WHEN IMAGINARIES FORGE ETHOS: THE HIDDEN SOCIOCULTURAL FORCES OF POLITICAL ARGUMENTATION

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Abstract

Ethos is a complex and crucial element in political discourse. Its complexity is evident in the construction process, which requires the speaker to consider the social imaginaries and cultural context of the audience. Building ethos based on one or more imaginaries allows a politician to secure the audience's adherence, as the imaginary "is based on judgments, ideas, even images, propagated without being examined or critically appropriated by the subjects who receive them"[i] (Lamizet, 2011: 28). This paper aims to analyze a set of imaginaries mobilized by political figures within a media corpus of Moroccan televised political debates. Specifically, we examine how ethos, imaginaries, and culture intersect through an analysis of several episodes of the televised debate series *Daif Al Aoula*.

Keywords

Ethos, Imaginaries, Political Discourse, Construction, Debate

Aristotle was interested in the moral character of the speaker (the orator) and their fundamental role in persuasion: "in his rhetoric, Aristotle calls ethos [...] the image of oneself that the orator projects in order to act through their words" Amossy, 2006: 70). The interlocutor (the audience) will be convinced first by the speaker's personality before their arguments.

In political discourse, constructing an image or ethos for argumentative purposes is therefore an essential practice. Politicians employ various strategies to create and circulate images; all aimed at mobilizing an imaginary of the political ideal.

This study focuses on the significance of imaginaries and representations in the construction of ethos.

1.   Corpus: presentation and treatment

The corpus analyzed in this study is a Moroccan political debate: the *Daïf Al Aoula* debate, which can be translated into English as "*The Guest of Al Aoula*" or "*The Guest of the Moroccan television channel Al Aoula.*"
In the media genre of televised political debates, we observe an intertwining of political discourse with audiovisual communication. For politicians, televised debate has become an essential practice: "televised debate has undoubtedly accentuated, if not outright prompted, this integration: its emergence and expansion have greatly contributed to making political practice a communicative practice" (Gauthier, 1995: 355).

Through this medium, political discourse acquires a form, a time, and a space in which political actors can construct and circulate various opinions, ideas, and representations: "it is ultimately in the media, by becoming part of stable forms of representation, that political events acquire consistency and meaning" (Lamizet, 2011: 33).

The corpus is primarily composed of Moroccan Arabic dialect, with occasional instances of classical Arabic and French terms. This requires transcription and translation into English to suit the study [ii].

The corpus includes several episodes, each lasting approximately one hour and thirty minutes. It is unnecessary to transcribe the entire corpus; we focus on passages that are significant for analysis, following Traverso's observation that in analysis, "the key word is therefore adaptation to the objective" (2009 :23).

To avoid disrupting the analysis with written Arabic dialect interventions—first transcribed phonetically and then translated—we will present the exchanges directly in English, while preserving relevant elements of the oral

text to "give the reader an idea of what is actually said" (Traverso, 2009: 89). It is important to stress that transcription is merely an "artifact, a simple tool for the analyst, who must never mistake the map for the territory, nor forget that its true object is oral in nature" (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2005: 28). In other words, our analysis will focus on the sociocultural representations involved in constructing ethos in the Daïf Al Aoula political debate as they occur in reality, rather than as they appear in transcription or translation.

2. The concept of ethos: from rhetoric to discourse analysis

The concept of ethos has undergone a substantial evolution, expanding from Aristotle's rhetoric to encompass other disciplines, such as discourse analysis. Research in this field has sought to address the question of ethos, examining it as both a discursive entity constructed during discourse and a preconceived image present in the minds of interlocutors.

In this context, a range of terminologies have emerged to characterize these two facets of the same coin (ethos = self-image), as Amossy (2000) does, using the two terms "preliminary ethos" and "ethos"

The author posits the following: As Amossy explains, "Ethos or image beforehand, as opposed to ethos in general (or oratorical ethos, which is fully discursive), is the image that the audience can form of the speaker before they speak" (Amossy 2000: 70).

