

Exploring Gender Constructs in Media Narratives

Badia Elharraki^{1*}

¹Sidi Mohammed Benabdellah University, Fez, Morocco

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the discourse of women who have experienced marital violence as represented in Moroccan media, with particular attention to how these women construct their narratives through strategies of authorization. The study investigates how survivors legitimize their accounts to portray themselves as victims, while simultaneously delegitimizing and condemning their abusive husbands. The primary source of analysis is the talk show Qesset Nnass ("The Story of People"), broadcast on Medi 1TV, a prominent platform where women articulate their lived experiences. By foregrounding authorization as a discursive strategy, the analysis highlights how these testimonies convey contextually embedded messages requiring careful interpretation to grasp their pragmatic force fully. The research is premised on the notion that media reflect and shape public understanding of sensitive social issues, functioning as a space where women validate their personal experiences and contest patriarchal norms. In this sense, the interaction between media content and audience reception becomes critical for examining how narratives of victimhood and resistance are constructed and negotiated. Methodologically, the study employs a mixed approach: a qualitative discourse analysis of televised testimonies is combined with a quantitative examination of audience comments, allowing for a more comprehensive assessment of how media discourse influences, and is influenced by, public opinion. The findings aim to shed light on the complex and reciprocal relationship between media, audience, and gendered power dynamics, thereby contributing to broader discussions on violence, representation, and women's agency in Moroccan society.

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1. Introduction

The persistent underrepresentation and misrepresentation of women, particularly those who have endured marital violence, remains a central problem in media discourse. Media representations are crucial in shaping public perceptions of social issues in many contexts. However, in patriarchal societies such as Morocco, media outlets often reproduce and reinforce gendered hierarchies of power. Fairclough (1995) notes that media discourse is never neutral but deeply embedded in social and ideological practices that

^{1*}Corresponding author:

Email addresses: badiaa.elharraki@gmail.com (Badia Elharraki)

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sustain inequality. Women's narratives are frequently framed in ways that emphasize vulnerability, reducing them to passive victims rather than recognizing their resilience, resistance, or capacity for transformation. This reductionist portrayal not only marginalizes women's agency but also obscures the structural and cultural complexities that underlie marital violence. As Gamble (2006) argues, stereotyping is one of the most persistent mechanisms through which gender hierarchies are reproduced.

The portrayal of women survivors of marital violence (WSMV) as one-dimensional figures has profound implications by neglecting to highlight their strength and coping strategies. Media discourse risks perpetuating harmful stereotypes that normalize gender-based violence. Such portrayals constrain societal understandings of the issue, fostering simplistic interpretations of victimhood rather than situating violence within broader socio-political and cultural frameworks. This aligns with Hall's (1997) view that representation constitutes reality, as it shapes how identities and social roles are constructed. In doing so, the media fails to provide an empowering space for women to redefine themselves beyond victimization. Moreover, as Hilton and Von Hippel (1994) contend, stereotypes are often naturalized through repeated media imagery, making it difficult for alternative representations to gain traction.

A further challenge lies in the limited scope of existing scholarship. Much of the academic work on the media representation of WSMV is rooted in Western contexts, where cultural frameworks, audience reception, and gender norms differ considerably. In contrast, North African and Middle Eastern contexts, including Morocco, remain underexplored. Sadiqi (2003) highlights the centrality of language in shaping gendered identities in Morocco, while Ennaji (2016) demonstrates how patriarchal structures deeply constrain women's political and social participation. Yet, systematic studies of how these dynamics are reflected in media discourse are scarce. Addressing this gap is essential for understanding the interplay between media narratives, gendered power relations, and audience perceptions in diverse cultural settings. Such an inquiry enriches comparative media studies and contributes to the global dialogue on gender, violence, and representation (Belknap, 2001; Gregg, 2007).

The state of the art in this field emphasizes the application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a methodological and theoretical framework for examining media discourse. CDA enables researchers to uncover the subtle yet pervasive ways in which power relations, ideologies, and social hierarchies are embedded in language (Van Dijk, 1988, 2000). By interrogating the linguistic and discursive choices in media texts, CDA reveals how certain voices are legitimized while others are marginalized. This is particularly relevant where media representation intersects with issues of gender and violence. Studies have shown that media can function as a double-edged sword: reinforcing structures of oppression or providing visibility for marginalized groups to challenge hegemonic norms (Weatherall, 2002; Van Leeuwen, 2007). In the case of WSMV, CDA offers a valuable framework for analyzing narrative strategies such as authorization, victimization, or resilience, and assessing how these shape public perceptions of women's roles and identities. By situating the study of WSMV within this broader scholarly context, the present research seeks to extend existing work by applying CDA to Moroccan media, a context that remains underexplored. As Ennaji (2005) stresses, Morocco's multilingual and multicultural fabric makes media discourse particularly complex, while Kilmartin (2000) reminds us that gendered selfhood is always constructed concerning cultural scripts of masculinity and femininity. Examining how Moroccan television programs such as *Qesset Nnas* portray women survivors of marital violence not only advances comparative media studies but also sheds light on the culturally specific ways discourse both reflects and shapes women's lived realities.

