

***THE QUESTION OF MEANING BETWEEN PRODUCERS
AND INTERPRETERS IN OF 'NISAE MINA ALMAGHRIB'
AND 'CITADINE': A SOCIOCOGNITIVE APPROACH***

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Abstract:

The undertaking of this paper is neither to uncover the direct effects of the ideological explicit or implicit propositions made in the two Moroccan women magazines under study, nor to provide a detailed account of their interpretive strategies shaping their discourse behaviour at the macro-structural level. Rather it hopes to provide an insight into the relationship between the producers of these publications and their targeted readerships. On this basis, the form and line of the questioning do not point directly to the readers' potential to assign multiple meanings to texts by taking apart particular extracts for a textual assessment of the dynamics of interpretive variation. The conception of the questionnaire aims at providing an in-depth information about the producers and their gendered community of interpreters. It- is equally meant to bring to the fore the importance of the role of their mental models in mediating between women magazines as a social apparatus and the feminine discourse practice in Morocco.

Key words:

Meaning - producers - interpreters - 'nisae mina almaghrib' - 'citadine' - sociocognitive approach.

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The first section of my questionnaire directly asks respondents to describe their personal profiles by answering six broad questions. The first question is about age. Two age categories are proposed: one ranges between 18 and 25 years old, the other between 26 and 40. The second question elicits information about the respondents' occupation. It suggests four different categories: householder, employed, entrepreneur, and unemployed. The third question, however, aims at categorizing respondents drawing on their place of residence. Answers to this question are hoped to offer an idea about their cultural background. the fourth question addresses their level of education. The fifth and sixth questions ask respectively about their native language, Berber or Arabic, and their second language in which they can interact fluently.

The returned filled forms show that 70% of my respondents fall under the age category of 18-25 of whom only 18% are married, 11% are employed, and the remaining 71% have no professional activity. While all the participants were fluent in Arabic some master also a Berber variety

This section touches on a critical examination of the semantic macrostructures imparted on the basis of the working concepts, the political positions and ideologies of those who stand behind the production of Nisae Mina Almaghrib and Citadine. It is an attempt to show how these two magazines as discourse are the outcome of a complex process of production. The editorial journalistic practices at this macro level of their discursive structures are discussed to assess the production strategies used to achieve a kind of balance the two parallel flows of editorial and advertising types of information. Attention will be directed mainly to the larger performative functions and structures of layout as a complex constructive sign.

The process of production will be dealt with on the basis of two dimensions: a first dimension at which discourse production is seen as an ideological construction of reality representing an event structure conforming to the version of the dominant group, and an economic dimension where the two magazines under study are viewed as business media enterprises primarily concerned with 'manufacturing' loyal readers to maintain and develop their flow of adverts to an extent at which a balanced management and profit can be secured.

Admitting the fact that the primary goal of such enterprise is to meet the needs of a predefined Moroccan women readers for information relative to their concerns and desires, the produced texts in these magazines are perceived of as pieces of novel information of three different

origins. The first origin relates to news emanating from what actually happens in the readers' external environment and supply the media enterprise with ready interesting novelties for diffusion. The second origin involves the general journalistic tendency to present brands and products in the form of innovations or news currently or recently available in the market. Accordingly, advertising can be seen to be part of the process of knowledge production undertaken by the media.

The third origin of information lies in the various production content that throughout the two magazines does not diverge from the propositions of the two previous origins of new information being diffused. However, classified adds are, to the best of my knowledge, the only exception that escapes these media enterprises' own initiative.

To be able to function and ensure the realization of a satisfactory media product, the two magazines try hard to meet a primary condition in which the above mentioned three origins of information are skilfully invested to monitor the flow of material shaping their finished products.

As discussed earlier in this paper, a critical analysis of *Nisae Mina Almaghrib* and *Citadine* can provide significant insights into the characteristics of their contribution in Moroccan mass communication, their role as social actors voicing the Moroccan feminine interests and portraying their emotions, perceptions and their gendered styles of relating to their environment. A critical reading of the two magazines under study as instances of cultural products helps us detting a clear idea about the mechanisms underpinning their functioning and production, the imperatives and constraints characterizing their process, their values and objectives as well as their social and cultural role in the Moroccan society.

The process of production of *Nisae Mina Almaghrib* and *Citadine* is, like all other media operating in the Moroccan marketplace, fully symptomatic of the mental models of the members of its discourse community, including both producers and consumers.

To start with, the producers of these feminine publications are a mixed group of men and women. In the case of *Citadine*, a group of fourteen women and fifteen men figure among the crew standing behind its realisation. A close examination of its team reveals some interesting points about the Moroccan feminine experience in the field of media production. For instance, the balanced number between the two genders seemingly, though not always true, indicative of the status of Moroccan women who suffered in the past from many conservative constraints restraining their upward mobility to higher positions of decision-making and areas of professional skill. This, in turn, indicative of the advanced stage of their political, cultural and social promotion.

