

Critical Discourse Analysis of Hip-Hop Music: A Case Study from Morocco

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Abstract:

This paper applies Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to Soultana's songs "Sawt Nssa" and "35.28", examining how the artist uses language to critique social norms related to gender and politics. Fairclough's model, which includes three dimensions: description, interpretation, and explanation to provide a structure to analyze the songs' textual, grammatical, and sociocultural features. Guided by the research question "How does Soultana employ linguistic and discursive strategies in her music to challenge gender and political inequalities in Moroccan society?", this study highlights how Soultana's lyrics employ a variety of linguistic strategies to convey messages of empowerment and resistance. The analysis demonstrates how Soultana uses music to advocate for social change and contribute to both gender and political discourse in Moroccan society.

Keywords: Hip-Hop Music, Critical Discourse Analysis, Gender, Identity

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INTRODUCTION

Hip-hop music has a rich history that traces its roots back to the inner cities of South Bronx. It emerged as a powerful platform to enhance the voices of underrepresented Black communities. At first, the genre served as a voice for racial issues, represented by African-American male rappers, who became representatives of the Black community. Black women, over time, also appropriated hip-hop as a tool to withstand both racial and gender-based discrimination. The involvement of women in hip hop faces the notion that the genre was mostly male-dominated. Before the release of Sugar Hill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" in 1979, Paulette Tee and Sweet Tee recorded "Vicious Rap" a year earlier under their father's record label, Paul Winley Records (Price 66).

It is obvious from this early recording by female singers that women have been shaping hip hop from the very beginning. Today, young hip-hop artists worldwide adapted hip-hop music to artfully articulate their own unique perspectives and experiences. As a result, Hip Hop has become an expression of youth culture, with its influence spreading far beyond its roots in the United States. Hip Hop has spread to every corner of the world and has been adapted by artists from diverse cultural backgrounds. In the Arab world, hip-hop has been embraced by Arab hip-hop music artists, who represent disaffected young Arab minorities in their communities. The appropriation of the American hip-hop model has created a form of Arab hip-hop, which serves as a reflection of the grievances experienced by Arab youth. Similar to African-American hip hop, Arab hip hop experienced male dominance during its beginning. However, the influence and reach of hip hop in the Arab world have surpassed its masculine origins and have resulted in the emergence of Arab female rappers who strive to represent and defend women's voices against abuse and discrimination. Thus, it proves that women



can excel in the realm of hip-hop music. Cheryl Lynette Keyes elucidates the remarkable talents of women in rap and emphasizes their steadfast sense of identity, asserting: "... female artists have not only demonstrated their lyrical prowess, but in their struggle to endure and flourish within this tradition, they have forged platforms to convey potent messages from black female and black feminist perspectives" (Keyes 186).

This paper applies Fairclough's CDA framework to the songs "Sawt Nssa" and "35.28" by the Moroccan artist Soultana. By analyzing the songs' textual, grammatical, and social features, there will be an exploration of how Soultana uses language to critique gender norms and political injustice in contemporary Moroccan society. Through this analysis, the study aims to reveal how Soultana's music serves as a tool for social change and empowerment.

1. The Rise of Hip Hop as a Tool of Empowerment

According to Mark Anthony Neal and Murray Forman, hip hop in the late 1970s was predominantly produced and presented by African-Americans. The release of "Rapper's Delight" by Sugar Hill Records in 1979 brought widespread fame and recognition to the genre (78). This emergence made rap music popular among black youth, who embraced it as a powerful way to express their struggles and get motivated.

Early pioneers of rap, including Kurtis Blow, Grandmaster Flash, and Furious Five, adopted the genre to address the struggles and aspirations of marginalized youth. By the early 1980s, rap music had evolved into a liberal form of expression that resonated with young people. Songs like "Those Are the Breaks" and "The Message" emerged as influential examples of socially conscious rap, which focus on the social and racial inequalities experienced by the African-American community (Forman and Neal 78).