Media, gender, and critical discourse analysis

The concept of discourse occupies a central position in gender and language studies, where it is employed in multiple and sometimes overlapping ways. From a formalist perspective, discourse refers to language stretching beyond isolated words, emphasizing communication's structural and functional properties (Saussure, 1983). This view is closely tied to the linguistic tradition, which examines how language forms and patterns shape meaning in texts and interactions. In contrast, a poststructuralist orientation situates discourse within broader systems of meaning, foregrounding its role in producing and reproducing social realities (Foucault, 1980; Hall, 1997). Here, discourse is not simply a vehicle of communication but a constitutive force that organizes knowledge, identities, and power relations within society (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2010).

These different discourse conceptualizations are particularly significant when applied to the study of gender. In one sense, gender is constructed through its articulation in spoken and written texts, where

linguistic choices shape how femininity and masculinity are described, evaluated, and normalized (Cameron, 2018; Weatherall, 2002). How women and men are spoken about—or the terms used to describe their roles, actions, and identities—inevitably carries ideological weight. Research in various contexts shows how discourse reproduces gender stereotypes, from women in Iranian television advertisements (Akhavan & Ghasemi, 2020) to online news coverage in Turkey (Baz, 2021) and Vietnam (Ngo, 2020). These studies demonstrate that linguistic and visual strategies often marginalize women, reinforcing traditional roles while limiting representations of agency and empowerment.

On the other hand, gender can also be understood as a socially constructed system of meanings that transcends individual texts and interactions. From this broader vantage point, gender is a cultural framework that structures how people interpret and make sense of the world (McRobbie, 2007). In this sense, discourse is implicated in the very constitution of gender as a category of social life. The repeated circulation of particular narratives and images across media, institutions, and everyday talk contributes to the naturalization of gender norms, embedding them in common-sense understandings of reality (Lazar, 2005; Gokulsing & D'Silva, 2017). This conceptualization underscores the role of discourse in sustaining stereotypes and power asymmetries, since dominant meanings about gender are often presented as self-evident truths rather than as socially constructed and contested representations.

Fairclough (2013) proposes an influential analytical framework for understanding discourse, consisting of three interrelated dimensions that constitute any communicative event: the text itself, the processes of text production and reception, and the broader sociocultural practices in which both are embedded. The first dimension, the text, refers to a given discourse's linguistic features and organizational structures, including choices in vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and rhetorical devices. By analyzing these textual properties, researchers can uncover the explicit and implicit ways social identities, relationships, and ideologies are constructed (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). The second dimension focuses on the productive and receptive practices that surround the text. Texts are not isolated; they are produced with particular intentions, framed by institutional norms, and consumed in contexts that affect interpretation (Entman, 2004; Lee, 2019). For instance, a media broadcast on marital violence may be shaped by editorial policies or political agendas, while its reception depends on the audience's cultural values and personal experiences. The third dimension situates both text and practice within the wider sociocultural environment. Here, discourse is embedded in broader social structures, power relations, and ideological frameworks that constrain and enable communicative practices (Van Dijk, 2001).

In patriarchal societies, for example, media discourse surrounding women survivors of marital violence often reflects dominant gender ideologies, but it can also provide spaces for resistance and redefinition of identities (Moon, 2017; O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2012). By integrating textual analysis with examining production, reception, and sociocultural context, CDA enables scholars to move beyond surface-level interpretations toward understanding how language operates as a form of social practice. This multidimensional approach is particularly valuable for analyzing gendered media representations, where texts simultaneously reflect and reproduce unequal power dynamics while offering potential avenues for transformation (Lazar, 2007; Machin & van Leeuwen, 2016). Fairclough (1995) stated:

Critical discourse analysis of a communicative event analyzes relationships between three dimensions or facets: text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice. "Text may" be written or oral, and oral texts may be just spoken (radio) or spoken and visual (television). By "discourse practice," I mean text production and consumption processes. By "sociocultural practice," I mean the social and cultural goings-on of which the communicative event is a part. (Fairclough, 1995)

Van Dijk's approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) shares important similarities with Fairclough's model but also introduces distinctive emphases that make his framework particularly influential in media studies. Like Fairclough, Van Dijk conceptualizes discourse as having three interconnected dimensions: the text, the discourse practices, and the social practices (Van Dijk, 2001; Fairclough, 2013). The first dimension concerns the text, which is analyzed at micro and macro levels. The micro-level examines linguistic and grammatical structures, such as lexical choices, syntactic patterns, and cohesion devices, while the macro-level focuses on larger themes, topics, and overall discourse structures (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2010).

