

Scroll, Speak, Resist: Deconstructing colonial narratives through female-centered Moroccan TikTok content

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Abstract

The study investigates how Moroccan women use TikTok to challenge colonial narratives while enabling localized feminist expression. Drawing on decolonial feminist theory, this research analyzes fifteen videos across three pages to identify how TikTok supports place-based feminism in Morocco in ways that resist dominant colonial discourse. The findings show that these content creators are active producers of decolonial feminism, positioning TikTok as a crucial site for shaping gender, identity and knowledge while remaining grounded in local social realities. Through historical reclamation, humor and educational advocacy, these influencers advance context-specific feminist narratives while challenging colonial representations of Moroccan women.

Keywords: Decolonial feminism; Moroccan women; TikTok; Digital empowerment

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1.0 Introduction

Feminist discourse has long been shaped by dominant Western narratives that often exclude marginalized women's voices (Lugones, 2023). These have further strengthened reductionist portrayals of women in the Global South as weak and in need of saving (Abu-Lughod, 2013). However, these women have contested such exclusions by producing their own forms of feminist knowledge, thereby challenging colonial representations on their own terms. Despite this, limited research has specifically examined how Moroccan women themselves use TikTok as a space for decolonial feminist practice.

The study thus investigates how three Moroccan pages use TikTok to challenge colonial narratives while promoting situated feminist expression. By employing content analysis, grounded in decolonial feminist theory, the research determines how TikTok—through music, visual aesthetics, and written text—resists colonial portrayals of Moroccan women and enables feminist narratives rooted in local lived realities.

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Received: 04 March 2026

Revised / Review Period: 05 March 2026 – 25 March 2026

Accepted: 08 April 2026

Published: 11 April 2026

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 *The Limits of Western Feminist Narratives: A Decolonial Perspective*

In 1984, bell hooks asserted that feminist theory emerged "from privileged women who live at the center" (hooks, 1984, preface). She explains that early feminist movements were predominantly shaped by the experiences of 'white', middle-class women, often excluding women of color, working-class women and others. Most women were thus excluded from these discourses, underscoring the movement's lack of inclusivity.

In 1978, Edward Said criticized Western depictions of 'Oriental' women as objects of male fantasy—submissive, unintelligent and always willing to please. This colonial discourse has, over time, perpetuated the image of women in the Global South as weak and passive beings, systematically erasing their agency and reinforcing the notion that their voices and actions must be mediated through colonial perspectives.

María Lugones' "The Coloniality of Gender" (2023) builds on this by revealing how colonialism not only shaped Western understandings of gender but also imposed a patriarchal system on once egalitarian societies. Like bell hooks (1984), she critiques the Western-centric foundations of feminism for universalizing the experiences of white bourgeois women while ignoring the intersections of race, class and coloniality.

For Muslim women, particularly, this meant that colonial powers not only imposed colonial patriarchal systems but claimed Islam as the root of their oppression. Abu-Lughod (2013) critiques this reductionist narrative, challenging the assumption that Muslim women are passive victims in need of rescue. She argues that feminist discourse overlooks broader issues such as state violence, poverty and Western political involvement, which play a more significant role in shaping their lives and limiting their agency.

Similarly, Fatima Mernissi (1987) argues that Moroccan women were never seen as biologically inferior by their society; instead, they were viewed as powerful and dangerous, which led to efforts to control them. She critiques Western feminism for failing to understand the diverse feminist struggles across cultures.

María Lugones (2023), Lila Abu-Lughod (2013) and Fatima Mernissi (1987) challenge Western depictions of Eastern, Muslim and Moroccan women, respectively, as weak, emphasizing that men historically feared these women. They call for the rejection of Western-centric biases, highlighting that Western feminist discourse often assumes these women need saving. They assert that these women can save themselves or do not need saving, thereby building upon and contributing to decolonial feminist theory, which serves as the theoretical framework for this article. The latter critiques the imposition of Western feminist ideals on non-Western communities, emphasizing the importance of reclaiming local histories, traditions and narratives.

