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The Use of Metaphors in Moroccan Political Struggle

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Abstract: This article examines the use of metaphor in Moroccan political discourse, its role in political struggle, and its function as a tool for shaping political views and constructing political realities. The study is based on a qualitative discourse analysis of two major political labels employed in contemporary Moroccan political polarisation: 3adamiyin ("nihilists"), commonly applied to radical opposition groups, and 3ayasha ("those who chant 'Long live the King'"), used to describe loyal supporters of the monarchy and the regime. These two political terms are reported in Moroccan newspapers. The study argues that these labels are used to frame political opponents, reinforce ideological polarisation, and attach negative connotations. While opposition discourse often implies that regime supporters are unthinkingly loyal, pro-regime discourse portrays the opposition as blind to the country's achievements. Despite their opposing political orientations, both metaphors perform similar discursive functions, including framing, delegitimisation, and the exclusion of rival groups from constructive political participation. The findings highlight the central role of metaphor in political struggle and show how linguistic framing contributes to the construction

of legitimacy, the polarisation of public opinion, and the shaping of political realities in Morocco. Moreover, the study reveals that although regime supporters and their opponents differ in their views of the monarchy and its achievements, both share a tendency to delegitimise the other and to question the intellectual and conceptual capacities of their opponents. This demonstrates the power of metaphor in disseminating political ideologies and in simplifying the understanding of political struggle in the Moroccan context.

Keywords: Metaphor, Political Discourse, public opinion, ideology, framing, *3ayash*, *3adamiyin*.

Introduction

The importance of concepts and terms in political struggle has been widely discussed in linguistic and political studies. Extensive scholarship has examined metaphor in political discourse. Kövecses, Z. (2010) emphasises that metaphor is a basic mechanism of human cognition, not simply a linguistic ornament. Lakoff (2004) emphasises that metaphors are not merely linguistic embellishments but are central to thought and action. They “govern our everyday functioning,” shaping how we reason and act (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Politicians use metaphors to guide interpretation and persuasion, anticipating that their utterances will be decoded in ways that align with their objectives. Pérez and Tavits (2019) demonstrate how political opinions are shaped by linguistic framing, while Joseph (2006) highlights how language defines rationality and social belonging.

Background to the Study

The Moroccan political system is characterised by the centrality of the King, both constitutionally and symbolically. The Moroccan Constitution considers the King as Head of State and Amīr al-Mu'minīn (Commander of the Faithful), granting him both political and religious authority (Elinson, 2013). The coronation of the current King was presented as a step toward democracy, signalling a break with the previous regime, which had been marked by the dominance of royal authority in the political sphere (Charbati, 2018).

The constitutional changes of 2011, which delegated more powers and responsibilities to the government, played a crucial role in pacifying the opposition. These reforms suggested that the King had transferred certain powers and responsibilities to the government, which was expected to take full charge of managing citizens' daily affairs. Consequently, opposition groups directed their criticism toward the government rather than the monarchy, avoiding confrontation with the King.

However, part of society remained unconvinced by these changes. They sought to delegitimise regime supporters by calling them *3ayasha*, while regime supporters retaliated by labelling them *3damiyin* ("nihilists"). Language thus became a powerful instrument of political struggle, used either to reinforce legitimacy or to contest it.

Research Objectives

This study seeks to examine how metaphors are used in the Moroccan political scene to shape political views and positions. It aims to uncover how both pro-regime and anti-regime actors employ metaphors to delegitimise one another. The study argues that the use of metaphors is not arbitrary but grounded in specific determinants that make them effective. More specifically, metaphors and framing devices shape perceptions, influence attitudes, and construct realities (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Charteris-Black, 2011). This study focuses on two important terms used in the Moroccan political context: *3damiyin* ("nihilists") and *3ayasha* ("those who chant 'Long live the King'") to show how metaphorical labelling is used to frame political actors, shape public perceptions, and reinforce ideological divisions.

Research Problem

This study investigates how metaphors are employed as ideological instruments in the Moroccan political struggle to structure political discourse, legitimise or delegitimise political opponents, frame political conflicts, and shape collective understandings of political achievements and ideological polarisation.