Importantly, this level of analysis also includes the interpersonal dynamics encoded within texts, revealing how power, solidarity, or distance are enacted through language (Cameron, 2018).

The second dimension addresses discourse practices and what Van Dijk calls “orders of discourse.” This includes constructing, interpreting, and distributing texts across different social domains. Media discourse, for example, is shaped not only by the linguistic structures within texts but also by the institutional routines of news production and the interpretive strategies employed by audiences (Entman, 2004; O’Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2012). In this sense, discourse practices link textual structures and the broader circulation of meaning, revealing how ideologies and social knowledge are embedded and reproduced through everyday communicative acts (Hall, 1997; Saussure, 1983). The third dimension situates discourse within social practices, particularly the relationship between language, power, and ideology. Van Dijk (2001) argues that discourse does not simply mirror social structures but plays an active role in maintaining or challenging them. Central to his approach is the concept of sociocognition—the mental models, knowledge structures, and cognitive schemas through which individuals and groups interpret discourse. Unlike Fairclough, who emphasizes the mediating role of discourse practices, Van Dijk highlights how social and personal cognition serve as the bridge between discourse and society (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). This includes personal memories, beliefs, shared cultural knowledge, and group-based ideologies (Foucault, 1980).

Bell (1991) underscores that the central question in Van Dijk’s framework concerns the complex relationship between media texts and their contexts. Specifically, his theory addresses how cognitive and social constraints influence the production and structures of media texts, and conversely, how contextual conditions shape the comprehension and use of these texts. Thus, for Van Dijk, the connection between macrostructures of society and microstructures of discourse is mediated by the cognitive activities of social actors. In this sense, discourse analysis requires examining texts and their production and understanding the cognitive mechanisms through which individuals and communities internalize, interpret, and reproduce ideologies (Van Dijk, 2001). By situating cognition at the heart of discourse analysis, Van Dijk provides a powerful framework for examining media representations of marginalized groups, including women survivors of marital violence (WSMV). His emphasis on sociocognition highlights how entrenched cultural beliefs and gender ideologies shape the portrayal of WSMV in media and how audiences interpret these portrayals (Ngo, 2020; Moon, 2017). This makes his approach particularly valuable for exploring contexts like Morocco, where deeply rooted patriarchal norms intersect with media discourse to reinforce or contest gendered power relations (Akhavan & Ghasemi, 2020; Baz, 2021).

In gender and media studies, a central concern lies in understanding how gender discourse is encoded in media texts and what social, cultural, and institutional forces give rise to particular representations of women. Media content is not neutral but reflects and reproduces dominant ideologies, often reinforcing pre-existing power structures that shape public perceptions of gender (McRobbie, 2007; Gokulsing & D’Silva, 2017). Feminist media critics have therefore emphasized the importance of analyzing media representations of women, paying close attention to how meanings surrounding femininity are produced, circulated, and consumed (Lazar, 2005). Such studies examine how women are positioned in relation to family roles, physical appearance, and broader social functions, revealing how these elements perpetuate stereotypical gender norms (Lazar, 2007; Machin & van Leeuwen, 2016). Fairclough (1995, 2013) provides a useful framework for approaching these questions by identifying three central dimensions of media discourse. First, media texts construct a version of the world, framing events, relationships, and social issues in ideologically loaded ways (Entman, 2004). Second, they establish relationships between participants, journalists, interviewees, and audiences, which may reinforce or challenge authority and credibility. Third, media texts construct identities for those involved, shaping how women, men, and social groups are positioned within the narrative (Hall, 1997). These dimensions underscore the inherently relational nature of media discourse, in which representation, identity formation, and social interaction are deeply intertwined (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2010).

Feminist media studies have built on these insights by foregrounding the role of identity in discourse analysis. Representation is not simply about how women are portrayed; it also involves the construction of subject positions that influence how women understand themselves and are understood by others (Lee, 2019). From this perspective, discourse is a defining force in shaping identity (Cameron, 2018). Gregg (2007) emphasizes that identity is configured through narrative structures that distinguish between “Me” and “Not-Me,” situating individuals within specific cultural and emotional contexts. This narrative framework combines

motives, feelings, and social expectations that guide human action, embedding personal identity within broader ideological systems. These perspectives highlight the importance of interrogating media representations for what they say about women and how they participate in the ongoing construction of gendered identities (Lazar, 2005; McRobbie, 2007). Media texts are powerful precisely because they do more than describe social realities; they actively shape the ways individuals perceive themselves and others within those realities. For WSMV, for instance, media discourse can constrain their identities by emphasizing victimhood or provide space for agency and resilience to emerge (Ngo, 2020; Akhavan & Ghasemi, 2020). Understanding these dynamics is essential for unpacking the complex interplay between gender, media, and identity formation in contemporary societies.