2.2 *Social Media: Visibility vs. Patriarchal Control*

All forms of media have historically been powerful drivers of change. Gill (2007) contends that they play a crucial role in shaping and defining femininity, masculinity and gender relations, actively influencing the production of gender identities and roles. She further explains that "for most people, their experience of feminism is entirely mediated" (Gill, 2007, p. 90). This mediated femininity, as argued by Mulvey (1975), was mainly grounded in patriarchal systems that served to please the male gaze. However, with the advent of social media, women have begun to reclaim this gaze, giving voice to marginalized communities (Amezoïrou, 2024). Nevertheless, this reclamation is not without backlash.

Penny (2013) warns that social media is rife with harassment, sexism, misogyny and bullying, explaining that the internet fosters an environment where women become increasingly self-conscious. Gill (2021) argues that women are constantly watched and judged on social media. Hirji (2021) proclaims that virtual and physical spaces are intertwined, noting that women vulnerable to harassment in real life face similar vulnerabilities online.

While these challenges are undeniable and concerning, social media offers significant potential to empower young women by giving them the space to redefine how they are represented. Peña-Fernández et al. (2023) maintain that platforms like TikTok create participatory spaces for feminism, enabling women to express themselves and advocate for change freely. In Morocco, social media enables women to voice their concerns and assert their presence publicly (Atifi & Touati, 2020). Chahbane & Alaoui (2023) further explain that social media supports the deconstruction of gender norms. Additionally, El Idrissi Amiri & Ghourdou (2024) found, in their analysis of the work of several Moroccan female influencers, that digital creators used personal branding to empower themselves and achieve economic independence. Together, these dynamics allow Moroccan women to assert their voices, deconstruct gender norms and achieve economic independence, ultimately allowing them to redefine how they are represented, thereby contesting colonial portrayals of women.

Several methods can be used to reclaim women's voices, challenge the male gaze and decolonize feminism on social networks. Sundén and Paasonen (2021) propose irony and absurdity as a feminist method, showcasing its critical value in exposing patriarchal narratives. Long (2023) discusses the rise of an 'aggressive' female gaze on social media as a response to the objectifying male gaze, using sarcasm and anger to critique men's behavior. Others, such as Jackson et al. (2020), advocate for more accessible approaches, such as raising awareness by using hashtags. Together, these approaches demonstrate the diversity of feminist strategies on social media, coupled with the variety of creators and audiences, which gives social media the necessary tools to oppose colonial narratives.

Hirji (2021) argues that technology alone cannot erase "the gendered and raced trope embedded in the collective imagination" (p. 79). While this is true, social media has granted Muslim women, particularly young Moroccan women, a platform for self-expression that is often restricted in other spheres. This makes their efforts particularly worthy of research. The article examines how young Moroccan female TikTokers deconstruct colonial paradigms, thereby contributing to decolonial feminist theory. This research is significant as most

studies on this topic are rooted in popular media and film, with few addressing social media. Thus, this paper offers a unique contribution by focusing specifically on the experiences of young women in Morocco on TikTok.

3.0 Methodology

The study employs qualitative content analysis grounded in decolonial feminist theory to explore how Moroccan TikTokers deconstruct colonial narratives using place-based feminism. This method was chosen for allowing the systematic examination of patterns across visual, textual, and auditory elements, while also enabling an analysis of how content creates meaning and challenges power structures.

The analysis focuses on three pages: @amazigh-cultures, @veeeraaa777 and @jooj. These pages were selected for their contributions to feminist discourse, as they reclaim cultural and historical narratives, challenge stereotypes and amplify the voices of Moroccan and Amazigh women. Five videos from each page were purposively selected based on both popularity and relevance to the study's objectives. These videos center explicitly on female subjects and all confront colonial narratives through cultural, historical, or social references. While the dataset is relatively small, these pages and videos were carefully selected to capture different forms of decoloniality on Moroccan TikTok while remaining manageable for in-depth analysis. Data collection and view counts were finalized on February 21, 2026.