Maingueneau (2002) and Charaudeau (2005) differentiate between *pre-discursive ethos* and *discursive ethos*. Finally, Kerbrat-Orrechioni distinguishes between rhetorical ethos and pragmatic ethos within this concept.

Amossy goes beyond the dissociation between rhetorical ethos and discursive ethos and proposes a non-restrictive analysis that can study both images of the speaker as long as: "he is engaged in a verbal exchange with the other and, regardless of the nature of this verbal exchange, willingly or unwillingly, in a programmed or spontaneous way, presents himself" (2014: 22). However, the author believes that the construction of ethos: "whether deliberate or not, any presentation of oneself is necessarily a reworking of what has already been said, a repetition and modulation of pre-existing verbal images" (2014: 24). In other words, the speaker already has an image in the mind of the listener (and vice versa). This pre-existing image can either be reinforced because it is positive or repaired because it is necessary to do so through repair strategies (*a reworking of the ethos*).

In the political arena, it is easy to have a preconceived image of politicians, as they are public figures who often appear in the media, which facilitates the generation of ethos.

We believe that the media play a role in the ongoing dissemination of political discourse, and therefore ensure the ongoing construction of ethos, which makes it easy to distinguish between pre-discursive and discursive ethos.

3. Sociocultural imaginaries: a source of ethos construction

Social imaginaries emerge from the perspectives individuals hold about their societies. Those who coexist within a society share a common reality and develop a set of collective imaginaries regarding that reality. These imaginaries are expressed through ceremonies, demonstrations, and rituals, allowing them to take shape as what are known as socio-discursive imaginaries. These can be observed in scientific theories, proverbs, sayings, and other cultural expressions.

Charaudeau (2005: 160) defines them as knowledge that "circulates in a space of inter-discursivity. They bear witness to collective identities, to the perception that individuals and groups have of events, to the judgments they make about social activities"

What we initially referred to as perspectives, which subsequently transform into a set of social and therefore socio-discursive imaginaries, are formed from the knowledge that individuals develop about their reality, either to describe it or to judge it.

We believe that political discourse is based on the mobilization of a set of imaginaries for argumentative purposes and, more specifically, in the construction of ethos.

When arguing, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (2008) believe that the speaker proceeds with construction followed by an adaptation to their audience. Adapting to the audience means constructing the image that is closest to them, and to do this, the speaker draws on several elements that circulate in common opinion:

> [When] it comes to arguing, to influencing the intensity of an audience's adherence to certain theses through discourse, it is no longer possible to completely disregard the psychological and social conditions without which the argument would be pointless or ineffective, considering them irrelevant (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 2008: 18).

Speakers must extend their focus beyond the specific audience, which consists of the personal beliefs of a particular group, to address a broader audience known as the universal audience. This universal audience includes all the knowledge and evidence accepted by everyone. As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (2008) state, "the universal

audience is made up of each individual based on what they know about their fellow human beings, in order to transcend the few differences, they are aware of" (2008: 43).

We also find this premise in Charaudeau (2004), who also believes that the construction of an image, whether by the speaker or their interlocutor, is based on the culture, values, norms, and evidence shared by both. For example, when giving a speech and constructing an ethos of power, character, intelligence, etc., politicians take into account their audience's representations of these images, because it is on this basis that their persuasion can be successful.

This involves constructing and adapting to the audience, an adaptation that is feasible if both live in the same intersubjective space: "where discourses circulate as carriers of systems of thought constituted in what we call 'socio-discursive imaginaries'" (Charaudeau, 2004: 30).

Based on Charaudeau's work, we will examine a few imaginaries from the corpus. The first one we will discuss is the imaginary of tradition. The discourses associated with this imaginary reference to the ancient values of ancestors, which are regarded as sources of authenticity and purity.

To illustrate this point, we will take a look at the following exchange from episode 2[iii], featuring Mohamed Abdelwahhab AL-Rafiki as a guest (hereinafter referred to as M-A. AL-R).