2. Method

Despite the variation in the degree to which they combine the text, discourse, and context, discourse analysis approaches presuppose that analyzing the text without its context is impossible. Van Dijk (2000) has noted that:

Discourse analytical approaches systematically describe the various structures and strategies of text or talk, and relate these to the social or political context. For instance, they may focus on overall topics or more local meanings (such as coherence or implications) in a semantic analysis. But also the syntactic form of sentences or the overall organization of a news report may be examined in detail.... These structures of text and talk are systematically related to elements of the social context, such as the spatio-temporal setting, participants, their various social and communicative roles, and their goals, knowledge, and opinions. (Van Dijk, 2000)

This study's analysis of Moroccan media texts extends beyond surface-level content examinations. Rather than focusing solely on syntax, semantics, or lexical choices, the analysis considers how texts are constructed and embedded within broader sociocultural contexts. This approach follows the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which conceives discourse as both a linguistic and a social practice (Fairclough, 2013; Van Dijk, 2001). Accordingly, the study applies both micro-level and macro-level analyses. At the micro-level, attention is directed toward the linguistic structures of Moroccan media texts, including lexical choices and syntactic constructions. The analysis explores overarching themes, narrative patterns, and ideological underpinnings at the macro-level, showing how gendered assumptions and power relations are discursively produced (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2010; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Such a methodological orientation resonates strongly with feminist CDA, which emphasizes the critical examination of how language reproduces gender ideologies and inequalities (Lazar, 2005, 2007).

To assess the discursive construction of women survivors of marital violence (WSMV), data for this study were collected from the Medi 1 TV program *Qesset Nnass*. This widely viewed talk show broadcasts personal narratives of Moroccan women. Forty-one episodes on the Medi 1 TV website were reviewed, and episodes focusing specifically on violence against women were selected. Complementing these texts, viewer comments retrieved from YouTube and the Medi 1 TV website were analyzed to capture audience reception. The selection of *Qesset Nnass* was based not only on its accessibility through online archives but also on its broad viewership both within Morocco and among diasporic communities, which makes it a significant cultural site for examining representations of women (Baz, 2021; Ngo, 2020). The analysis incorporates production and reception processes by triangulating program content with online audience discourse, consistent with CDA's concern for linking texts with broader social practices (Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

The analytical framework draws on Fairclough's (1995, 2013) three-dimensional model of text, interaction, and context and Van Dijk's (2001) notion of discourse macrostructures. Fairclough's model is particularly valuable in this context, as it enables a layered examination of how texts construct representations, enact social relationships, and reproduce ideologies (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2010). Van Dijk's framework complements this by offering a systematic approach to identifying thematic structures and the cognitive processes that mediate between discourse and society. Together, these approaches allow for investigating

how patriarchal ideologies are embedded in Moroccan media narratives and how audiences negotiate these representations (Hall, 1997; Foucault, 1980).

In methodological terms, the study combines qualitative and quantitative approaches. Qualitatively, the discourse of women featured in *Qesset Nnass* was examined to trace patterns of representation and legitimation strategies. This part of the analysis highlights how Moroccan women's identities are discursively shaped concerning themes of victimhood, resilience, and agency (Akhavan & Ghasemi, 2020; Gokulsing & D'Silva, 2017). Quantitatively, the comments posted by Moroccan audiences were analyzed to identify recurring evaluative positions and patterns of engagement. This mixed-methods design enables a comprehensive understanding of how media representations intersect with public discourse to reinforce or contest gendered ideologies (Lee, 2019; Moon, 2017). The methodological integration of discourse analysis with audience research thus strengthens the study's capacity to explore both the representational and the interpretive dimensions of gender in Moroccan media.