Research Question

How are metaphors employed by pro-regime and anti-regime actors in Moroccan political discourse to construct, reinforce, or challenge political legitimacy through the use of terms such as *3ayasha* and *3damiyin*?

Literature Review

Political leaders have historically relied on metaphorical framing. For instance, George W. Bush's phrase "War on Terror" (Lakoff, 2004) helped legitimise military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan (Charteris-Black, 2011). Van Dijk (1997) conceptualises political discourse as a form of power enacted through text and talk. Within this framework, political metaphors are primarily used to strengthen national identity, influence public opinion, and construct political realities.

Metaphors as Instruments to Strengthen National Identity

Musolff (2021) confirms that metaphors such as NATION AS A BODY and NATION AS A PERSON are used to depict and strengthen national identity. National identity can also be reinforced by raising awareness of perceived dangers related to political issues such as immigration. In immigration discourse, metaphors are frequently employed to represent immigrants. For example, the metaphors FLOOD and INVASION are often used to frame immigration as a threat (Santa Ana, 2002). Similarly, family metaphors can be employed to promote unity, as illustrated by Lakoff's (1996) concept of the "strict father."

Metaphors as Instruments to Influence Opinions and Justify Policies.

Political reasoning is largely unconscious and is influenced by embodied metaphorical systems (Hellsten, 2002). Metaphors are used in political communication to structure citizens' perceptions of political realities (Hart, 2018; Chilton, 2018) and to guide emotional responses (Landau et al., 2019). This is achieved by imposing specific perspectives on the receiver through the mapping of one domain onto another. For example, the abstract concept of argument is often framed in terms of war: "I defended my idea" or "I demolished his opinion." Such mappings structure political discourse by highlighting certain dimensions while downplaying others (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Musolff, 2016). Similarly, political speech often frames politics as a journey—"We are on the path of reform"—or as a fight—"The fight against corruption" or "We are at war with disease."

In addition to influencing perceptions, metaphors can be used to justify important political policies, including the legitimisation of confrontation-based policy responses (Flusberg et al., 2021; Semino, 2021). They mobilise support, create a sense of urgency, and frame political actors as heroes or enemies (Semino, 2008).

Metaphors as Instruments for Creating Realities

Furthermore, metaphors do not merely reflect political reality; they also help create it by implicitly incorporating judgments into everyday language use (Charteris-Black, 2018; van Dijk, 2018). Metaphors can also be used to establish ideological boundaries (Koller, 2022), thereby contributing to political polarisation (Thibodeau, 2020).

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the field of political science by demonstrating that metaphors occupy a central position in political struggle. Political conflict is not limited to material realities; it also involves the symbolic construction of meaning. Language, through metaphor, does not merely mirror reality but actively participates in shaping it (Lakoff, 2004; Musolff, 2016).

Within the Moroccan political context, metaphors extend beyond rhetorical ornamentation or argumentative persuasion. They are mobilised to influence both cognition and emotion, to consolidate stability, or to destabilise political adversaries. In this sense, metaphor in Morocco cannot be reduced to a decorative figure of speech or merely a conceptual framework; rather, it constitutes a pivotal element of political practice and a significant factor in shaping the trajectory of the political system, whether toward stability or instability.

In addition, this study contributes to the fields of linguistics and cognitive science by demonstrating that the effectiveness of metaphor rests on its capacity to activate meaning at both the cognitive and affective levels of the audience. Consequently, it is argued that metaphor should not be examined solely in relation to concepts or as a subordinate category of language, but rather as an object of study in its own right, with significant implications for political analysis.

Methodology

Research Design

This article employs a qualitative discourse analysis of the use of metaphor in Moroccan political struggle. The methodology combines cognitive and discourse-analytical approaches to uncover the underlying conceptual structures of two prominent metaphors: العياشة ("those chanting 'Long live the King'") and العدميين ("nihilists"). The study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytical approach to investigate how these metaphors function in Moroccan political discourse. Specifically, the analysis examines how these two terms construct political identities, reveal ideological positions, and shape public opinion.

