THE SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF POSTERS AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN JORDAN

Rasha Salhab Altamimi

PhD.in Gender and Diversity., University of Oviedo, Oviedo, Spain,

uo279629@uniovi.es

Abstract

This paper aims to define the role of the communication posters designed by feminist protesters in expressing the rejection of domestic violence against women in Jordan, since few studies address such topics. In response to a notorious incident in 2019 where a suburban woman in Jordan was physically abused by her husband in front of her children, Jordanian feminists staged a protest march in the heart of the capital city, Amman. The victim became permanently disabled due to this violence. Several female protesters joined the demonstration, carrying reflective visual and verbal posters to show their empathy towards the victim and repudiation of the victimization. Moreover, these posters have been circulated via Twitter, with users writing empathic comments on the images and using several hashtags such as #Jerash Crime and #Enough, which prove that these posters are effective in vindicating women's rights, besides claiming security and protection against violence. The research methodology involved conducting a semiotic analysis on the most explicit posters raised during the march and

distributed via Twitter to show condemnation of the brutal physical violence against the Jordanian victim.

Keywords

Domestic Violence, Violence Against Women, Semiotic Analysis, Physical Violence, Mass Communication, Awareness Posters

1. Introduction

Violence against women is one of the practices that hinder women from contributing to society and achieving their goals. Also, this issue is a widespread phenomenon around the world. (Vleuten, Roggeban, Eerdewijk, 2020). The World Health Organization asserts that 30% of women are at risk of physical violence (WHO, 2021). A study by Elghossain et al. (2019) showed that intimate partner violence has increased between 6% and 59% among Arab countries in 2019. Their results state that 3% to 40% of the violence reported was sexual, whereas 5% to 91% of violence was psychological and emotional. Moreover, more than one in three women experience sexual violence, physical violence, or stalking in the USA. These issues cause an immediate risk of bodily injuries associated with many health consequences, including psychiatric, endocrine, musculoskeletal, gynecological, and reproductive diseases. (Thomas& Dyer& Tornetta III& Park&Gujrathi & Gosangi&Lebovic & Hassan& Seltzer& Rexrode& Boland, Harris & Khurana, 2021).

A study conducted by the United Nations in Jordan established that emotional and verbal violence was the most prevalent type of violence in 2020 (Anderson, 2020). In addition, another conducted study in Jordan referred to a term prevalent in Jordanian society," the Man Box," which refers to a strict set of expectations, perceptions, and behaviors that consider masculine concepts imposed by society, such as superiority, cruelty, emotional oppression, and aggressive or dominant social behavior. Accordingly, gendered-based violence is central to hegemonic masculinity, dictates dominant and dissenting behavior, and makes these behaviors acceptable and naturalized. Therefore, adherence to these concepts is one of the causes of violence against women and the creation and strengthening of social environments conducive to domestic violence. (Alsawalqa & Alrawshedh & Hasan, 2021).

A study by the Information and Research Center - King Hussein Foundation showed that stereotypes based on gender discrimination are still rooted due to the roles and responsibilities of both genders in the family and society and that the phenomenon of patriarchy is increasing

among state authorities and society. Many women do not claim their rights due to their ignorance, social pressures, family norms and strict social norms. This confirms the stereotypical features of women, such as submissiveness to men, vulnerability, and the priority of emotion over rationality (IRCKHF, 2019).

Concerning the role of Jordanian laws and legislation in protecting women from domestic violence, the Protection from Domestic Violence Law (Law No. 6/2008) was issued, which guarantees the preservation of family ties and limits the effects of penal procedures against crimes committed by family members. By providing the Family Protection Department (FPD) with precautionary protection efforts to protect the family from the abuser for up to forty-eight hours if there is no other way to protect the victim or a member of her family. If the agreement between the victim and the offender fails, the case will be referred to court. Jordanian law allows the court to issue an excellent protection order to the victim or any family member for a period of up to one month, and it can be renewed for six months in case of violation of the defendant. Nevertheless, Jordanian law also includes many obstacles to preventing and eliminating domestic violence. In addition, the legislators began to review the procedural and substantive provisions related to protection from domestic violence without establishing a prohibitive and comprehensive definition of domestic violence in light of the application of penal provisions in the law (Nasrawin, 2017).