3. Result Text

At the textual level, the analysis of *Qesset Nnass* episodes demonstrates that the semantic macrostructures of women survivors of marital violence (WSMV) are consistently organized around the theme of injustice. This aligns with Van Dijk's (2001) assertion that macrostructures provide the overarching propositions of a discourse, structuring narratives into recognizable thematic patterns. In this case, injustice manifests through multiple recurring themes, including abandonment by husbands, loss of children, financial exploitation, and denial of legal recourse. These themes converge to form a master narrative in which women are systematically marginalized not only by their partners but also by institutions and cultural norms. Similar findings have been reported in Iranian and Turkish media contexts, where women are framed through narratives of victimization and dependency, often stripped of agency (Akhavan & Ghasemi, 2020; Baz, 2021). The first set of themes revolves around women's dispossession, both materially and emotionally. Many women report being physically abused, subsequently abandoned by their husbands, and in some cases, deprived of access to their children. Such experiences reveal the intersection of patriarchal power and familial complicity, as women are frequently evicted from their homes and urged by their families to endure abuse for the sake of marital preservation. These dynamics resonate with McRobbie's (2007) critique of the "post-feminist sexual contract," wherein women are encouraged to tolerate inequality under the guise of familial duty. The narratives in Moroccan media thus reproduce patriarchal ideologies that normalize women's suffering while erasing their voices, echoing the patterns identified in Indian and Vietnamese media representations (Gokulsing & D'Silva, 2017; Ngo, 2020).

A second cluster of themes underscores the failures of institutional protection. Despite filing complaints, women encounter inadequate responses from law enforcement or the judiciary. Even when abusive husbands are arrested, they often continue their violence, revealing systemic gaps in enforcement. This failure reflects what Entman (2004) terms the "framing of power," where institutions selectively highlight or neglect issues, thereby shaping public perceptions and minimizing the urgency of structural reform. In this way, the Moroccan media narratives analyzed here not only document individual suffering but also implicitly expose broader institutional inefficacies that perpetuate cycles of violence. Another salient dimension of the discourse involves the compounded vulnerabilities of women and children. Violence frequently extends to pregnant women, children, and even disabled dependents. The consequences for children are particularly devastating, with accounts of suicide, homelessness, and sexual assault emerging as frequent themes. These findings echo Lee's (2019) analysis of the #MeToo movement in Chinese media, which revealed how discourse often broadens beyond individual women to highlight systemic patterns of harm across generations. By foregrounding children's suffering, Moroccan media both amplifies the severity of marital violence and implicitly invokes cultural anxieties about family cohesion, which in turn complicates women's decisions to leave abusive relationships.

Finally, the narratives reveal women's complex and sometimes contradictory desires for reconciliation. Some women express a wish to reunite with their abusive husbands, often out of a desire to maintain contact with their children or due to lingering emotional attachment. Such ambivalence illustrates Cameron's (2018) argument that gendered discourse often constructs women's voices in ways that reflect structural constraints and personal negotiation of identity. The Moroccan context, therefore, reflects not only

the persistence of patriarchal ideologies but also the nuanced ways in which women navigate their lived realities. As Lazar (2005) emphasizes, feminist CDA is particularly suited to uncovering these tensions, as it situates women's discourse at the intersection of power, ideology, and resistance. These findings demonstrate that the discourse of WSMV in Moroccan media is structured through a narrative of injustice that incorporates dispossession, institutional neglect, intergenerational harm, and ambivalent reconciliation. This configuration reflects broader global patterns in media representations of women but also reveals culturally specific dynamics tied to Moroccan patriarchal structures. The analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of how media reflect by identifying these recurring themes. It reproduces gendered ideologies, sustaining what Foucault (1980) would describe as the "capillary" operation of power within everyday discourse.

It appears that the summarized stories consistently reveal a recurring pattern that pervades these experiences and can be applied to most narratives depicted on television. Common factors such as unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, and coming from divorced households characterize the circumstances of many women who encounter violence post-marriage. These predisposing conditions often intersect with two types of triggering factors: internal and external. Internal factors relate to the husband's addiction to drugs or alcohol, while external factors involve the husband's limited job prospects or dependence on his wife's finances in certain cases. These triggers precipitate violent behavior, prompting the wife to either leave the household or remain without financial support from the absent husband. The resulting sense of helplessness and lack of income forces the wife to seek assistance from authorities, such as the police or the court. However, these institutions often fail to offer satisfactory solutions due to unjust laws, such as the absence of theft laws between spouses, logistical challenges, such as locating absent husbands, or corruption within the authorities. In some instances, when viable solutions are lacking, women are compelled to return to the same adverse conditions, perpetuating a cycle of abuse. Moreover, distressingly, some women endure violence to remain with their children or because they believe they can endure anything out of love for their violent husbands!.

Discursive Practice

At the level of discursive practice, we will show how women legitimize their discourse by having recourse to one of Van Leeuwen's (2007) four legitimization categories, namely authorization, which is our version of Fairclough's production practice. The other element of discursive practice, namely consumption or reception, which analyzes the audience's comments on women's discourse on YOUTUBE and Medi 1 TV website, will be summarized to provide the overall picture.