However, the nature of the tasks and positions held by women among this team marks to some extent some fields where Moroccan women have excelled and those where they still need the collaboration of their male counterparts. This fact cannot be traced back in all cases to a lack of professional expertise, but rather to the considerations of gender congruence in most cases. One prominent instance of this kind is the position involving photograph and illustration technicality that are normally associated with men within the Moroccan sociocognitive frame of reference are occupied by men except for one who bears a western name.

This kind of cooperation between members of the two sexes is also the case for Nisae Mina Almaghrib which was founded by a mixed group of two females and a man. The whole team standing behind its realisation is a composition of twenty-six women and six men. The position of the chief editor is similarly to Citadine a woman.

After this short, but revealing descriptive description of the staff members of the two magazines, attention next turns to another component of these publications which is of paramount importance to any attempt of critical analysis of their texts. This component is certainly the editorial articles which traditionally disclose a lot about the opinions and major stances of the magazines under study.

The importance of analysing editorials lies in the fact that they are expressive of their producers' subtle ideologies influencing their opinions, themselves influencing the discourse structure of the editorial articles.

In all the issues of Nisae Mina Almaghrib and Citadine I have been examined, the editorial articles clearly show the complex relations between the ideological presuppositions of their producers, their opinions and their discourse structures. The ideologies and opinions expressed in these issues are mostly social and institutional or political rather than personal. For instance, in Nisae Min ALmaghrib, issue n°67, February, 2006, the editorial article deals with the increasing number of women MPs in the world as a case in point concerning the democratic promotion of women. Similarly, in the 74th issue dating back to September of the same year, the chief editor, Layla Benyasine, says that her magazine and Femmes du Maroc decided to publish the same editorial opening article the topic of which relates to the civil rights of maids in Morocco and the necessity to recognize their role in backing up their upward mobility by exempting them from the exigencies of the housework.

In Citadine, the type of the semantic macrostructures does not diverge from the general thematic repertoire traditionally dealt with in feminine magazines. However, the so-called edito in Citadine, issue number 122, October, 2006, provides a lucid mapping of the mental model of the producers of discourse in this magazine. It vividly sheds light on the Moroccan feminine construction of their political and social reality. The article foresees the coming legislative elections and pessimistically expects right at the beginning that the already polarized community of women 'Nous les femmes' will go for no less than a vulnerable prey to the greedy and all-pervasive male dominance. Yet resistively enough, the article has as a title 'The Battle Plan' implicitly suggesting that the raging ideological warfare has not come to terms yet.

Certainly, these editorials are full of subtle textual expressions of ideologically based opinions which involve beliefs and mental representations of their producers. The social practices of discourse and forms of expression enacted in them show the socially constructed dimensions of their minds.

As with the editorial article in Nisae Mina Almaghrib, issue n° 67 mentioned above, the dialectical aspect of the gender relations characterizing Moroccan society is translucent enough. The ideological potency of the text is established by the use of a discourse structure that is characterized by potent forms of expression marking tensional gender relationships in terms of professional upward mobility and social promotion. While reading through the article, one does not have to be a skilled analyst to feel the chief editor intends to create in the reader the impression that women are winning over MP offices to the detriment of their male

rivals. The flow of discourse in this article draws an ideological square whereby women, all of them, including readers as implicitly suggested, are part of the 'we-group' with men as the 'them-group'. The discourse is structured to establish this version of reality as a matter of fact. Therefore, there is no difficulty to see that the warfare revolving around positions of power waged in the outside Moroccan world is transcribed into a semiotic guerrilla declaring women winners and men losers. The key to the strategy of the article is not in appraising the benefits of democracy in bring women up to positions of power, but in the social relations depicted by the semiotic process and the positions constructed for women readers and the social organization that implicates them.

At many points in this editorial article whose function is to assert the proper form of gender relations, the surface content is the power and success of women and the relative weakness and failure of men. A critical reading of such article enables both the analyst and the reader to spot the kind of ideological construction of social reality undertaken by the chief editor of *Nisae Mina Almaghrib*. By the use of some cardinal and ordinal signs, and also by providing some examples of females who have recently come to office, the editorial tries to portray a new social order in which the previously dominated community of women are on a steady move to gain more ground and dominance over 'them', the members of the out-group of men.

On the same tune and line of thought is the editorial of *Nisae Mina Almaghrib*, issue n° 74. This article is the product of virtually the same mental model as the one discussed above. The topic is on the civil rights of servants. Though the editor here tries to include within this frame all kinds of servants of the two sexes, for instance, drivers, gardeners and guards, only the female maid is at the heart of her concern. It is true that the article is untitled, but still the topic and hence its meaning and purpose are clear from a bold cuff inserted in the midst of the text. This is part of the tradition of the editorial practice in *Nisae Mina Almaghrib*. It presents a strategy of layout in which readers are encouraged to develop particular reading habits. The ideological effectivity of such practice lies in the efforts women readers have to exert to disclose the meanings and propositions suggested by the article. Perhaps the insertion of the bold cuff halfway down to the end of the text means that readers should read through the text instead of scanning for topic sentences. The tact of such technique lies in a somehow coercive imposition of consuming the entirety of the article. It is in fact, an anticipatory maneuver undertaken as a strategic counter attack against those women readers who perhaps do not enjoy reading through the print or simply who are used to skim the magazine by reading the headlines alone.