All these data confirm that it is necessary to raise awareness and educate women about their rights. There is a need to eliminate violence and not perpetrate such injustice against them. Additionally, there should be a motivation not to remain silent and resort to all available legal means to demand and secure protection from such violence. Among the most effective means is using direct communication methods, such as organizing awareness meetings and reform marches using posters and logos to demand the protection of women from violence. In addition, employing mass communication means such as the press, posters, radio, cinema, and social media platforms can help convey the message through these media about the growing phenomenon of violence against women.

2.Scope of The Study

Mass communication plays a critical role in increasing the awareness about violence against women, which can trigger public opinion toward participation in protection activities to

end this cycle of violence (Dekić, 2017). Based on this, one of the most effective communication methods that represented the rejection of domestic violence in Jordan was the organization of an awareness protest in 2019 led by feminist protesters to claim women's rights and end the multiplication of this phenomenon.

Human rights activists organized the event because of a domestic violence case against a Jordanian woman called Fatima. She is a suburban woman who lives in a city in northern Jordan called Jerash. She became a well-known victim when she lost her eyes after her husband pulled them out in front of her children, and the incident has come to be known as the Jerash crime (Royanews, 2019). Fatima confirmed through a press statement that she has lived through a long history of domestic violence by her husband since the beginning of their marriage, specifically when she became pregnant with their first child. Still, the passion for motherhood and fear of losing the custody of her children are the reasons that drove her to tolerate the violence every time (Mushahid, 2019).

Several female protesters joined the demonstration, carrying reflective visual and verbal posters to show their empathy towards the victim and repudiation of the victimization (Garaanews, 2019). The event was widely reported on news websites and social media platforms. Besides, it had a massive impact on Twitter users, who launched several hashtags such as طفح الكيل# (#Enough) and جريمة جرش# (#Jerash_Crime). This facilitated the circulation of the awareness posters reflecting condemnation of the Jerash crime (Royanews, 2019).

Figure 1: (Alwatanvoice, 2019)

3. Statement Problem

Violence against women must occupy ample space in the Jordanian media due to the high prevalence of this phenomenon in Jordan, especially the domestic violence that swept across Jordanian societies during the covid19 outbreak. According to Sawsan Abuhammad's study, 40% of women most vulnerable to domestic violence were unemployed and married. (Abuhammad, 2020). Accordingly, it is necessary to produce and disseminate media content focused on women's issues within the framework of preparing and implementing media programs to develop treatment methods that might improve the government's vision of tightening severe penalties against domestic violence to redress society. Besides, it will enhance the idea of orienting women about their rights and lead them to protect themselves against violence to build a cohesive community of justice and security against all forms of violence. The most prominent communication means that help in conveying the message is social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. These platforms enable users to express themselves by commenting on the posts they encounter and saying their views on an issue (Coles& Saleem, 2020). Among the most prominent of these issues is the issue of social movements such as #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter (Jackson et al., 2020; Mundt et al., 2018). Accordingly, violence issues against women should occupy ample space in the Jordanian media.

Given the crucial role that the media plays in combating and facing violence against women (Sutherland& Easteal& Holland& Vaughan& 2019), it is essential to research Jordanian media effects in addressing violence against women to achieve equal rights. Based on this, the study is based on the role of awareness posters in combating domestic violence to achieve equality of rights through applying the semiotic analysis method to analyze the selected posters spread on Twitter. The participants, via the Twitter network, used posters expressing the issue of domestic violence against women to express their opinions and interact with these photos that were held through a protest march against a famous case against the victim Fatima. I chose the awareness posters as visual means to analyze due to their impact on social change through sending effective messages, which bring peoples' attention to persuade them, change their thoughts and behaviors and increase their awareness about social problems. (Dağlı, 2015).

4.Research Objectives

This study aims to discuss the role of the posters in representing domestic violence in Jordan by applying the semiotic method. Based on my investigation, academic studies in Jordan reveal a severe lack of attention to the effects of communication in raising awareness of violence against women. Accordingly, my contribution to this field is to enrich the academic research repertoire with the required topics. This study can be considered a reference for all researchers investigating this social topic focused on the relationship between communication methods and violence against women.