> (1)
> Host Mohammed Tijjini (hereinafter M.T.): "In your opinion, what is Salafism (.) and what term can be applied to (.) **Si** AL-Rafiki↑(3''') now? ↑
> M-A. AL-R: [...] the solution to the problems facing society today(.) is to return to what our predecessors based their lives on(.) t the foundations laid by our predecessors, to return to how people lived in the early centuries in terms of practices(.) (asp.) in terms of behavior (asp.) (.) in terms of work [...]".

In this exchange, the speaker M-A. AL-R draws on the imagery of tradition by suggesting that the solution to today's societal problems lies in returning to the origins and values of our ancestors (our predecessors). This return to our origins and roots is a prerequisite for overcoming our current problems.

The speaker M-A. AL-R draws on this imagery to construct *the ethos of the traditional politician*. It seems that most people feel a sense of nostalgia, regretting the past and especially the pleasant moments associated with that period.

This state of mind makes each person feel that their past is much better than their present, which means that a section of the audience would have this nostalgic background and could adhere to this idea of *returning to one's origins* developed by the speaker and accepting his *ethos of the traditional politician*.

The other imaginary highlighted by Charaudeau (2004) is the opposite of the first. It is *the imaginary of modernity*, which the author defines as "a set of representations that social groups construct about how they perceive and judge their present moment, in comparison with the past, attributing a positive value to it, even when it is criticized" (Charaudeau, 2004:166).

We can see this imaginary in the same episode between the same participants in the following exchange:

> (2)
> M.T: "When you say to me, for example, (eu ::h), it means (eu ::h)(.) the thought of tanouir (.) what do you mean by that?↑
>
> M-A. AL-R: "By that I mean (3''') that (.) religion must interact with the changes that are taking place () that there should be no room for conflict as is happening today(.) that there will be consent between religion and society(.) because society is developing and growing [...]".

In this exchange, the speaker M-A. AL-R believes that society is simply developing and that religion must adapt to this development. He draws on *the imagery of modernity*, insisting on the need to set aside the rules that limit people's thinking in the Islamic religion and to adopt an *enlightened Islam*.

It is as if he is presenting the audience with *light* on one side and *darkness* on the other, and it is obvious that the universal audience will opt for light.

In this example, we can see how M-A. AL-R builds *a modern ethos* in the same episode by mobilizing the imaginary of modernity. We are faced with the same speaker who mobilizes two imaginations and creates two opposing ethos (*modern* versus *traditional*).

In his two speeches, M-A. AL-R, who is essentially a preacher, constructs in the first speech *an ethos of tradition*, proposing a return to the behaviors and practices of the ancients as a solution to current problems. In the second, he constructs *an ethos of modernity* by proposing to adapt the Islamic religion to the changes of this century.

Balancing these two sociocultural imaginaries allows him to expand his appeal, incorporating both modern and traditional elements.

The fourth imaginary we will discuss is the imaginary of popular sovereignty, which expresses the "desire to be together, not to distinguish oneself from other members of the group, and above all to stand together with them when they are threatened" (Charaudeau, 2004:125). Charaudeau (2004) explains that the imaginary of popular sovereignty is embodied in discourses that celebrate the sovereignty of the people as responsible for their social, economic, and political lives.

To fully understand this imaginary and the ethos that is built from it, we will take this exchange from the episode[iv] with Mohamed Aujjar:

(3)

M.T: "Why↑(.) because (.) the program will give a voice to(.) interventions (.) by a Christian Moroccan(.) a Shiite Moroccan(.) a Baha'i Moroccan or an Ahmadi Moroccan(.) that means(.) (eu:h) the debate is not only about freedom of belief but also other freedoms↓(.) doesn't this correspond with your vision↑?

Mohamed Aujjar (hereafter M.A.): "Firstly(.) as Moroccans(.) we are committed to the uniqueness of the current and we are satisfied with the attachment of Moroccans to their doctrines (3''') and this country. Throughout its Islamic history, Morocco, **Si** Tijjini, has allowed non-Muslims(.) to practice all their rituals (3''') and Moroccan Jews practice their rituals in complete freedom (asp.) Africans, Europeans, and Christians, when they come to our country, practice in churches in complete freedom. There are invitations that must be avoided and insistence on supporting the uniqueness of the movement in Morocco, and we do not provoke issues that ultimately aim at disunity. (asp.) [...]".