1. Legitimation by WSMV (production)

The theory of legitimization elucidates the mechanisms by which social order is established. Van Leeuwen (2007, p. 92) outlines four categories of legitimization:

- a. Authorization: This involves legitimizing actions or practices by invoking the authority of tradition, custom, law, or individuals vested with institutional authority.
- b. Moral evaluation: Legitimation is conferred through implicit references to value systems.
- c. Rationalization: Legitimation is achieved by referring to the goals and functions of institutionalized social action, supported by cognitive validity derived from societal knowledge.
- d. Mythopoesis: Legitimation is conveyed through narratives that reward legitimate actions and penalize non-legitimate ones.

At the level of legitimization, the analysis of *Qesset Nnass* illustrates how Moroccan television discourse constructs authority to frame violence against women as both a personal and societal problem. Following van Leeuwen's (2007) model, authorization emerges as a dominant legitimization strategy, in which appeals to law, tradition, experts, or official institutions justify particular positions. This aligns with broader CDA scholarship, highlighting how media often rely on authoritative voices to establish credibility and shape audience perception (Fairclough, 2013; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). In the Moroccan context, this practice is particularly salient given the tension between entrenched patriarchal norms and the state's efforts to demonstrate a commitment to gender equality. Thus, authorization is a discursive mechanism for reinforcing and contesting existing gender ideologies.

One of the clearest forms of authorization occurs in the presenter's introduction to episodes addressing women survivors of marital violence (WSMV). By citing statistical evidence—such as claims that more than half of Moroccan women experience violence—the program legitimizes the issue as a matter of public concern. Using statistics exemplifies what Entman (2004) describes as framing through quantification, whereby numbers drawn from institutions lend authority and credibility to discourse. Similar strategies are evident in Iranian and Turkish media, where statistical references are deployed to underscore the seriousness of women's marginalization, even as the broader narrative continues to reproduce patriarchal norms (Akhavan & Ghasemi, 2020; Baz, 2021). In this sense, Moroccan media's use of institutional data simultaneously authorizes feminist concerns while embedding them within culturally resonant frameworks.

Expert commentary further reinforces this process. For instance, invited specialists deploy what van Leeuwen (2007) terms *personal authorization*, grounding legitimacy in their professional expertise. In one episode, an expert emphasizes the therapeutic function of “talking about” violence, categorizing it into physical, economic, and sexual dimensions. By recommending legal and institutional solutions such as *Alhadana* (custody) and state initiatives like *Tamkine*, the expert situates individual suffering within broader structural frameworks. This reflects Lazar's (2005) argument that feminist CDA must attend to how expertise functions discursively to normalize certain responses to gendered violence while delegitimizing others. At the same time, this expert discourse mirrors trends observed in other national contexts, such as South Korea and Vietnam, where specialists mediate between state policy and women's lived experiences (Moon, 2017; Ngo, 2020). The narratives of WSMV themselves also draw on authorization strategies, albeit in more constrained ways. Some women legitimize their claims through references to legal authorities, describing interactions with police or court officials. For example, one survivor recounts forgiving her abusive husband at the police station, citing threats to her daughters' safety. At the same time, another underscores her daughter's rape by invoking the testimony of a medical doctor. These strategies echo what Hall (1997) identifies as the politics of representation, where women's legitimacy is tied to institutional voices rather than their own testimony. As Gokulsing and D'Silva (2017) note in their study of Indian cinema, women are often constructed as credible only when their narratives are corroborated by external authority, reinforcing gendered hierarchies of voice.

Nonetheless, the analysis also reveals tensions and limitations in applying authorization. While official statistics, expert commentary, and legal frameworks are mobilized to lend credibility, the solutions offered often remain abstract and insufficient. For example, experts recommend psychological interventions but rarely propose concrete or actionable steps, leaving women with limited recourse. This gap underscores Cameron's (2018) critique of gender discourse as often producing well-intentioned but generalized prescriptions that fail to address the complexity of women's lived realities. Moreover, the persistence of violence despite legal interventions illustrates Foucault's (1980) notion of power as diffuse and capillary—operating not only through formal institutions but also through everyday cultural practices that sustain patriarchal control. In sum, the findings demonstrate that Moroccan media employs authorization as a central legitimation tactic, drawing on statistics, expert knowledge, and institutional authority to frame violence against women as both pervasive and socially unacceptable. However, this discursive reliance on external authority also highlights the fragility of women's voices, which remain subordinate to institutional and professional validation. Similar patterns across regional media contexts suggest that while CDA can uncover how legitimation strategies construct gendered discourse, further feminist critique is necessary to ensure that women's agency is not reduced to derivative authority (Lazar, 2005; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2010).