5. Literature Review

Several studies conducted in Jordan tackle the extent of women's presence in Jordanian media and drama. Besides, the print newspapers lack raising public awareness of women's issues. Unfortunately, there is a shortage of studies addressing the impact of Jordanian media platforms in tackling violence against women. Except there are two academic types of research conducted in Jordan. The first research concluded that Jordanian media do not address women's needs in different areas, such as their right to seek protection from violence. This study tackled the coverage of the most popular Jordanian newspapers on crimes against Jordanian women concerning cases reported to the courts. The study results showed that the "crime of murder" was one of the highest crimes reported in the newspapers (Alattal, 2015).

Another study conducted by Esam Salayta addressed the role of Jordan Broadcasting Service's "General Program" in creating awareness of women's issues. The study approaches the role of the Jordanian radio in supporting women and raising awareness of women's issues. It shows the importance of having specialized programs for women, especially since Jordanian radio lacks technical programs to educate women; the programs do not give sufficient attention to women's rights and problems that support them to participate in public life. The importance of this study for my research is getting to know the views and trends of Jordanian women regarding women's development issues and how willing women are to receive more content that fulfills their interests. And the role of the official Jordanian radio in tackling women's issues. (Salayta, 2017).

Accordingly, previously reviewed studies argued that there is a need for more specialized studies on women's issues and problems.

6. Gap of the Study

This study's distinction is that the topic aims to use the semiotic analysis of posters in tackling domestic violence, unlike the previously reviewed studies, which did not address domestic violence- physical violence in particular. In contrast, Salayta discussed the impact of a radio station in raising awareness of women's issues by applying the quantitative method (Salayta, 2017).

Meanwhile, Al-Attal investigated the role of the Jordanian press in tackling honor crimes in Jordan by applying a quantitative questionnaire (Alattal, 2015). Accordingly, this study addressed the gap that has not been used yet, which is the role of semiotic analysis in treating posters expressing domestic violence in Jordan, particularly physical violence. It strengthens my research argument that there is still a need to conduct this type of qualitative research in light of the lack of academic research for this type of issue, especially in the use of the analytical method.

7. Methodology

The methodology of the research was qualitative. I applied semiotic tools to the case study (the Jerash Crime) to interpret the significance of the representative posters circulated via Twitter and online news to reflect the rejection of domestic violence. Besides, I have analyzed the signs displayed in each selected poster, which include shapes, expressions, colors, text, and gestures, to understand their messages and meanings.

Semiotic analysis is useful in mass communication and cultural studies. It can help us to realize the information or meaning not contained in books, computers, or audiovisual media (Chandler, 2007). According to Ronald Barthes's theory, semiotic analysis helps in understanding the underlying meaning of verbal and non-verbal content by decoding the denotations (literal message) and the connotations (the coded meaning of the message) (1977, p. 37). Moreover, the denotative message represents an idea that is transformed from sender to receiver through media such as posters, social media websites, TV, and radio (Danci, 2002). Meanwhile, the connotative message might hold different meanings according to the viewers' point of view based on their culture and background, so that it may not be practicable for the semiotic analyst to decode the sign's purpose in an absolute way. (Barthes, 1977, p.17).

Barthes defined three structures to analyze an item from a semiotic perspective:

- The linguistic message (text) that accompanies an image, representing the caption, title, press article, film dialogue, or comic strip balloon, combines two signs (denoted and connoted meanings) that help explain the picture (Barthes, 1977, pp. 37-41).

- Denoted or without code message: is the first order of signification, referring to the denotation analysis. The denotative analysis describes the signs of the images, paintings, and cinema literally, without coding (Barthes, pp. 17-18).

- The symbolic, coded, or connoted message: is a second-order signification of connotative analysis. It focuses on decoding the connoted meaning of the symbolic signs according to a specific culture of the society that receives the message. This means the signs of a connoted message, such as physical exaggeration, drawings, colors, facial expressions, or gestures might hold different meanings in the viewers' perception depending on their background and culture (Barthes, 1977, pp. 17-27).