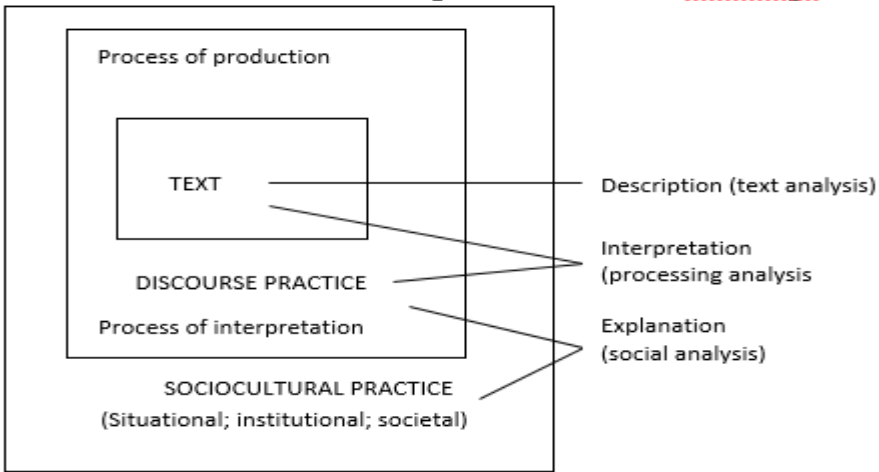
According to Christopher Emdin and Edmund S. Adjapong, disadvantaged groups consume rap music to construct their identities. Emdin and Adjapong explain that "hip hop youth...often construct their identity through hip hop music and culture" (Emdin and Adjapong 122). They suggest rappers can connect with their communities by sharing similar experiences and struggles. Consequently, rap music has emerged as a form of defiance against social norms and oppression. Rap music is known for its ability to foster a sense of empowerment, which is infused in some rap songs. In fact, rapping lyrics draw the link between the people's lived experiences and the lyrical messages. This is evident in the way hip-hopppers strive to reflect real-life experiences in their music. As Mickey Hess notes, "hip hop artists assure their listeners of their realness, of the accurate correlation between their actual lived experience and the experience they present in their lyrics" (45). Hip-hop singers can deliver shared stories and experiences to their audience; therefore, they get the attention of the youth by creating a sense of belonging. Rap emphasized that is not a male-dominated art, but women also can have their imprints, for example Missy Elliott, a rap artist and a "five-time Grammy Award winner", left a considerable mark in the hip-hop industry (Hess 546). Her impact goes beyond music as she represented women within the genre. In the Arab world, the Arab uprisings have resulted in the emergence of Arab female rappers to protest against the regime, show that women can rap, and empower women through their lyrics. To illustrate, *Balghis Badri*, a Sudanese feminist activist, and *Aili Mari Tripp*, a Professor of Political Science, Gender and Women's Studies highlight the spread of rapping among Arab women and write: "since the Arab Spring, we are now hearing women's voices, extending into the present the practice of Arab women using poetry in song to express their visions, with themes that are socio-political and/or concerned with gender issues".

Empowerment in rap is the manifestation of resistance and a feeling to be noticed in patriarchal societies.

2. Exploring Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Approach

Texts and speeches are the subjects of discourse analysis, a field dedicated to three aspects: text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice, which are connected to Fairclough's model of Critical Discourse Analysis. Norman Fairclough claims that discourse analysis examines "the relationship between the discourse processes and the social processes" rather than only analysing language (Fairclough 132). Furthermore, he contends that continuity and change are powerfully shaped by a discourse (Fairclough 24). Discourse thus covers a variety of social practices rather than merely a written or spoken language. The three aspects engaged in the study of a discourse are outlined in the following graph.

Figure N°1. Dimensions of Discourse analysis



Source: Fairclough, Norman, 2013a, p 98

Norman Fairclough examines language through the lens of three main areas. Firstly, "description" is the structure and formal properties of the writing. Second, "interpretation" delves into how people use texts to communicate and highlight the link between "text and interaction" (21). Lastly, "explanation" explores the influence of social factors on people's interactions (21). Fairclough's method illuminates the nexus between language and society to reflect how they shape one another in diverse ways.

3. The Language of Empowerment in Soultana’s ‘Sawt Nssa’ and ‘35.28’

1. “Sawt Nssa”

1.1 Exploring the Textual Dimensions of Soultana’s ‘Sawt Nssa’

Values in song’s lyrics	Lexical Type	Extracts from the Song
Experiential Values	Antonym	Loved Hated
	Hyponymy	Mother
	Euphemism	She is selling her body.
	Metaphors	You looked at her like a cheap thing.

Relational Values	Formal Language	She could be your mother.
	Informal Language	The woman's voice is what I'm calling.
Expressive Values	Positive Expressive	A rose is still a rose
	Negative Expressive	He gave her lies and violence.

1.2 Syntax of Strength in the Song

Table 2: Pronoun Usage in Soultana’s Lyrics

Pronouns in the Song	The subject pronoun “I”	The subject pronoun “She”	The Subject Pronoun “you”
Extracts from the song	I am lost in the dark, in search of the light.	She could be your mother. She could be your sister	You looked at her like a cheap thing

Table 3: Exploring Definite Articles in Soultana’s Discourse

Definite Article	Extracts from the song
“The”	The money

Table 4: Grammatical Classification of Sentences in the Song

Classification of Sentences	Sentences from Lyrics
SVO	I lost my beauty
SVC	This is a Moroccan girl.