2. The audience attitudes (reception)

The analysis of audience comments on *Qeset Nnass* offers valuable insights into how Moroccan viewers engage with televised narratives of women survivors of marital violence (WSMV). From a sample of 217 online commentators across YouTube and Medi 1 TV's website, 75.57% expressed support for WSMV, while only 24.43% were critical. When excluding unidentified users, this distribution remained consistent, with 77.60% supportive responses compared to 22.40% critical ones. Particularly noteworthy is that male viewers registered even higher levels of support (81.01%) than female viewers (75.22%). This finding diverges from prior research in Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) contexts, which often suggests that women are more supportive than men of anti-violence narratives due to their direct vulnerability to gender-based violence (Akhavan & Ghasemi, 2020; Ngo, 2020). The unexpected reversal in Morocco highlights how specific discursive

strategies of authorization and representation can shape male receptivity, a phenomenon underexplored in previous feminist media studies.

These results demonstrate how the discursive legitimization strategies identified in the televised program—such as appeals to statistics, legal authority, and expert opinion—effectively mobilized audience support. According to Entman's (2004) framing theory, the salience of such authoritative frames can significantly shape public opinion by directing attention to particular interpretations of events. The success of these strategies in engaging Moroccan men may be tied to the show's ability to present violence against women as not only a women's issue but also a societal crisis affecting families and children. This resonates with Turkish and Vietnamese media's findings, where framing women's suffering within broader familial and social concerns encouraged stronger public identification with victims (Baz, 2021; Ngo, 2020).

At the same time, the data reveal that approximately one-quarter of viewers resisted or criticized WSMV, reflecting persistent patriarchal attitudes that normalize or excuse male violence. As Foucault (1980) reminds us, discourses of power are never uncontested; instead, they circulate in ways that simultaneously enable resistance and reproduce domination. Negative comments often echoed cultural norms of patience, endurance, and familial preservation—discursive tropes similarly observed in South Korean and Indian media portrayals of women, where traditionalist ideologies continue to exert influence despite broader social change (Moon, 2017; Gokulsing & D'Silva, 2017). This demonstrates how Moroccan media discourse operates within a contested terrain of power and ideology, consistent with Fairclough's (2013) argument that texts are socially shaped and constitutive.

The mixed-methods design adopted here—combining CDA with quantitative analysis of audience comments—adds an innovative dimension to discourse studies. While CDA is sometimes criticized for its subjectivity and lack of empirical grounding (Wodak & Meyer, 2016), quantifying online audience reactions provides a more systematic measure of discursive impact. This methodological integration echoes Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (2010) call for CDA to evolve in dialogue with empirical social research, ensuring that the analysis of media texts is grounded in actual reception practices. By incorporating audience voices, this study demonstrates how discourse circulates beyond the level of media production, shaping and being reshaped by public responses in digital spaces. These findings highlight that Moroccan audiences are not passive recipients of televised narratives but active interpreters who negotiate meaning within their cultural and ideological contexts. The high levels of male support suggest a potentially significant shift in the discursive construction of gender violence in Morocco, signaling that carefully framed media interventions can open spaces for new gendered subjectivities and solidarities. As Hall (1997) emphasizes, representation is not simply reflecting reality but producing new meanings. In this case, *Qesset Nnass* appears to have produced counter-hegemonic meanings that challenge entrenched patriarchal logics, even if such meanings remain contested.

Social context

The analysis of WSMV discourse cannot be divorced from Morocco's broader cultural and social context. Fairclough (2013) reminds us that CDA is always concerned with the interplay between text, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice. The narratives presented by women on these talk shows are not isolated stories but are deeply embedded within Morocco's patriarchal system, which continues to shape women's lived experiences. Patriarchy functions here not only as an institutional structure but also as a cultural ideology that defines and normalizes gendered hierarchies, thereby sustaining women's subordination. This aligns with Foucault's (1980) notion of discourse as a form of power/knowledge that regulates social relations, particularly in contexts marked by conservative traditions, economic precarity, and systemic inequalities.

Our findings highlight how Moroccan women are socialized from birth into gender-specific roles that naturalize male dominance and female subordination. This resonates with feminist CDA research, showing how socialization processes reinforce traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity across different cultural contexts (Lazar, 2005, 2007). The Moroccan case reflects what Cameron (2018) critiques more broadly: the myth of inherent gender difference, which is repeatedly reinforced through discourse and stereotypes. In this sense, stereotypes function as Hall (1997) describes them as "systems of representation" that reflect and produce gendered meanings. By continually framing women as weak, passive, or dependent, Moroccan media discourses perpetuate gender inequalities and constrain women's capacity to challenge oppressive structures.