Accordingly, I have fragmented the semiotic analysis of this study into three parts:

- The linguistic message: analyzing words and phrases of the selected posters denotatively and connotatively.

- The non-coded or denotative message: it reflects the literal message without coding, through describing the signs as they are, such as the character (victim), her facial expression, and color of the images.

- The symbolic, cultural, or connoted message: decoding the hidden meaning of the symbolic messages, including interpreting the relations between contextual, denoted, and connoted messages.

8. Analysis

A number of photos have been chosen because of their popularity on Twitter, in order to decode them using semiotic analysis. These include:

Figure 2: (Al-Ali, 2019)

Denoted Message of The Picture (Literal):

Figure 2 presents black and white colors and a wounded woman with bleeding eyes, messy hair, and a brutally sutured mouth, leaving scars.

Connoted Message of The Picture (Coded):

The black and white picture connotates a dismal woman and her tragic life. Her tightened mouth surrounded by red dots means that she has no right to speak or ask for freedom, or that she will be punished for doing it. Her hair suggests an untidy appearance. Although the pictures of the victim circulated through the news websites showed her wearing the veil, the designers according to their imagination wanted to represent Fatima through the posters, with messy hair to depict the victimized woman as lacking a presentable appearance because of the violence inflicted on her.

The combination of the connoted and denoted messages points out that the signs represent a desperate and weak woman who lacks a good appearance and beauty because of her silence and fear of suffering further violence and standing in front of everyone who

underestimates her value and deprives her of the ability to live in freedom. As a result, the passive victim woman appears useless, disabled, lacking attractiveness, and as living a fading life because of the fear of having to face the problems such as Fatima has experienced.

Figure 3: (Swan, 2019)

Linguistic Message (Text):
Denoted Text:

The phrase العين بالعين means "an eye for an eye" in English.

Connoted Text:

The phrase is a famous slogan reflecting justice and equality based on Islamic law. This phrase was quoted from the Holy book of Muslims, the *Qur'an*, which encouraged the protesters to take it as a slogan to demand social justice without bias.

Denoted Message of The Picture (Literal):

The image presents a yellow background, including a veiled woman exposed to violence, her eyes covered with medical gauze, which makes her eyes bleed instead of shedding tears. The handprint on her neck is colored red.

Connoted Message of The Picture (Coded):

In this picture, the yellow color might mean awareness and alertness (Chang & Lin, 2010). Moreover, the image holds the connotation that the veiled woman represents the victim (Fatima), due to her lamentable situation of being deprived of her eyes by her criminal husband. The red hand around her neck and bleeding eyes mean the violence that she experienced. Finally, the phrase العين بالعين means in English "an eye for an eye", a slogan asking for justice and equality.

As a result of the combination between the text and denoted message, the connotation of the yellow color claims freedom. It draws attention to the need to stop violence against women. The red hand means that silence regarding violence could lead to death, which also expresses the extreme violence that the victim faced. The bleeding eyes indicate that Fatima cried blood, reflecting the extent of her pain and grief due to extracting her eye. Accordingly, applying the penal code can reinforce the slogan of an eye for an eye. The perpetrator must be punished equally according to the severity of his crimes, thus achieving gender equality and preventing the abuse and death of women. Additionally, ensuring equality will prevent more such disasters and physical loss for women.

Figure 4: (Badarneh, 2019)

Linguistic Message (Text):

Denoted Text:

The words at the top of the picture لاتصالحي' mean "do not reconcile" in English.

Connoted Text:

The text describes the protesters asking Fatima not to make peace with her husband or forfeit her right to punish him, who intentionally assaulted her physically in front of her children, in case she was considering going back to him to reunite with her family, as she had been doing so far.

Denoted Message of The Picture (Literal):

The picture reflects similar expressions as the previous ones, such as a veiled woman with injured eyes and a featureless face. The main difference is that the black color dominates the background and the victim's clothes.

Connoted Message of The Picture (Coded):

The picture holds the meaning that the woman represents Fatima, and the bleeding eyes mean violence. Black is linked to fear, anger, and sadness (Chang & Lin, 2010). Undoubtedly, the prevailing color coding of the image might refer to the oppression and the darkness in Fatima's life.