In this exchange, which is an excerpt from the second sequence in which the host asks his guest to comment on some current events, M.T. asks M.A. about the reasons behind his refusal to participate in a conference on individual freedoms.

M.A. invokes notions of the unity of the Islamic movement, solidarity among Moroccans, and union, and also constructs an ethos of tolerance. He inserts himself into a community that is the predominantly Islamic Moroccan people, who must remain united while accepting other religions.

By mobilizing this image of the sovereignty of the people, he manages to construct several ethos in addition to the ethos of tolerance: such as the ethos of the community, the ethos of the defender of the Islamic religion, and the ethos of solidarity.

We see that despite the existence of a common ground that encompasses all individuals, the politician finds himself blocked by the different groups of opinions that circulate within a single community. He therefore tries to juggle between two or more imaginaries in order to make his speech successful, or sometimes to juxtapose two that are totally opposed, as in the case of the imaginary of tradition and modernity in the example of M-A. AL-R.

The mobilization of a particular imaginary aims to represent the political ideal. Lamizet (2011) finds that politicians disseminate a set of imaginaries for persuasive purposes. They multiply strategies by encouraging the mind to identify with this utopian world and thus to accept the vision proposed by the politician. This vision is based on "an aesthetic representation of political society" (Lamizet, 2011:235).

The ideal imposes itself as a norm on which "our opinion is based, and in relation to which we are able to judge, evaluate, and understand the strategies of the political actors we witness, in their speeches and in their achievements" (Lamizet, 2011: 234).

4. Culture and the construction of ethos

The question of the relation between ethos and culture is part of the same debate raised at the beginning: does ethos depend on cultures, or does it transcend them at a higher level, that of the universality?

We believe that it is important to return to Goffman's work (1987) and especially to the notion of *face*, to understand the nature of this connection. Goffman (1987) discusses the interaction between a speaker and a listener, where each tries to respect constraints and norms of conduct to preserve both their own face and that of the other (*the process of figuration or facework*). Goffman emphasizes that: "The speaker is indeed obliged not only to be attentive to what the listener has in mind [...] but also to express themselves in a way that is not tactless given the circumstances" (1987:235).

According to the author, all of the constraints that ensure that neither will be tactless stem from a society's collective and shared knowledge.

Preserving face requires speakers to adhere to certain norms and rules so that recognition and appreciation can be established between them. Each of them projects a positive image of himself while at the same time he constructs an image of his interlocutor and and tries to protect both his own and the other person's face by mobilizing a set of cultural mechanisms such as greetings, acts of politeness, wishes, etc.

To show the relation between ethos and culture, Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2002) starts from the premise that language as a system maintains relation with external substances such as culture.

She finds that there is a complex relation between language and culture, since language conveys culture and is itself one of its components: "it is indisputable not only that culture permeates all discourse produced by the speaking community, but also that it is, in a sense, 'encapsulated' in the language system" (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2002: 37).

To prove the existence of this language-culture link, the author presents the following arguments:
First, in the lexicon of a given language, there are words that are the product of a society's culture, which explains the difficulty of translating them into another language, hence the connotative level of a term that remains purely cultural.

We can see this in the following example taken from the episode featuring Mohamed Ben Abdelkader[v] when the host (M.T) wanted to provoke him with the scandal that took place because of the rotten meat at the Feast of Sacrifice, also known as Eid al-Adha. He asks him:

> (4)
> M.T: "ki xroʒ beɛda l-ḥem dlɛid ? "ki xorʒa-t dwart-kum ?"

This is a recurring question used by Moroccans during Eid al-Adha and the days that follow. This question is linked to Moroccan culture and a specific context in which people express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the sheep sacrificed on this occasion.

We were unable to translate it into English as it is associated with Moroccan culture, so we will simply provide a meaning that can be roughly translated as: "How did you find the meat from the sheep sacrificed for Eid?" This meaning remains approximate to the meaning of the expression in Moroccan culture.

