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RESEARCH ARTICLE

LANGUAGE OF BEIN SPORTS FOOTBALL COMMENTATORS: AN ANALYSIS OF LIVE ARAB FOOTBALL COMMENTARY

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Abstract

The paper examines the Qatari institution of BeIN sports sportscasting under the guise of sports entertainment with a focus on football as the most popular sport broadcasted. In fact, the institution's exposure insidiously influences its sportscasters' fans and viewers across North Africa and the Middle East in particular. This impact has manifested in the course of the World Cup Qatar 2022 tournaments. To this end, the study instrumentalizes discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis to sift the language of "Arab" popular sportscasters of the televised channels broadcasting international football matches including Morocco as a participative and competing team. Remarkably, the countless repetitions of Arab and Arabic-related issues cause an uproar and theft of sport enjoyment among viewers. Sport enjoyment is relegated to government politics. Accordingly, the Qatari-based media control and filters reveal that pan-Arabism and Islamism are commercialised to manufacture consensus of BeIN sports visibility and transparency. Therefore, the study concludes that these Qatari media filters strangle their channel audiences in North Africa through pan-Arabist sports commentators in particular and other continents' diaspora in the main.

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Introduction:-

What is commentary? It can be defined as "a spoken account of events which are actually taking place" (Crystal & Davy, 2016, p. 125). In addition to this, what's the point of watching sports? Sport is a "game, competition, or activity needing physical effort and skill that is played or done according to rules, for enjoyment and as a job" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). Here, sport is a game for enjoyment in the eyes of viewers and a job for professional players. Now sport and commentary combination lead to encompass sportscasting. Indeed, Ferguson (1983) mentions that sportscasting is "an oral reporting of an ongoing sporting activity" (p.150). This sportscasting hints at the discourse of commentators in sporting activity. Humpolík (2014) argues that "even though they [audience] do not provide the sportscaster with a reaction of any sort, the fact that the speech is directed at them makes them a clear part of the discourse" (p.9). Here, the BeIN sports television channel broadcasts football matches directly to its fans and subscribers across the world. According to BeIN sports' website, "We are active in 5 continents with a passion for sports and entertainment" (BeIN sports group, 2023). According to the English edition of the beinmediagroup website, their activities include "TV production, distribution, and media rights acquisition (2023).

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Actually, the population and residents of North Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and Asia are addressed in Arab everything, Arab player, coach, club team, team, league, club, tournament, national team, country, cup, champion, stadium, and suchlike to the extent that Europe and Guardiola are Arabs as well. The viewers regret watching and subscribing to the Arab Everything channel discourse. Therefore, why does pan-Arabism discourse penetrate the sports field in Arabic culture and Arabic-speaking countries? Is it perhaps to remind the sports viewers of their Arab superiority and descendants in North Africa? Why do they politicise sports?

Literature Review:-

Sports and politics concepts are interlocked in world politics and interests. Sports in the absence of politics is a chimera. Since sports refers to pleasure and enjoyment, this role left a vacuum in the field of study. However, Gift and Miner (2017) argue that “political scientists and policy scholars devote little attention to the study of sports, especially compared with other disciplines like business, law, and economics as well. We offer reasons for this void and suggest how political scientists can begin to fill it”. Here, a new academic zeal began to interrogate the field of sports and its extensions. Reiche and Sorek (2019) argue that “The growing visibility of Middle Eastern sports has only recently attracted the attention of scholars” (p.1). For instance, ideology is bound up with sports. Sorek, T. (2019) asserts that “Dynamics in the sports sphere are an integral part of political processes and sometimes they take part in generating them”. An independent media outlet in sports activities and coverage policy is a perfidious lie. Sakr (2007) states that “TV is state-owned and thus represents the views and policies of the government” (p.6). The study limits its interest to the Qatari-sponsored BeIN sports group. Since Qatar is an Arab and Gulf country, its sports commentators circulate and voice its Pan-Arabism and Islamism as Qatari’s soft power. Bennis and Aammari (2023) argue that:

The recent event of the FIFA World Cup 2022 held in Qatar is groundbreaking evidence of the continuity of Orientalism. Qatar, the Arab and Muslim nation, has been the target of a vitriolic Western campaign that churns out the same colonial stereotypes about the Orient, being represented as the land of desert corruption, ignorance, and uncouthness, hence unfit for Western standards of democracy and human rights.