The opening editorial in *Citadine*, issues n°121 and 122 are another case in point as far as the editorial construction of social reality presented here as a preferred reading of Moroccan women magazine as a community of discourse. In the issue of September, the editor chooses for her article "School for All" (trans. Mine) tackles the problem of schooling with two speeds, the governmental and the private education systems. The chief editor, Keltoum Ghazali, shows sympathy and sorrow for the Moroccan generations who do not have equal chances of success in their education, and hence in their professional and social careers. What's presented here is a topic which is of special interest to parents. The text, therefore, is characterized by a discourse structure enabling the editor to instill messages of feminine concerns for the lamentable status of education in the Moroccan society. Though there is no overt statement addressing women in particular, the choice of such topic is suggestive in a number of ways. First, it is meant to show the elitist common conscience that the producers and readers of *Citadine* as a social category have. Second, this act of selection is a matter of

contingence since the issue is published in September marking the beginning of a new academic year.

The succeeding issue of Citadine, n°122, opens with an attractive editorial title, The 'Battle Plan'. The first questions that might come to the reader's mind are 'Battle for what?' 'Battle against whom?' In her article, the chief editor, Kaltoumn Ghazali, is another illustration for the feminine counter-hegemonic voicing of the worries and concerns of Moroccan women in their male dominated society. The topic beneath this title is about the coming legislative elections and the dangers of marginalization of women. Fears are mainly from the eventual emergence of any radical fundamentalist movement that might abolish what the community of women have been able to snatch by the approbation of the controversial Mudawwana in 2004

Strikingly in contrast to the editorial article in Nisae Mina Amaghrib about the increasing number of women in positions of power in which their chief editor seems too much optimistic as to the status of women in the future, this article presents a dark version of the political and social reality lived by 'we', the group of women. The editor structures her discourse in conformity to her factual beliefs and opinions reflecting her mental representation that is socially acquired, constructed and finally enacted in her discourse. In fact, the social meanings underpinning her article are sets of propositions that organize and constitute her domains of knowledge and experience. Understanding those meanings making up that versions of social reality inevitably influences the textual form she has tailored for her imparted discourse.

From a sociocognitive perspective, the editors' subtle propositions represent shared social representations of a Moroccan feminine discourse community articulated about gender relations, stereotypes, conceptions of beauty, marital happiness, and many other fields of interest to women. At one level of analysis, Nisae Mina Almaghrib represent a referred reading of a specific feminine community that share similar emotions, perceptions and appeals setting them as defining category. Their preferred propositions are meticulously encoded by the editorial staff in various semiotic modes in such a way as to encourage women readers to accept as natural, factual and commonsensical their definition of the readers' lived social reality. For instance, the portrayal of women as victims of the political and social system in Morocco on the basis of past experiences is presented through a complex amassment of importing conventions as a most obvious and objective, and impartial reportage of reality.

At another level of analysis, the two women magazines put under study in this paper can be viewed to represent a resistive reading of that reality. Their advent was initially a natural outcome of the social and psychological need to voice their interests, attain a recognizable standing in society, and sustain their potential in forcing their way to more power through the ideological tension characterizing their environment. The editorial article discussed earlier can serve as a good illustration for the resistive feminine discourse remarkably abundant of counter-hegemonic social representations of feminine reality.

This second level of analysis eases and at the same time enhances our understanding of the Moroccan women magazines, in general, and Nisae Minalmaghrib and Citadine in particular as a feminine community of discourse whose primary function is to meet the various needs and expectations of their readerships. In terms of the famous Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the need for security through knowledge is the first and basic psychological need. The producers of Nisae Minalmaghrib and Citadine are aware that their readers are in need of knowledge

about their sociocultural environment and that their products reinforce implicitly the communal ties and interdependencies amongst them.

Being a key element in the sociocultural cycle, the two magazines contribute to the elaboration of the feminine mass culture via the diffusion of information pertaining to their concerns. With regard to their capacity of knowledge production, the functioning of Nisae Mina Almaghrib and Citadine is highly determined by their control and regulation of the three information flows underpinning their journalistic product: the news, advertising and the editorial content.

A close examination of the two magazines in terms of the ratio of each of these types of information shows that the editorial staff is in full command of what really matters for their readerships and what really meets their needs and expectations. Part of their success in this respects is responsiveness to another need involving a feeling security. This need relates to the readers' personal identity through a sense of belonging to a feminine community. Gendered identity of what is perceived of as a Moroccan women and gender meanings are constructed at one level through the choice of specific topics reflecting the shared interests between Moroccan women. At a second level, the construction of personal identity is done through specific textual layout of the two magazines. For instance, on both Nisae Mina Almaghrib and Citadine, the use of an unlimited range of signifiers of femininity with a projection of the Moroccan version of femaleness is meant to enhance their social bonding and create in them the impression that their magazines are reliable resistive voices of a purely feminine account of the Moroccan social reality.

This tendency in these magazines is inherent in the nature of their system of production. The reader as well as the analyst do not have to do much effort to be able to realize that both magazines put much significant emphasis on the concept of 'baldi', that is "traditional".