Next, there is the use of honorifics, which also reflects the connection between culture and language. This involves the use of certain *deixis* in social interactions, which determine the status between the speaker and the listener.

In this sense, we can give the example of the term "***Si***," an abbreviation of *Sidi* (which means "sir" in English). This abbreviation is used in Moroccan Darija and in this political debate as well, and it generally indicates respect between the speaker and the listener. We find it in the formula: *Si+ first name/function/surname*, such as "***Si AL-Rafiki***," "***Si Tijjini***," etc.

Finally, ritual formulas are also cultural markers: "we can see that ritual formulas can be traces, less innocuous than they appear, of a certain underlying cultural logic" (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2002: 41).
The expression of wishes as an example is related to the culture of society. In the use of phrases such as "*mebruk l-ɛid*" to wish someone a happy holiday, or in this exchange taken from the episode featuring guest Abdellah Boussouf[vi]:

> (5)
> T.M: "[...] ɛwašrek mebruka↑
> Abdellah Boussouf: Allah jbarek fik wa ramaḍan karim (asp.) [...]".

In this exchange, the expressions "*ɛwašrek mebruka*" "*Allah jbarek fik*," and "*ramaḍan karim*" (again, difficult to translate with all their connotations!) are used among Moroccans to express their wishes, and here in this exchange, on the occasion of the month of Ramadan.

We can therefore summarize that there is a link between the ethos and culture of a given society because the linguistic system reflects its culture. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2002) finds that ethos cannot be thought of in a collective and generalizing framework, as several intercultural approaches have done, since different social groups give rise to different constructions of ethos:

> it is certain that this hypothesis is more acceptable in relatively homogeneous societies, such as Japanese society, than in more mixed societies such as the United States, where the unity whose ethos we seek to define must necessarily have more precise contours (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2002: 44).

What Kerbrat-Orecchioni is trying to prove in this quote is that it is difficult to talk about a collective ethos in a mixed society such as the United States, since the members of the population belong to different cultures, unlike the Japanese population, which is known for its homogeneity.

In the same vein, Amossy insists that argumentation based on ethos should be open and take into account the cultural dimension of ethos, since the use of ethos differs from one culture to another. What may be a positive image in one community is not necessarily so in another. It must also take into account ethos as an individual and collective representation, as this entity can refer to one or more people.

Conclusion

We have demonstrated that ethos is a complex entity that can only be defined on the basis of several concepts that reveal its complexity on the one hand and its importance in political discourse on the other.

This complexity can be seen in the process of its construction, which requires the speaker to take into account the social imaginaries and culture of their community when constructing their ethos.

We have also emphasized the importance of socio-cultural imaginaries in creating an image that can win over others; the speaker is perceived on the basis of a social imaginary and a culture of the moment, since interlocutors rely on the social representations they have acquired during their life in the community to attribute seductive images to him (such as the image of the modern, traditional, credible, honest, virtuous, serious, competent politician, etc.). These imaginaries define the way ethos are conceived, which explains why they differ from one culture to another and from one society to another.

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[i] All quotations have been translated by the author of this work from French into English to adapt them to the text.

[ii] The transcription system used is based on the conventions established by Traverso (2009):
(.) indicates a short pause, (asp.) indicates aspiration, […] indicates a cut by the transcriber, (3''') indicates a long pause, ↑ indicates rising intonation, :: indicates a long prolongation, ↓ indicates falling intonation. = indicates the overlap of two turns of speech. [appears at the beginning of overlapping turns of speech. : indicates a short prolongation. **Si**: abbreviation of *"sidi,"* an honorific in classical and dialectal Arabic equivalent to *"sir"* in English.

[iii] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6gLQ0g9W12 [accessed on 08-09-2018].

[iv] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9WcrxYLKT8 [accessed on 08-09-2018].

[v] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0zhIu4H59k [accessed on 08-09-2018].

[vi] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gB2KSpZLc_M [accessed on 08-09-2018].

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