The study examines the recurring themes and content elements of the fifteen videos. These are visual aesthetics, written text and music. Visual aesthetics include gaze, facial expression, clothing, accessories, symbols and editing style. Written text encompasses captions, on-screen quotes, memes and labels. Music is examined in terms of emotional tone, humor, patriotic references and empowering audio. Together, these categories enable an examination of how content creators retell histories of female resistance, deconstruct Orientalist perceptions and promote Moroccan women's empowerment on TikTok.

Ethically, the study relies exclusively on publicly available TikTok content. Creator usernames are referenced only insofar as they function as public identifiers, and no private data was accessed.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Content Creator 1: @amazigh-cultures

@amazigh-cultures is a TikTok page with 79.9k followers and over 4.3 million likes. Through its content, the platform actively retells the history of the Amazigh people—the indigenous people of North Africa. Particular emphasis is put on Amazigh women's resistance to colonization and their vital roles in preserving cultural heritage.

The first TikTok post, with 503.2k views, explores the history of the oldest banking system in the world, located in Agadir. It features an elderly Amazigh woman holding the key to the bank and unlocking its doors. The video seeks to prove that Amazigh people were enlightened long before colonization, thus openly challenging colonial perspectives that painted them as 'barbaric.'

The second post, with 286.5k views, features an image of an Amazigh woman wearing traditional clothing and accessories, her face and hands tattooed. She gazes directly at the camera. The video includes a caption in brackets with an emoji of a man, saying, "Amazigh women tattooed just to protect themselves against invaders." The page responds, "No, they chose to because they wanted to."

Post 3, which has 156.1k views, counters colonial depictions of the Amazigh people as uncivilized. It explains that this portrayal stemmed from colonial authorities' fear of their strength and independence. The video then transitions to empowering music, featuring drawings of Amazigh female warriors with swords and tattoos.

Post 4, with 344.7k views, retells the story of Aicha Kandisha, a historical Amazigh figure misrepresented as a ghost story to frighten children. The video reframes her as a heroic warrior who resisted Portuguese invaders.

Post 5, with 51.2k views, opens with the caption "Eyes can't talk." The following image challenges this notion, showing a close-up of an elderly Amazigh woman's face, her eyes filled with pain and resilience. The caption beneath the post reads: "These eyes carry the weight of generations who fought, sacrificed and endured countless colonizations throughout history—a gaze that embodies the soul of a people who refused to let colonization erase their identity."

4.2 Content Creator 2: @veeeraaa777

@veeeraaa777 is a TikTok page with 34.6k followers and 2.8 million likes. The page uses memes, humor, music and captions to celebrate Moroccan identity while addressing gender inequality and confronting colonial legacies. It retells Morocco's history of resistance to French colonization and challenges stereotypes and societal norms regarding Moroccan women.

Post 1, with around 5k views, features two images. The first depicts Tbourida, a traditional Moroccan equestrian art form, captioned "It's just a Moroccan song," with Tafra Dak Rami by Messnawa playing in the background. The second part of the post responds with a firm "No" and showcases four historical photos of Moroccan resistance to colonialism. These images include women holding rifles and women and children standing before soldiers, symbolizing their active role in the anti-colonial struggle.

Post 2, which has 26.9k views, features a young Moroccan woman proudly holding the Moroccan flag. The caption reads: "No matter how hard they try, I will never hate this country."

Post 3, which has 81.2k views, uses Moroccan Arabic to respond to the stereotype that Moroccan women are witches. A woman angrily questions, "Why do you call me a witch? Why would I want to bewitch you? Why would I do that to you, you piece of trash?" The caption reads, "Songs I'd play if I met someone from the Middle East." This is a direct response to the stereotype that Moroccan women are witches who lure and "steal" men from other nations.

Post 4, with 3.6k views, shows a woman sitting with a disgusted expression wearing a traditional Moroccan gown captioned, "This is the face I'll give you if you try to educate me about my origins while ur not even Moroccan." The video asserts her right to speak about Morocco and reject colonial narratives.