This argument focuses on the Arab and Muslim as common features of oriental Qatar. This role of the victim of Orientalism played by Arab and Muslim countries like Qatar is no longer a ruse to evade criticism. Nevertheless, the country is torn between the oriental discourse of the West and a source of productive discourse of pan-Arabism and Eastern Muslims. The first is instigated by the Western media voices, yet the second revolves around Qatar’s silencing of the non-Arab people’s voices. Remarkably, double discourse originates from the Qatari media outlet: BeIN SPORTS. When religion and ethnicity combine in sports events, religion is relegated to ethnicity in BeIN sports’ language of commentary. For instance, Senegal versus Egypt. Indeed, as Qatar receives orientalism, it self-reduplicates it through BeIN sports using pan-Arabism and Muslim filters for inclusion or exclusion. This power rests upon the Chairman of BeIN Sports Media Group. In 2003, Nasser Al-Khelaifi began his TV career as “Director of Rights Acquisitions of Al Jazeera Sport, when the channel was first launched. In 2008, he was promoted to General Manager of the Qatari-based sports channel and was made chairman of Qatar Sports Investments” (BeIN sport, 2023). Sports commentators influence the Arab-speaking countries’ football match fans and viewers. Abrams (2013) mentions that “Politics belongs in sports-first because politics guides everything, and second because politics is already inherent in sports” (p.49). In conclusion, there is a link between politics with soft power through sports events which “showcase the values, culture, and imagery of a host nation, and through that, ideally, attract investors, tourists, and attention” (Næss, 2023). This is a part of media studies for discourse and critical discourse analysis.

Research Methodology:-

Sport is an integral part of the soft power. Organizing sports events contingent upon the state's potential aids in achieving diplomatic goals. Qatar’s broadcasting of football matches invests in sports commentators’ portrayal and Arab-centrism discourse. Fairclough (2013) elucidated this concept as follows:

Discourse is commonly used in various senses, including (a) meaning-making as an element of the social process; (b) the language associated with a particular social field or practice (e.g., ‘political discourse’); (c) a way of construing aspects of the world associated with a particular social perspective (e.g., a ‘neo-liberal discourse of globalization’) (p.11)

Discourse is multidimensional and multifaceted so that it must be contextualised to delimit its sense-making. Nevertheless, this research study is limited to political discourse and its extensions. To this end, discourse analysis [DA] is the research methodology adopted to analyse the subject. Brown and Yule (1983) argue that “the analysis of discourse is necessarily the analysis of language in use (p.1). The definition of discourse is observation and demystification of language in use and its linguistic styles and forms. Since discourse analysis is insufficient to account for language in use, critical discourse analysis emerged to widely discuss the power and ideology inherent in a language in use. Fairclough argues:

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) brings the critical tradition of social analysis into language studies and contributes to critical social analysis a particular focus on discourse and on relations between discourse and other social elements (power relations, ideologies, institutions, social identities, and so forth). (Handford & Gee, 2013, p.9)

This argument stresses social analysis alongside discourse analysis in connection with power relations, ideologies, institutions, and social identities as well. Hence, critical discourse analysis [CDA] “has been utilised widely to unmask the ideologies which discriminate the oppressed group while presenting a positive image for the group with the highest authority” (Ramanathan & Hoon, 2015). In plain English, CDA is a detector of powerful ideologies, disadvantaging the subaltern group by virtue of the privileges and rights these ideologies enjoy. Gordon et al. (1972) claim in an interview with Michel Foucault “the power of knowledge of the truth and the power to disseminate this knowledge” (p.34). Namely, if you have power, you disseminate your knowledge. Additionally, Ramanathan and Hoon (2015) argue that “The criticality is designated specifically to the issue of power, hegemony, and resistance in various fields of language”. Since there is power there must be resistance as a general rule [Qatari BeIN sports versus Saudi Beout sports]. Coupland and Jaworski (2005) claim that “Important aspects of our social lives are constructed in and through language, whether in the moment-to-moment social interchanges of everyday talk or in the beliefs, understandings, and principles that structure our lives” (p.134). As a fait accompli, the construction is synonymous with deconstruction in light of binarisms.

Michael Halliday is known for the foundation of Systemic Functional Linguistics [SFL]. SFL discusses “three abstract functions (metafunctions) that are simultaneously realised in every clause we speak or write... the three metafunctions are the ideational, interpersonal, and textual” (Schleppegrell, 2013, p.21). That is, the focus on the meaning of language in communication rather than just its structural form is the interest of this study. Based on this synopsis, the study opts for a functional approach. It is thus adopted to examine the local and global dimensions of sports commentators on the football matches broadcasted on the BeIN sports channels in North Africa.

