The table below shows examples of which the types of nouns that were found and the number of tokens of each noun type in the lyrics. Nouns that occurred less than 5 times were deselected in the investigation.

Table1: Nouns referring to the concept

Nouns referring to the concept of WOMAN (target words)	Number of tokens in Moroccan pop lyrics: 20 songs	Nouns referring to the concept of MAN (target words)	Number of tokens in Moroccan pop lyrics: 20 songs
[<i>h?bibti</i>] my lover	13	[<i>h?bibbi</i>] my lover	13
[<i>ʃumri</i>] my life	8	[<i>ʃumri</i>] my life	4
[<i>zin</i>] or [<i>ʒazali</i>] beauty	57	[<i>sidi</i>] my Sir	5
[<i>tafla</i>] girl	8	[<i>rajal</i>] man	5
Total	86	Total	27

The word [*h?bibti*] and [*h?bibbi*] lover occurs 13 times in both genders. As the table shows the noun [*ʃumri*] life occurs in both genres with different amount of tokens. It is

rather clear that within the Nouns referring to the concept of woman there are different types of nouns used than within the Nouns referring to the concept of man. There are equal types of nouns represented in both gender but as they occur, Within the males' lyrics however, they do so in a larger number of tokens. Frequent noun referring to the concept of WOMAN is [*zin*] or [*ʒazali*] beauty; which are associated with negative values and will be named as "nouns of negative value" throughout the study.

3.1. Presentation of individual nouns

This section presents a close investigation of the nouns that have been found to occur in the 40 lyrics. The section is divided into subsections based on what nouns occurred referring to both genders and how they differ from each other. The terms "positive" and "negative context" are used in this chapter, which refers to the closest words surrounding the nouns. For instance, if the surrounding words create a context of negative connotation it is considered to be negative and vice versa.

3.2. Nouns occurring in Moroccan pop

In the following, the study will highlight a general introduction to the meaning of nouns. Subsequently, it will illustrate and analyze how these nouns are used in the data. Two nouns were found to occur in Moroccan pop lyrics referring to both woman and man: [*h?bibti*] and [*h?bibbi*] lover and [*ʃumri*] my life. In most occasions the possessive form my lover is used, seen in example 1, 2 and 3 of Males' lyrics.

1. Ya ʃumri yalawrida.
My life as flower (translated by the author).
2. ʃumri wala nssito 3andi 3ziz o rali.
My life I couldn't forget her to me she is dear and priceless.
3. Habibi mahani
My lover makes me suffer (translated by the author).
4. Darto mahbobi o safit niya
I have choosen him as my lover with good intentions (translated by the author).
5. Bghito obghani rah howa zemani
I loved him and he loved me he is my man (translated by the author).

The image of men being the ruling gender and in this case, as the possessive form is used, the artist indicates that he “owns” the woman. In this case, love is represented along with the physical appearance and the woman is not displayed as independent. While in as seen in example 4 and 5 from females’ lyrics, love represent marriage and commitment. Nevertheless, In the Moroccan pop lyrics there are several nouns that are only represented to refer to one gender and not the other such as; girl and beauty. the word [tafla] girl occurs only in males’ lyrics. The meaning of a word may be numerous, which also applies for the word baby. It partly refers to an infant or a woman that you are fond of but also to something that is small or adjusted to small children (COHA 2013). The meaning gives an innocent impression of the word.

1. Dak tafla ya nass fliha bayat fassas
That girl whom I spent the night protecting (translated by the author).
2. Jrit moraha wa chadani yakhoti tafla hadi majnona
I ran after her what a pity this girl is crazy (translated by the author).

In these examples the noun girl, referring to the concept of WOMAN is used in a positive context and rather frequently in the overall lyrics. The women that the singers address are women they care about and have strong feelings for. In example 1 as well as in several other pop lyrics, the artists seem to express an urge to protect the women which may be connected to the meaning of the word. As they use the noun [tafla] girl, it may indicate an image of the women being fragile and need to be taken care of which somewhat enhances the image of men being stronger. In the second example the woman is displayed as dumb.

While the noun beauty is used by male artists to praise women’s physical appearance. Moroccan pop lyrics do not include radical expressions that sexually objectify women. For example, Moroccan pop lyrics do not include western pop’s culture. However, there were still some lyrics that implied women were good for nothing but to be beautiful:

1. Zin malo malo zahi wala 3ala balo.
What’s wrong with the beauty, she careless and enjoying life (translated by the author).
2. Ghazali ghazali insan maho aadi.
My beauty is an abnormal human (translated by the author).
3. Zin zin zini ana.
That beauty is my beauty (translated by

the author).