Table 5: Varieties of Sentence Structures

Declarative Mode	The woman's voice is what I am calling
Imperative Mode	Don’t humiliate her

Table 6: Linguistic Modality in Soultana’s Discourse

Modal Verbs	Sentence from the Song
Stating a fact	A rose is still a rose.

1. Key Linguistic Findings from Soultana's 'Sawt Nssa'"

The song's message is communicated through a variety of words. For instance, "loved" and "hated" show how different people think about women. Hyponyms like "mother" give more information and stress the caring roles women often play. Phrases like "She is selling her body" reflect the harsh truth of women being exploited less shocking. Metaphors, like "You looked at her like a cheap thing," paint a clear picture of how society judges and devalues people.

1.1 Relational Values and Social Interaction in Soultana's 'Sawt Nssa' Song

Relational values in the song are conveyed through both formal and informal language. Formal expressions like "She could be your mother" lend a serious tone to the lyrics emphasize the importance of respect and empathy for women. Informal language, such as "The woman's voice is what I'm calling," connects with the audience's everyday vernacular that can relate to the people's language.

1.2 Expressive Values and Emotional Discourse in Soultana's Sawt Nssa' Song

Expressive values are pictured through positive and negative language. Positive expressions like "A rose is still a rose" celebrate the natural value of women, which reflects compassion towards women. Negative expressions such as "He gave her lies and violence" reflect the harsh realities and injustices faced by women.

1.3 Grammatical Patterns and Meaning in Soultana's Sawt Nssa' Song

Grammatical features in "Sawt Nssa" establish different perspectives and voices. Pronouns like "I" in "I am lost in the dark, in search of the light," "she" in "She could be your mother. She could be

your sister," and "you" in "You looked at her like a cheap thing" draw the nexus between the artist and the audience with sympathetic wording to inspire the audience to consider their viewpoint on women. Definite articles like "the" in "The money" highlights economic issues where people are living poverty due to the lack of jobs or the wrongdoing of the government. Sentence structures vary from simple SVO sentences like "I lost my beauty" to more complex SVC constructions such as "This is a Moroccan girl" to develop lyrical diversity and raise issues of paramount importance concerning women, such a losing her beauty due to the continuous subjugation the women live and her strive to gain a foot hold in a patriarchal society. The song employs different sentence types, such as declarative and imperative modes, which enhance the power of the lyrics. In "A rose is still a rose," modal verbs emphasise the unchallengeable nature of certain realities. The rose symbolises women to suggest that they should be treated with respect and care.

2.“38.28” Song

1.2 Exploring the Textual Dimensions of Soultana’s “38.28”

Values in song’s lyrics	Lexical Type	English Gloss	Extracts from the Song
Experiential Values	Antonym	"Democracy"	dimuqratiya
		"Injustice"	zulm
	Synonym	"Oppressed"	maqhoor mazloom

	Euphemism	"They encircle you with walls"	yidooru beek soor
	Metaphors	"Sometimes the people see red"	sa'at yahmar al-sha'b
Relational Values	Formal Language	"The policy of excommunication and deception"	siyasat al-takfeer wa al-tazleel
	Informal Language	"My silence and your silence made the official oppress the people"	skati wa skatak khalla al-mas'ool 'ala al-sha'b yadsir
Expressive Values	Positive Expressive	"Call me a free Moroccan woman"	sameeni maghribiya hurra
	Negative Expressive	"The policy of excommunication and misguidance"	siyasat al-takfeer wa al-tazleel

2.2 Syntax of Strength in the Song

Table 2: Pronoun Usage in Soultana’s Lyrics

Pronouns in the Song	The subject pronoun “I”	The subject pronoun “You”
Extracts from the song	We rapped about the country to bring change	If you start, it's impossible to finish.



Table 3: Exploring Definite Articles in Soultana’s Discourse

Definite Article	Extracts from the song
“The”	The Injustice

Table 4: Grammatical Classification of Sentences in the Song

Classification of Sentences	Sentences from Lyrics
SVO	Democracy is a rumour.
SVC	It is hard to endure.
SV	The world speaks

Table 5: Varieties of Sentence Structures

Declarative Mode	"My voice and your voice, they counted them as a period at the end of the line"
Imperative Mode	"Stay silent; it's better for you not to speak"
Interrogative Mode	"What do you think? The situation is getting better"

Table 6: Linguistic Modality in Soultana’s Discourse

Modal Verbs	Sentence from the Song
Stating a fact	The prohibited is being legitimised.