Interpretation of BeIN Sport Naming

Decomposing the BeIN sports naming process as a brand uncovers the surface and deep meanings and reasons for its foundations. Knowingly, the shift of Al Jazeera's sports company to an English three-word composition [**be, in, sports**] is not innocent. In marketing, three English words as a logo target and ease the globalisation strategy. Initially, the first surface meaning lies in the change of Arabic to English, Aljazeera becomes BeIN sports. This weakens the pan-Arabism ideology the channel lauds every day. The second surface meaning is the wider audience target by the company using languages other than Arabic in broadcasting matches. Unlike surface meanings, deep meanings refer to a shift from a normal condition to the enjoyment of the sport by watching [viewer] or playing [professional player] in the presence of the Arabic language. It is through sports language that the channel becomes popular. In the sense that BeIN Sports permits its viewers to have access to the pleasure of sports or “full immersion in sports vibe”. In English, *in* as a preposition refers to “inside a container, place, or area, or surrounded or closed off by something” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). This means that BeIN sports functions as a container of sports leisure if viewers watch its broadcasting content. Indeed, the channel adds ‘be-in’ as an invitation to the trap of its ideological container: pan-Arabism. Therefore, the synergy of ideology and enjoyment is ascribed to the BeIN sports company agenda setting. This inclusion has paid off in the Qatar World Cup on the Moroccan identity crisis debate. Here is the impasse of entertainment-driven television channels. Miller (2009) refers to Television as “the most influential advertising medium, and its influence is greater than during the pre-Web period” (p.14). It's supposed to cherish the leisure time of the viewer watching sports, but the sports-charged company embeds undeclared purposes, contaminating the non-Arab viewers' minds. In the end, it is tennis, ping-pong, or basketball games that should be about per se to live up to the expectations of loyal viewers to football matches in particular.

BeIN Sports Sportscasting

Qatar's political will to dominate Asian and African sports through its monopoly of entertainment sports, it resorts to massive investments in the pro-Arab linguistic localities of North African and Middle Eastern countries in the broadcasting channels. This policy manifests in the Arabophone sportscasters recruited such as Jawad Bada in Morocco, Hafid Derraji in Algeria, AissamCheouali in Tunisia, Muhnad El Jali in Libya, Khalil al-Balushi in Oman, and Fahd Al-Otaibi in Saudi Arabia, who is victimised on the morrow of Saudi-Qatari crisis. These sportscasters are always engaged in a "monolog or a dialog-on-stage" targeting an "unknown, unseen, heterogeneous audience" (Ferguson, 1983, p.150). It is supposed that linguistic and religious biases toward Arabs and Muslims find an underpinning. According to Britannica (2023), "The Arab Muslim conquerors had a much more durable impact on the culture of the Maghrib than did the region's conquerors before and after them". This argument is conducive to the generalisation of BeIN Sports' positionality: pan-Arabism and Muslims. It is high time that BeIN Sports utilises an inclusive approach by readjusting its exclusivist and eclectic language addressed to the audience. Humpolík (2014) argues that "In case of a league or a cup match, however, positive narration towards one team should not occur and the commentary should remain unbiased" (p.12). In contrast, partiality with the audience is inevitable and welcomed, especially if one of the competing teams shares Arab or Muslim or both features. According to BBC, "Morocco has a substantial population of Berbers, or Amazigh as they prefer to be called - some estimates put it at nearly 40% of the country's population of more than 34 million" (21 December 2022). With this sportscasting, "Moroccan unity in diversity" is endangered in light of exclusivism and discrimination against the non-Arab population. This is an uneasy task because these types of matches dictate the salience of pan-Arabism and Muslim alignments. Striking epitomes manifest in these international matches wherein sportscasters position themselves by including themselves in the target group of viewers through "we" constructions (Richard 2000, p. 197). That is to say, sportscasters tend to expose their ideological, religious, linguistic, political, and cultural affiliations in the live football commentary. For instance, the international football matches; Morocco vs Portugal; Morocco vs Spain; and Morocco vs Belgium. These international matches are epitomes of pan-Arabism and Muslim-driven discourse since the competing teams are non-Arab, Christian, and European. In a word, the sportscasters align with viewers' predilections.