The final post, with 48.3k views, addresses the societal double standards around Moroccan women marrying foreigners, with the phrase "Oum Chanta" used to insult women who marry outside their nationality. The post critiques the gendered nature of this insult, highlighting that Moroccan men face no such condemnation for similar actions.

4.3 Content Creator 3: @jooj

@jooj is a Moroccan media production agency with 413.7k TikTok followers and 7.7 million likes. The platform is popular among Moroccan youth for its mix of educational and entertaining content. Some of their content raises awareness of women's rights and struggles. These posts feature women, ensuring they represent themselves rather than relying on external (male or Western) narratives.

Post 1, with 440.1k views, has a female influencer publicly calling out Moroccan comedian Taliss for making a rape joke. The influencer explains why he should be "canceled" and why such jokes are harmful, drawing examples from Moroccan and pop culture to educate viewers.

Post 2 captioned "Feminism in Morocco by Chaimae Haddoumi" features a young Moroccan woman wearing modern clothing inspired by traditional Moroccan gowns. She critiques white feminism, explaining that it often acts as though women's rights originated solely from Western contexts. She highlights Amazigh women as historical examples of strength and freedom, arguing for a feminism rooted in Morocco's local history. The video has 66.7k views.

Posts 3, 4 and 5 focus on educating viewers about the updated *Moudawana* (family code), which affects women's rights in Morocco. Videos 4 and 5 feature a female lawyer addressing misinformation and answering questions. The combined videos have over 100k views.

5.0 Discussion

The TikTok pages share a common goal: empowering Moroccan women. @amazigh-cultures, @veeeraaa777 and @jooj decolonize feminism by providing spaces where Moroccan women's voices are amplified and celebrated. Despite their shared goal, each page adopts a distinct approach.

The platform @amazigh-cultures resists colonial narratives and advocates for the Amazigh identity, affirming Amazigh women's agency. Edward Said (1978) criticized Western portrayals of the 'Orient' as barbaric and of 'Oriental' women as submissive, unintelligent and passive. @amazigh-cultures counters this by reclaiming erased histories, showcasing the Amazigh as a highly civilized nation and Amazigh women as historical figures—warriors, heroes and knowledge holders. Figures like Aicha Kandisha reclaim their narrative, challenging reductive depictions imposed by colonial perspectives.

@amazigh-cultures disrupts the "exoticized victim" trope and asserts a narrative of agency and leadership, aligning with María Lugones' "The Coloniality of Gender" (2023). The video showcasing the Agadir banking system not only proves that the Amazigh culture was long civilized but also emphasizes that the institution's key holder was a woman. Lugones' argument that colonialism, rather than indigenous culture, shaped patriarchal systems proves to be true. Videos of Amazigh women warriors further demonstrate that these women never needed saving and were not passive beings, as Lila Abu-Lughod (2013) has stated.

Amezourou (2024) argues that social networks are powerful tools for advancing the empowerment of Moroccan women. This is true for @amazighcultures, which takes control of the gaze and shifts it to a female perspective. By reclaiming erased histories and celebrating the resilience of Amazigh women, the platform challenges prevailing colonial narratives that depict Amazigh people as uncivilized and barbaric. While the platform engages users with visual elements and music, its tone remains predominantly educational and serious, setting it apart from @veeeraaa777.

@veeeraaa777 reshapes the portrayal of Moroccan women by challenging the stereotypes imposed on them. Comparable to Sundén and Paasonen's (2021) analysis of Western women's Twitter posts, @veeeraaa777 uses irony to address gender inequality and colonial depictions of Moroccan women, thus reclaiming power. This is obvious in post 3, which uses an excerpt from Moroccan media to critique witchcraft allegations. Post 4 humorously rejects outsider input and, by extension, colonial perspectives on what Morocco is and what Moroccan identity is, thus taking back control of the narrative. This approach makes the conversation accessible, relatable and lighthearted while still engaging with serious societal issues.