Despite the strength of the black color shown in the image, the white is evident in the large sized text, to draw attention and emphasize the idea of not reconciling, as shown by the red effect around the eyes to warn and alert people about violence. Additionally, the image represents the woman without features except for her bleeding eyes, which might reflect a miserable or psychologically distorted woman, such that what she feels within also manifests on the outside because of the passivity toward violence.

The interaction between the three messages—the linguistic, the denoted, and the connoted—illustrates that the protesters warn Fatima against tolerating or adjusting to her awful situation. Otherwise, she will turn out a broken woman due to the dark side of her life and her passivity toward oppression. In the end, this symbolic message representing the second order of signification confirms that vulnerable women who are in the same situation as Fatima should move on and ask for protection without waiving their rights of enforcement of the law and punishment of the offender, so as to secure themselves against humiliation, weakness, and

destruction of the self, so applying the justice and law could also be an encouragement for women and society in general not to forgive/accept this kind of violence.
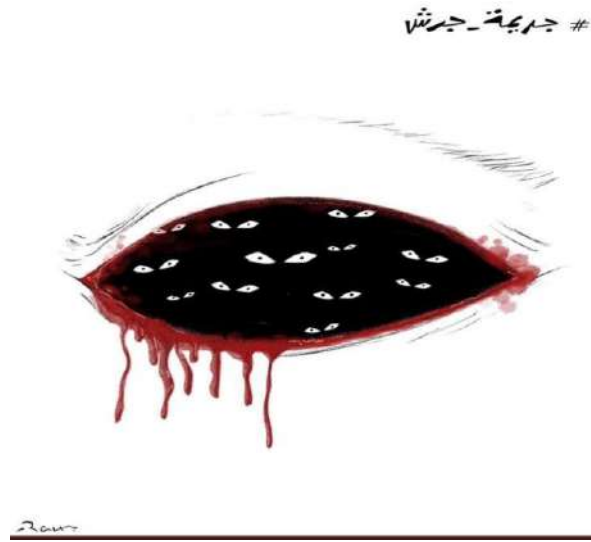
جريمة_جرش

Figure 5: (Alkahtib, 2019)

Linguistic message (Text):

Denoted Text:

    There is a hashtag at the top, #, جريمة جرش, which means in English "#Jerash_Crime".

Connoted Text:

    The hashtag reflects Fatima's experience, which was known through the Twitter website as "the Jerash crime".

Denoted Message of The Picture (Literal):

    The image shows a black and bleeding eye that contains several eyes inside.

Connoted Message of The Picture (Coded):

    The poster represents Fatima's eye bleeding after she experienced the brutal attack by her husband. The red circles on the left side of the eye symbolize rage and exasperation. Based on this, the angry eyes inside represent people's solidarity with Fatima because of the injustices and violence she has suffered and their desire for revenge. What supports the point is that the language of the eyes is one of the most effective ways to communicate genuine feelings of anger of a human being, as they are the most expressive part of the body (Guarnera& Hichy& Cascino& Currubba& Buccheria, 2017). Moreover, the black eye represents Fatima's oppression

or blindness following the violence. Last but not least, the connection of these messages ensured that although Fatima lost her eyes, the crime opened people's eyes to the injustice and her husband's abuse towards her, which caused a wave of anger among the public as a reaction to the Jerash crime, and their condemnation of it.

9. Conclusion

This study sheds light on the issue of domestic violence in Jordan by applying a semiotic analysis of several images raised in a protest march, following an infamous incident that occurred in the city of Jerash against a victim named Fatima, whom her husband assaulted in front of her children in 2019. This issue provoked public outrage, which prompted many women and human rights advocates to take to the streets in a protest demonstration against such this type of violence, holding verbal and visual posters displaying solidarity with the victim. These reflective posters also went viral on social networks and news sites.

This qualitative study used the semiotic analysis method according to Ronald Barthes's methodology, which is based on the analysis of the three levels of awareness messages: linguistic; symbolic or (non-coded), which is regarded as first-order signification; and connoted message (coded message), referred to as the second order of signification. This level deciphers the signs of the images, which include the character (Fatima), color, and facial expressions, to discover the image's hidden meanings that the protesters want to convey to society to raise awareness of the need to combat violence against women, through analyzing the relations between the contextual, denoted, and connoted messages.