BeIN Sports Ideology

BeIN sports's ideology manifests in the Arab football commentary. Osman (2022) argues that "[Arab sports] commentators add just as much life to proceedings as the players on the field" (MIDDLE EAST EYE, 2022). Why is football commentary very significant and attractive? Let's start with some 21st-century intellectual ideas about information, language, and ideology. This concept of "attraction often has a diffuse effect, creating general influence rather than producing an easily observable specific action" (Nye, 2004, p.16). Noam Chomsky is a modern American thinker and a great expert in media analysis. He says, "The very media is teaching or establishing ideas." This statement unearths the untold activities of beIN Sport giant corporation. Indeed, Chomsky and Herman (2021) state that the essence of media is indoctrination. Even if BeIN sports is explicitly concerned with sports, its excessive exposure to viewers influences them. Lippmann (1991) argues that the deliberate form of co-operation required the meeting of too many minds and the consent of too many wills" (p.21). Through sports, the mission consists in fitting many minds, which lend themselves to manufacturing consent. Media regulates the psyche of its viewers. This argument is supported by a study. Miller (2009) asserts that "the psy-function (psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis) at work. It is the heart of Television Studies" (p.26). The football commentary works heavily and permanently on the psychology of the Moroccan viewers either Arabophone or non-Arabophone. According to BBC, "Culturally many Moroccans see themselves more as Arabs than Africans - and some sub-Saharan Africans in Morocco complain that racist attitudes are never far from the surface" (21 December, 2022). Certainly, these tendencies of Moroccans are one of the diffuse effects of the BeIN sports heavy exposure and live commentary via sportscasters as effective tools of pan-Arabism. The meeting point is Pan-Arabism. Here comes a question. What are the thoughts of the desirable ingrained in their viewers? Sabry (2005) "Discourses of unity and reconciliation mask difference and competing antagonistic forces inherent to Moroccan society" (p.7). Pan-Arabism is not to unify and reinforce the people of North Africa and the Middle East but is to mask multiculturalism and multilingualism prevalent everywhere in the world. In summary, this condescending-over discourse is detailed in the following paragraph.

Analysis of BeIN Sports Discourse

Media discourse is unified in its source and transmitted via available means. Media discourse means "interactions that take place through a broadcast platform, whether spoken or written, in which the discourse is oriented to a non-

present reader, listener or viewer” (O’Keeffe, 2013, p.441). There is a claim that “Al Jazeera is fanning the flames of extremism among its audiences... due to the active nature of audiences in consuming news” (Miladi, 2006). Since BeIN sports originated from Aljazeera, one doctrine is their common ground: extremism by means of pan-Arabism and Islamism. This applies to BeIN sports in the name of sport and entertainment. Frankly, the repetition of such words as Arab and Islam is discursive and by no means innocent. The presence of an Arab component automatically refers to the intentional absence of non-Arab people, language, players, teams, and country as well. This is perhaps called Arabo-centrism. Rabab'ah and Abu Seileek (2012) argue that “The study revealed that one of the salient features of TV discourse is repetition, which is employed to perform a variety of language functions. Repetition was used to express emphasis, clarity, emotions, highlight the obvious, be questionable, express annoyance, persuasion, express surprise, give instructions”. Lahlali (2011) argues that “transnational Arab media, particularly Al-Jazeera, have contributed to this change by adopting a liberal and critical approach when dealing with Arab taboos [religion, governance, and gender]”. In fact, the plight of the Arab media lies in its validating the myth of absolute truth possession regarding Islam and Arabs. If the Arab media is self-critical and self-questioning about discriminatory, oppressive, and suppressive discourses, multidimensional diversities in the interests of the majority of Arab-speaking countries will emerge over the next generations. Schleifer (2010) claims that “the media in Arab and other Muslim-majority contexts will adhere more closely to standards of honesty and accuracy, and in doing so will become more faithful to the demands of Islam itself.” The prophet Muhamed peace be upon him said,

All mankind is from Adam and Eve; an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also, a White has no superiority over a Black nor a Black has any superiority over a White except by piety and good action. (The Last Sermon of Prophet Muhammad)

Remarkably, this is a message to BeIN sports demagoguery-driven discourse to be a true Arab Qatari and true institution faithful to Islam as it claims to be. A religion that treats non-Arab and Arab people the same way regardless of being a Muslim, African, or Eastern. Qatari is seemingly orientalist by the West and it orientalises the East and North Africa.