The persistence of gender stereotypes is evident not only in Moroccan television but also across global media. Studies in Iranian television advertisements (Akhavan & Ghasemi, 2020) and Turkish online news (Baz, 2021) demonstrate similar patterns of female subordination and stereotypical portrayals. Likewise, research on Indian cinema (Gokulsing & D'Silva, 2017) and Vietnamese newspapers (Ngo, 2020) underscores how entrenched patriarchal values shape representations of women in ways that reinforce rather than challenge existing inequalities. The Moroccan case, therefore, should be seen as part of a broader cultural and media phenomenon in which women's identities are constructed through discourses that normalize inequality.

Importantly, issues such as illiteracy and poverty intersect with gendered discourses to exacerbate women's vulnerability. Illiteracy rates remain disproportionately higher among Moroccan women, particularly in rural areas, limiting access to education, economic empowerment, and legal awareness. As Van Dijk (2001) argues, CDA must account for the socio-economic conditions underpinning discursive power structures, since inequality is reproduced in language and sustained by material deprivation. Poverty not only restricts women's opportunities but also reinforces their dependence on patriarchal family structures, making resistance to violence more difficult. This corresponds with Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (2010) assertion that CDA must situate discourses within broader political-economic contexts to capture their social significance fully. In sum, the discourse articulated by WSMV reflects the deeply entrenched patriarchal order of Moroccan society, where gender inequality intersects with structural conditions such as poverty and illiteracy. We highlight the systemic nature of women's subordination and the urgent need for transformative interventions by situating these discourses within their sociocultural context. CDA, as emphasized by Wodak and Meyer (2016), is an analytical tool and a means of exposing ideological structures and calling attention to possibilities for social change. In this light, the voices of WSMV, though situated in a context of oppression, also function as counter-discourses that challenge dominant ideologies and draw attention to the urgent need for reform in Moroccan society.

4. Conclusion

The portrayal of Women Surviving Male Violence (WSMV) in media narratives presents a complex dynamic where these women are central to the stories yet depicted as passive recipients of action rather than active participants in their own lives. This duality reflects a broader societal pattern in which women, especially those in vulnerable situations, are often portrayed as needing rescue or intervention rather than as empowered individuals capable of agency. In these narratives, WSMV are characterized as vulnerable and problematic, contrasting sharply with their husbands or male counterparts, who are depicted as active agents driving the narrative forward. This dichotomy not only reinforces traditional gender roles but also perpetuates a view of women as dependent and in need of protection, further entrenching their passive portrayal.

Our analysis, grounded in legitimation theory, reveals how media texts use specific discourse strategies to project legitimation, justifying and endorsing certain social practices. Legitimation in this context refers to how media narratives validate and rationalize individuals' actions, behaviors, and identities within the story. By identifying the legitimation techniques employed in these narratives, we can uncover the underlying mechanisms that shape public perception and reinforce social norms. As a powerful cultural force, the media serves as a battleground where identities, social relationships, and ideas are contested and either positively or negatively represented. This battleground is particularly significant for WSMV, whose stories are often manipulated to fit prevailing societal narratives. Among the various legitimation techniques identified, authorization emerges as a particularly potent tool WSMV uses in its discourse. Authorization involves invoking authority figures, institutions, or societal norms to lend credibility to one's narrative. In the case of WSMV, this technique is used to evoke fear and garner sympathy, thus solidifying their narratives and maintaining cognitive validity. By aligning its stories with authoritative sources, WSMV can position itself as a legitimate victim deserving of public empathy and support. However, this reliance on authorization also underscores their perceived lack of agency, as their legitimacy depends on external validation rather than their intrinsic worth or actions.

The media's role in shaping these narratives cannot be understated. As our analysis shows, the media reflect and actively construct social realities. Through the selective use of legitimation techniques, the media can influence how WSMV are perceived, either reinforcing their victimhood or potentially

empowering them by highlighting their agency. However, in the current landscape, the media often leans towards the former, contributing to a discourse that limits the potential for WSMV to be seen as active participants in their own stories. In conclusion, the portrayal of WSMV in media narratives through the lens of legitimation theory highlights significant issues regarding gender, power, and representation. While WSMV are central to these stories, their passive portrayal and reliance on authorization to legitimize their experiences reveal a deeper societal tendency to undermine women's agency. This analysis underscores the need for a more nuanced and empowering representation of WSMV in media, recognizing their strength and agency rather than perpetuating their victimhood. By challenging these narratives and promoting more balanced representations, the media can transform public perceptions and advance gender equality.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The authors state that there is no conflict of interest concerning the publication of this paper.

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About the author

Badia Elharraki, a researcher in linguistics, translation, discourse analysis, and critical discourse analysis from Sidi Mohammed Benabdellah University, Fez, Morocco, E-mail badiaa.elharraki@gmail.com