However, @veeeraaa777 also utilizes anger and disappointment to critique patriarchal discourse and Eurocentric paradigms, reclaiming control over the gaze. This approach echoes Long's (2023) article, where the author examined the rise of an 'aggressive' female gaze in response to misogynistic posts by men. While Long viewed anger as a negative development that perpetuates gender disparities, @veeeraaa777 uses it instead as a powerful form of resistance. This is evident in post 5, which addresses the societal double standards surrounding Moroccan women marrying foreigners. By incorporating these elements, the TikTok creator creates a unique platform for discussing gender equity in a way that resonates with younger generations, who may find the playful tone engaging and the display of anger empowering.

@jooj stands out by blending entertainment with educational content. It draws from the serious, educational approach of @amazigh-cultures and the humorous, sarcastic tone of @veeeraaa777. Unlike the other two, @jooj operates as a media company with a professional team, offering the most varied and polished content. This structure allows it to cover a wide range of topics, from feminist discussions to celebrity interviews, making it informative, entertaining and accessible to a broad audience.

@jooj ensures that when it addresses women's issues, it is women who speak them, breaking the patriarchal and colonial narrative where men and the West speak on behalf of women. This approach is clear in Post 1, where a young woman, much like Mernissi (1987), critiques the notion that women's rights originate solely from Western contexts and advocates for feminism rooted in Moroccan and Amazigh culture. Her contribution decolonizes feminist discourse and challenges colonial narratives. The caption, "Feminism in Morocco by Chaimae Haddoumi," is powerful as it amplifies a young woman's voice, breathing new life into a seemingly outdated topic and correcting misconceptions about feminism.

All three platforms share a commitment to empowering women by amplifying their voices and challenging colonial portrayals of women. They promote cultural pride in distinct ways—@amazigh-cultures highlights Amazigh heritage, @veeeraaa777 celebrates Moroccan identity, and @jooj features diverse content about Moroccan issues. Each platform resists colonial histories, stereotypes and gender norms. Notably, the pages use a blend of English, Darija and Amazigh, signaling a shift away from French dominance, which in itself is a decolonizing act. However, the heavy use of English may create a niche audience limited to a specific societal class, raising questions about accessibility. On the other hand, this linguistic choice positions the pages for greater international recognition, projecting strength and resilience on a global scale.

6.0 Conclusion& Recommendations

The rise of Moroccan female-centered content on TikTok represents a significant shift in feminist discourse, actively challenging colonial narratives. By analyzing the content of 3 TikTok pages, this study showcases how these digital platforms serve as spaces for decolonial resistance, cultural pride and gender empowerment. Each platform adopts a unique approach—whether through historical reclamation, humor, or educational advocacy—to disrupt colonial perceptions and redefine Moroccan feminism on its own terms.

It is important to note that this study is limited to three TikTok creators, to positive content and to content production, in order to allow for in-depth qualitative analysis; as a result, the findings cannot fully capture the diversity of Moroccan digital feminism or its audience reception. Indeed, social media is a space of cyberbullying, negativity and gendered harassment. However, this study argues that new media can also serve as a tool for empowerment, localized feminism and resistance.

Ultimately, this study affirms that Moroccan women are not merely participants in global feminist movements but active contributors to their evolution. Building on these findings, future studies on Moroccan digital feminism should move beyond content production to examine whether and how it affects audiences online and in real life, to better understand the effects of digital decoloniality on Moroccans. As social media continues to evolve, so too will the strategies of digital resistance, and so will backlash and harassment. It remains vital for researchers to spotlight the struggles and opportunities women face, both online and offline, and to identify ways to mitigate challenges and reinforce empowering narratives, as Moroccan women continue to shape their own stories—both in digital spaces and beyond.

Acknowledgement

Cadi Ayyad University, Marrakech, Morocco, funded this study.

Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper contributes to feminist media and decolonial studies by examining Moroccan women's use of TikTok as a site of feminist resistance. It expands digital activism scholarship by shifting focus from Western contexts to Global South content creators, thus examining how short-form platforms enable new forms of female empowerment.

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