Data Collection

The data were collected from online sources, primarily newspapers. The two terms, العياشة (those chanting "Long Live the King") and العدميين (nihilists), are not part of mainstream academic discussions or formal political debate. The term 3ayasha is generally associated with opposition groups. It is used to discredit regime supporters, whereas regime supporters use the term 3adamiyin to discredit an opposition perceived as unable to recognise any past, present, or future political and economic achievements.

The term العياشة (3ayasha) emerged during and after the February 20 Movement and is commonly used to describe individuals perceived as repeatedly chanting "Long Live the King" (Hadouch, 2017). The term has also been used to describe those who opposed the 2017 protests in the Rif region (Ben Shrif, 2017). The Islamist movement leader Aharshan explains that the term derives its meaning from a perceived division among Moroccans between those who say "Long Live the King" and those who say "Long Live the People" (Maghreb Times, 2025).

The term العدميين (3adamiyin, "nihilists") is used to describe individuals perceived as unable to recognise any positive achievements of the Moroccan state. Morocco's Head of Government, Aziz Akhannouch, called for recognising Morocco's achievements and rejecting what he described as a "nihilistic vision" that focuses exclusively on negative aspects (Hespress, March 10, 2019). He further urged Moroccans not to leave the public sphere to "nihilists" and "dark forces," whom he described as people who "seek destruction" (Le360, 2019).

Data Analysis

The two metaphors, العياشة (those chanting "Long Live the King") and العدميين (nihilists), are analysed using a framework comprising three main steps: mapping, categorising, and framing.

Mapping: Following Lakoff and Johnson (1980), the study identifies mappings between source and target domains. In other words, it examines how abstract concepts (targets) are understood through more concrete concepts (sources).

Categorising: Glucksberg (2001) explains that metaphors function as class-inclusion statements, allowing two different concepts to be represented simultaneously. Aspects of the source concept are transferred to the target concept based on shared features.

Framing: Metaphors frame political and social issues by highlighting certain aspects of reality while obscuring others (Lakoff, 2004). This framework is applied to analyse the underlying structure of the two terms: 3ayasha and 3adamiyin.

Results

a. The term العياشة (3ayasha: those chanting “Long Live the King”)

Mapping: The term 3ayasha maps regime supporters onto people who repeatedly chant “Long Live the King.” Thus, loyalty to the regime is understood as a group of people who continuously repeat this slogan, whether for a reason or not.

Categorising: Mapping loyalists onto 3ayasha creates a single category that groups diverse regime supporters as essentially similar individuals committed to supporting government policies and opposing dissent.

Framing: The term 3ayasha highlights regime supporters' loyalty to the government and the king while obscuring other possible motivations. It ignores the possibility that supporters may value political stability, support specific policies, or have well-founded reasons not to oppose the regime.

Additional observed metaphorical functions of the term 3ayasha

Associated Implicatures: The slogan “Long Live the King” is associated with the label Al-3ayasha, which implies unconditional loyalty.

Explanatory Power: The label explains supporters' behaviour by suggesting that their positive evaluation of government performance stems primarily from loyalty to the king.

Substitution: The portrayal of regime supporters as mere chanters of “Long Live the King” suggests that they are viewed as replacing independent thought with repetitive slogans. Rather than forming their own opinions, they are portrayed as simply echoing political chants.

Judging: 3ayasha are portrayed as intellectually blind, unable to think critically or perceive the regime's flaws.

b. The term العدميين (3adamiyin: nihilists)

Mapping: The metaphor maps the opposition onto nihilist philosophers, presupposing that both share a common characteristic: the rejection of any positive contribution or value.

Categorising: The opposition is categorised as a group that rejects the value of government achievements altogether. Their criticism is interpreted not as a realistic assessment of government

performance but as a consequence of a nihilistic worldview that sees no good in the world and, consequently, no good in government achievements.

Framing: The term frames the opposition by highlighting its alleged refusal to recognise government achievements while downplaying the reasons and arguments underlying such criticism.

Additional observed metaphorical functions of the term *3adamiyin*

Associated Implicatures: Labelling the opposition as nihilists implies they are politically blind, supposedly explaining their inability to recognise positive aspects of government performance.

Explanatory Power: The opposition's rejection of the regime and their perception that no progress has been achieved are explained by their alleged nihilistic outlook.