Implications that all that is important to a woman is her looks, that a woman cannot be valued or loved if she is not pretty according to societal standards disclaim that women can feel worthy of themselves based on their abilities or substance (Sommers, 1995). Songs that focus on the importance of looks alone, like the example given above, direct impressionable teenagers into believing such social fallacies as looks are the most important factor in judging someone. Research shows that confidence and leadership abilities have a strong correlation (McCosh, 2012). Thus, Moroccan lyrics objectify women, which in turn lower their confidence, leading to a lesser likelihood of assuming a leadership position.

On the other hand, the words [rajal] man and [sidi] my Sir occur only in females’ lyrics

1. Ana machi choghli a sidi khalini deriya deriya beriti tablini.
I don’t care Sir please leave me, you easily wanted to charm me (translated by the author).
2. Rajal makayan bhalo fel qima safa la-wal fchadda flih nƙawal.
One man of a kind always the best whom I depend on during hard times (translated by the author).
3. Mabqit fahma walo yamkan siyad hbal.
I can’t understand anything; I guess the sir has gone crazy (translated by the author).
4. Dahaktini yasi w fakartini bel passi
You made me laugh Sir and you reminded me of the past (translated by the author).

Artists portray males as strong and powerful through subordination of themselves in their lyrics as it is shown in example 1 and 2. Some scholars also emphasize that women are not only constantly defined in relation to men, yet are also defined as subordinate to them. Therefore, women are socialized to acquire those features, which match them with a relationship of dependence on men. These features include gentleness, passivity and submission to always please men (McDowell & Pringle, 1992). However, the female artists in examples 3 and 4 used the noun in a sarcastic way to show their negative attitude towards males’ dominance. The artist in example 4 also emphasizes her unwillingness and resistance to dominant patriarchal relations in culture.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed at investigating a number of song lyrics of Moroccan pop music. The investigation focuses on what nouns the songwriter use to refer to the concept WOMAN and MAN, and in what ways these nouns depict women and men based on the meaning of the words as well as the contexts in which they occur. Eight different nouns were included in the investigation, each of which was used in a certain context. Overall, the results show that nouns referring to the concept of WOMAN and MAN that are connected to positive meaning and value occur in both genders but are more frequent within Moroccan female pop lyrics. In addition, nouns connected to negative meaning and value, are represented in the Moroccan males' pop songs.

There are several other ways that this study could have been carried out and it would have been better to further narrow it down by investigating only one gender instead of two. This investigation merely scratches the surface of something that would have been interesting to dig deeper into. This study illuminates certain patterns in each gender concerning what nouns are used, referring to the concept of WOMAN and MAN. The meaning of the nouns and what context they are in determines the depiction of women in the lyrics. This may be further investigated, perhaps looking at what impact the negative depiction of women and men has on people's view.

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Appendix 1

Male Singers and their songs

- Zouhir Bahaoui- Desole, Decapotable and Gracias
- Fnaire- Siri Siri
- Douzi- Amar
- Saad lamjerred- Ghazali and Ghaltana
- Zakaria Ghafouli- Hobino
- Chawki- Tsunami
- Nouamane Belaiachi- Madamti and Bent l houma
- Mok Saib- Je men fous
- Aymane Serhani- Nebghi tejini bsurvit
- Younes- I love you
- Mehdi Mozayin- Beddala
- Mido Belahbib- Raha tesnapili
- Tiw Tiw- Ma fille
- Hatim Amor- yama
- Omar and Rajae Belmir- Goulou
- Ayoub Africano- Bravo

Female Singers and their songs

- Zina Daoudia- Sayidati and Rendez vous
- Jamila- Blach
- Salma Rachid- Ach ja yedir
- Asmae Lamnawar- Ando zin
- Dounia Batma- Machi Choghli
- Samira Said- Mazal
- Hanane Lakhdar- Shnayi
- Ibtisamt tisskot- Bghani baayoubi
- Safae and Hanae- Dani Dito
- Souhaila Lachehab- Lik man walich
- Zineb Oussama- daba Hayane
- Karima Ghit- Mtelleaa Hajbo

- Khawla Benamran- Dahaktini yasi
- Maria Nadim- Disk Hyati
- Soma Dima- Ronaldo
- Tahra- Blanak Khawi
- Lamiae Zaydi- Dablio
- Kaoutar Berrani- Khalti
- Safae Hbirko- Yallah