2. Key Linguistic Findings from Soultana’s "35.28" Song

The song highlights significant concerns influencing people's life using opposing ideas like "democracy", dimuqratiya, and "injustice" ,zulm. Synonyms like "oppressed" ,maqhoor, mazloom, reflect the widespread social misery. Euphemisms like "They encircle you with walls" ,yidooru beek soor, soften the terrible reality of detention and subjugation. Metaphors like "Sometimes the people see red" ,sa'at yahmar al-sha'b, depict group wrath and revolt.

2.1 Relational Values and Social Interaction in Soultana’s "35.28" Song

In the song, relational values are expressed using both formal and informal language. There is a focus on society problems, formal statements like "The policy of excommunication and deception" ,siyasat al-takfeer wa al-tazleel, give the story a dark tone. Informal language like "My silence and your silence made the official oppress the people" connects with the audience's daily vocabulary, which renders the message more relevant.

2.2 Expressive Values and Emotional Discourse in Soultana’s ‘35.28’ Song

Positive phrases like "Call me a free Moroccan woman" ,sameeni maghribiya hurra, praise personal empowerment and



independence. Negative statements such "The policy of excommunication and misguidance" ,siyasat al-takfeer wa al-tazleel, attack the system's manipulation and control.

2.3 Grammatical Patterns and Meaning in Soultana's '35.28' Song

In "35.28," grammatical elements set several voices and points of view. Pronouns like "I" in "We rapped about the country to bring change" and "you" in "If you start, it's impossible to finish" produce an interaction of the artist and the rapper's identities. besides, words such as "the" in "The injustice" highlight a particular problem, which prevalent in the society. Simple SVO sentences like "Democracy is a rumour" and SVC like "It is hard to endure" enhance variation and impact in sentence patterns. In "The prohibited is being legitimised," modal verbs like "stating a fact" underline the protagonist's critique towards the hardships the artist and the people confront in their community.

Following Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, the study first provides a description of the linguistic features of the two songs. The next two phases are interpretation and explanation, which are then applied to uncover how the lyrics construct meaning and reflect the broader social and cultural contexts.

2. A Discursive Interpretation of Soultana's Songs

2.1 Textual Context and Meaning in Soultana's Songs

2.1.1 How Utterance Shapes Meaning in Soultana's Lyrics

Rich and varied words abound in both "Sawt Nssa" and "35.28," which use antonyms and metaphors to create depth and

contrast. While the mix of formal and informal language in lines like "She could be your mother" and "The woman's voice is what I'm calling" balances seriousness with familiarity, in "Sawt Nssa," metaphors like "You looked at her like a cheap thing" and antonyms like "loved" and "hated" shape the emotional ambiguity the artist is going through. Likewise in "35.28," the political criticism gains weight via the use of antonyms like "democracy" and "injustice," as well as from metaphors like "sometimes the people see red." As shown in phrases like "The policy of excommunication and deception" and "My silence and your silence made the official oppress the people," the song also combines both formal and informal language to improve the message's appeal while yet preserving its weight.

2.1.2 Local Coherence as a Tool of Persuasion in Soultana's Music

The manner in which the lyrics in each song create a gripping story, "Sawt Nssa" and "35.28" both show great local coherence. With each line supporting the major topic of women's courage in the face of hardship, the lines in "Sawt Nssa," together tell a tale of resistance and empowerment. In "35.28," too, the lines underline the themes of oppression and the pressing need for reform to guide an integrated account of political critique and the search of justice.

2.1.3 Analyzing Text Structure and Meaning in Soultana's Songs

Both "Sawt Nssa" and "35.28" are set around explicit central themes. With a tone of respect and empathy for women, "Sawt Nssa" centres on female emancipation. The several phrase forms and linguistic devices improve the song's power, which strengthen its message's impact. Likewise, "35.28 addresses political criticism and social challenges while using its linguistic features to underline the need of awareness and change.

2.2 The Situational Context of Soultana's 'Sawt Nssa' and '35.28'

2.2.2 Representation of Actions and Events in Soultana's 'Sawt Nssa' and '35.28'

With Soultana playing a cultural and political critic, both "Sawt Nssa" and "35.28" tackle important society issues. In "Sawt Nssa," Soultana positions herself as an ally for women's rights by examining issues of female empowerment and society. Then, she shifts to issues of politics and difficulties with society in "35.28," which support justice and change.