Extension: The term extends the philosophical meaning of nihilism into the political domain, reinterpreting the denial of meaning or value as a denial of governance and political achievement.

Judging: Because the opposition is portrayed as seeing no value in government achievements, it is judged as nihilistic. Consequently, its members are portrayed as unable or unwilling to recognise positive governmental accomplishments.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that metaphor plays a central role in Moroccan political struggle. The metaphors *3ayasha* and *3adamiyin* demonstrate that metaphors function as political tools for shaping perceptions and constructing social realities. The main findings can be summarised as follows.

The terms *3ayasha* and *3adamiyin*, as used in Moroccan political struggle, reflect fundamental conceptual mechanisms such as mapping (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), categorisation (Glucksberg, 2001), and framing (Lakoff, 2004). In addition, several other metaphorical functions were observed in both terms, including associated implicatures, explanatory power, and judgment.

The study further demonstrates that, despite their opposing ideological positions, the two metaphors share a common underlying strategy: portraying the adversary as blind to reality. The metaphor *3ayasha* conveys blindness to the regime's flaws, whereas *3adamiyin* conveys blindness to the government's positive achievements.

This shared logic suggests that both metaphors rely on a common conceptual structure in which political disagreement is explained through cognitive deficiency rather than through legitimate differences in values, interests, or interpretations. These findings support previous research suggesting that metaphors contribute to political polarisation by simplifying complex realities into antagonistic categories (Thibodeau, 2020).

However, the two metaphors differ in some of their underlying mechanisms. While the philosophical meaning of nihilism is extended to the political domain, reinterpreting the denial of value in life as a denial of governance and political achievement, the term *3ayasha* implies that

regime supporters substitute repetitive slogans and chants for critical political judgment. In this way, both metaphors construct political realities through two interconnected processes: delegitimisation and exclusion.

By labelling opponents as *3adamiyin* (nihilists), the metaphor undermines the legitimacy of their political views and portrays them as inherently negative and unproductive. Conversely, by labelling regime supporters as *3ayasha*, opponents delegitimise them by questioning their intellectual independence and political judgment. This finding supports Musolff's (2021) argument that political metaphors establish ideological boundaries and define who is considered a legitimate political actor.

Each group challenges the other's ability to perceive reality, accusing its opponents of political blindness. As a result, both metaphors symbolically exclude the opposing side from playing a constructive role in politics. This exclusion obstructs dialogue and cooperation and may negatively affect social integration and national unity.

Overall, the findings suggest that these metaphors can be deemed influential cognitive and ideological tools that define political identities, set ideological boundaries, and cause political polarisation within Moroccan political discourse. Ideologies are not simply the result of logical arguments and political debate; rather, they are governed by deeply rooted metaphors embedded in the subconscious, which shape public perceptions of reality (Hasan, Amin, & Mirwan, 2026).

Conclusion

This article has examined the use of metaphors in the Moroccan political scene and the ideological foundations upon which they are constructed. The analysis focused on two prominent metaphors: *Al 3ayasha* (those who proclaim loyalty to the King) and *3adamoyin* (nihilists, those who perceive no value in government actions). Although these metaphors appear to differ in terms of political alignment and immediate rhetorical function, they share common foundations, beliefs, and perspectives.

The study acknowledges its limitations. It does not claim to provide a comprehensive mapping of all metaphors used by Moroccan politicians, nor does it examine the full range of strategies employed to undermine adversaries. Instead, it offers an initial insight into two key metaphors that contribute to processes of Moroccan struggle. The foundations identified here enrich the broader repertoire of metaphorical tools used in political discourse to frame others' perceptions, but they do not exhaust the possibilities.

Suggestions for Future Research

Ultimately, although this study has generated new perspectives and theoretical insights, further research is required to deepen our understanding of the underlying structures of political metaphors and to expand the range of cases examined. New terms need to be investigated for their underlying entailments and implicit framing, particularly in relation to economic and societal topics. Future research could also analyse the use of metaphors across different political contexts to compare the

mechanisms that shape political views and construct political realities across ideological environments.

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Conflict of interest

The author report there are no competing interests to declare.

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