Regarding the linguistic messages, the analysis of the expressions used by the protesters in the posters describes the demand for the cessation of violence and the administration of justice. The phrases shown in the images are clear and direct in terms of linguistic elements. The second picture was designed in a large and bold font to emphasize that the victim should not reconcile with her husband. As for the text appearing in the third picture—an eye for an eye—it came to embody the prevailing cultural values in the Islamic society, quoting a text derived from the Holy *Qur'an* to emphasize the necessity of ensuring justice among members of the community.

Concerning the denoted analysis at the first level of significance, there are similarities among the signs in the first three pictures, which are the depiction of a victimized woman with

bleeding eyes, unlike in the fourth picture, which represents a bleeding eye with the appearance of several black, angry eyes inside. Besides, there are differences in expression through colors according to the perception of the protesters, where the first and third images reflect the black and white colors and the tightened mouth surrounded by red dots, while the second image demonstrates the background in yellow with the presence of hand traces in red around the woman's neck.

In connection with the second-order representation or the symbolic messages, the four pictures represent a study of domestic violence that depict Fatima with some differences in the symbolic signs. The first picture reflects several signs that portray Fatima's situation—such as the black and white colors and a woman with bleeding eyes, a tightened mouth, and messy hair that describe the violence that Fatima was exposed to, reflecting the terrible devastation in her life. Besides, these signs also reveal her passivity towards the violence, which prevents her from speaking up or claiming her freedom, thus making her lose her appearance and beauty. The protesters duly wanted to prove that the weak woman would lose herself, her identity, and her appearance as long as she remained submissive to fear and violence.

The second picture explores several connotations in the signs which reflect coded meanings. The symbolic signs such as the yellow background, a veiled woman with bleeding eyes, and traced hands around the neck, besides the slogan an eye for an eye, portray Fatima, who was exposed to brutal violence, through her eyes bleeding instead of shedding tears. Accordingly, the protesters wanted to establish and warn through this image that this violence might prove fatal. Also, applying the penal code and ensuring justice would help protect women from such domestic violence.

The fourth image explores the denoted signs that reflect Fatima with no facial features, which depicts the extent of the pain within her, as if what she feels inside appears on her outside because of her passivity towards violence. Besides, the black color shows the tragedy and darkness of the victim's life because of the violence.

The relation between the linguistic, connoted, and denoted messages of the image portray the protesters' demand not to remain silent in the face of the violence, and to claim freedom and not tolerate or compromise their rights as persons having an identity in society. Otherwise, they will end up like Fatima, a weak-willed woman who lives a hopeless life because of fear.

In addition, the fourth message contains an eye that reflects Fatima's case. The bleeding eye includes angry eyes which reflect the people's solidarity with Fatima, so the denoted message indicates that the Jerash crime has attracted people's empathy toward Fatima for losing her vision, and it has opened their eyes to the criminal act, thus triggering more anger and condemnation of this crime.

To sum up, the analysis at the second level of significance showed a similarity in the denoted messages of the four images according to the protesters' perception. This means that all signs in the images depict the domestic violence victim's situation in a way that draws the viewer's attention through colors, facial expressions, and resonant phrases, so as to emphasize the need to reject violence and demand freedom.

In addition, there is a missing element in the posters, an aspect that was not addressed therein: Fatima's children, who witnessed the crime. From my point of view, it would have been a good idea to include all parties to the incident within these posters, and not just the mother, so that the posters might have been more effective and impressive if the protesters had tackled the consequences of such violent acts on children.

I recommend conducting more research on the impact of means of communication in combating the violence against women due to the scarcity of these studies in Jordan, especially the studies that use the semiotic analysis method of media campaigns that aware the audience about the violence. Besides, the campaigns officials must conduct studies to measure the impact of the messages on the public through their interactivity on social media. Accordingly, it would help to improve the innovative message that plays on the audience's emotions and trigger their empathy toward the victimized women.

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