2.2.3 Agents of Discourse in Soultana's 'Sawt Nssa' and '35.28'

In both "Sawt Nssa" and "35.28," Soultana adopts a critical perspective through a combination of formal and colloquial language to engage her audience. In "Sawt Nssa," she adopts the position of a cultural critic in which she addresses the challenges of women, and in "35.28," she functions as a political critic, reveals society difficulties. The rapper conveys her views to a wide audience to defend both gender equality and social justice.

2.2.4 Power and Social Relationships in Soultana's Lyrics

Soultana explores and criticises the mechanisms of power and opposition inside society through both "Sawt Nssa" and "35.28". First, in "Sawt Nssa," she rejects accepted assumptions about women's roles and advocates reform and empowerment. Second, in "35.28," the emphasis moves to the more general interaction between the disadvantaged and those in authority, therefore stressing the necessity of justice and reform.

2.2.5 Functional Aspects of Language in Soultana's Lyrics

Using a blend of formal and informal vocabulary to engage listeners, the language functions as a tool for critique and advocacy in both "Sawt Nssa" and "35.28." In "Sawt Nssa," the language questions society's assessments and promotes respect of women and empathy. In "35.28," too, the language emphasises asking for knowledge and justice as well as criticising political injustice.

2.3 The Intertextual Context of Soultana's 'Sawt Nssa' and '35.28'

2.3.1 The Historical Roots in Soultana's Discourse

Drawing on historical origins to tackle modern society and political concerns, "Sawt Nssa" and "35.28" reflect a protest music. In "Sawt Nssa," the song criticises present society standards while emphasising women's empowerment by citing past efforts for gender equality. "35.28" similarly tackles political and social concerns, particularly those relevant to modern Arab society thereby maintaining the history of protest music as a means of increasing awareness and supporting transformation.

2.3.2 The Influence of Soultana's Message on Social Change

Power shapes both "Sawt Nssa" and "35.28"; Soultana uses her position to question political and social systems. In "Sawt Nssa," the song questions the system that support inequality by criticising society expectations on women's roles and supporting gender equality and respect. Likewise, in "35.28," Soultana questions repressive systems, supports political fairness, and pushes opposition against power.

3. Explanation of the Discursive Practices in Soultana's Songs

3.1 The Interplay of Power and Ideology in Soultana's Discourse



In its different themes, "Sawt Nssa" and "35.28" both highlight power conflicts. In "Sawt Nssa," the song questions society's views on women by exposing the ideas that devalue them and so supports gender equality. It questions and aims to destroy these ingrained conventions. In "35.28," Soultana questions accepted political beliefs by stressing power conflicts and support of justice and awareness.

3.2 Constructing Female Identity in Soultana's 'Sawt Nssa' and '35.28'"

Soultana builds her identity in both "Sawt Nssa" and "35.28," as an actor of rebellion and change. She presents herself as "Sawt Nssa" as a strong, independent woman who uses her music to question social conventions and support women's emancipation. She plays the political critic in "35.28" to demand political justice and express opposition to the government.

3.3 Soultana's Discourse as a Catalyst for Social Change

Listeners could be inspired and pushed for change in both "Sawt Nssa" and "35.28". In "Sawt Nssa," the artist questions social injustice and exploitation as well as society's expectations, which empowers listeners to fight for women's equality. In a similar vein, "35.28" confronts issues of injustice and discrimination to push the audience to participate in political and social transformation.

3.4 The Socio-Cultural Resonance of Soultana's 'Sawt Nssa' and '35.28'"

Soultana's songs "Sawt Nssa" and "35.28" reveal a great involvement with issues of gender and political oppression. In "Sawt Nssa," Soultana addresses topics including exploitation and established social norms through metaphors, antonyms, and

euphemism. Her use of formal and informal language builds a link with the audience, which promotes respect, empowerment, and gender equality. In "35.28," Soultana similarly exposes political corruption and social difficulties through formal language, metaphors, and experiential values. Stressing on the need for transformation and social justice, these songs have more appeal for Moroccan and Arab society. Particularly in the wake of the Arab Spring, they align with more general movements for women's rights and political justice by drawing from a local context yet resonating worldwide.

CONCLUSION

Soultana's "Sawt Nssa" and "35.28" demonstrate the powerful role of language in conveying resistance against gender oppression and political corruption. By employing a combination of formal and informal language, metaphors, antonyms, and euphemisms, Soultana critiques social norms to focus on the need for gender equality and political reform. Through Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, these songs construct identities of resistance, empowering listeners to challenge social injustices. Soultana's use of language is not only a means of personal expression but also an invitation to collective action, which makes her music as a catalyst for social change in Morocco and beyond. Soultana echoes the words of Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*, stating that "every woman has to listen to her own inner voice to find her identity in this changing world. She must create, out of her own needs and abilities, a new life plan" (Friedan 332).

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