Qatari Politics-Sports Synergy

Sport is an ideological extension of the political system. To be precise, the Qatari regime’s politics is transmitted by soft power companies like the giant BeIN sports group. In detail, Arabisation in North Africa is likened to Americanisation in the world. This fossilised backward reality is whitewashed in light of pan-Arabism. Therefore, the relationship of non-Arab viewers with the channels varies as per their cultural, scientific, and sporting backgrounds. As a response to this synergy, a Saudi channel BeoutQ, was founded to compete and challenge the Qatari power and interests. This illuminating Qatari blend of politics and sport is a corollary of the bilateral dispute between Qatar and Saudi Arabia. It is described as “the most widespread piracy operation that the world has ever seen, principally targeting the global broadcaster BeIN sports for political purposes” (Timeline). This piracy operation is propagated as the theft of sports and entertainment. Herman and Chomsky (2021) argue that “one would expect in a properly functioning system of indoctrination with the task of preserving privilege and authority from critical analysis” (p.244). However, the Qatari’s theft of the non-Arab minds and pure hearts of football fans is into oblivion. This theft is taken for granted because the dispute touches only political interests. Unlike Saudi Arabia, Morocco’s multilayered diversity unveils the incompatibility of the Qatari synergy of pan-Arabism and Islamism. Kaya (2013) states, “Diversity as a phenomenon was not necessarily valued by the ruling powers, and was sometimes even denied” (p.297). This is explained perfectly as he argues, “There are no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent interests,” British Prime Minister Lord Palmerston (1784-1865) remarked. According to Oxford Reference (2016), “We have no eternal allies or perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and immortal, and it is our duty to follow those interests.”. In actuality, Qatar has become popular via Al Jazeera and BeIN sports influences. Therefore, I have recently contributed to clarifying the role of sports in the global sphere. Honestly, power breeds resistance. the BeoutQ and Arabsat piracy [Saudi War on Qatari Resistance] project launched in June 2017 through broadcasting rights until July 2020, this period hardened the Qatari BeIN sports giant companies full of a series of pressures. This is conceived of the tyranny of power with the “Must Be with us” policy. Knowingly, Saudi Arabia’s foreign policy in its relationship with Arab-speaking countries uses power with or power over. Finally, Qatar’s quest for exit lasts years for a solution, but its politics-Sports synergy is still at work for good.

BeIN Sports’ s Exposure Influences

The Qatari BeIN sports is a Pandora's box regarding identity crisis. Influences seek to shift the balance of powers in favour of the Qatari soft power at the expense of hard power. Middle Eastern Islamism and pan-Arabism are

endangering Moroccan viewers. As a response, Moroccan Islam and local secular culture as intellectual shields to tamp down the huge influences of Middle Eastern Muslims. The sport-engulfed discourse's daily sedition for identity remembrance is continuous. According to BBC, "Immediately after Qatar was awarded the right to host the 2022 World Cup, its media framed the event as a "Victory for Islam and pan-Arabism" (21 December 2022). The fallacies of BeIN sports running commentary discourse are dormant. according to BBC,

If you were to do a DNA analysis of the Moroccan team, you would find that most of them are Amazigh. Most of them don't speak Arabic. And if they did it will be 'broken Arabic' because they grew up in the West. (21 December 2022)

DNA is synonymous with scientific language, which could terminate the ideological fallacies repeated every day. Add to this, this science could launch the awakening of Moroccan viewers from lethargy for good. The BeIN SPORTS falsifies and arabises places, countries, people, players, and coaches, with or without their knowledge. The Algerian Kateb (1999) said once, "Algeria is a country subjugated by the myth of the Arab nation because it is in the name of Arabization that Tamazight is repressed. In Algeria, as in the whole world, it is believed that Arabic is the language of Algerians" (p. 264). The Arab thing has been exhausted in the commentary language so that they can invest in a new brand concept in the interests of Qatari Easternism. However, the dispute in the Gulf countries turns out to be a reconciliation for Moroccan citizens through self-critical thinking. Stuart Hall's Representation is instrumental in this context: when he says that the picture has several levels and several messages that are drawn according to the type of viewer. The first is conformist, and the second is negotiated. The third is oppositional. This is highly critical, questioning everything and trying to get far beyond the picture to give it a different meaning contrary to what the image presented in the first place. In plain English, this is how ideology infiltrated into sports in a world where the message inherent in the image is transmitting information under the guise of watching live sports matches hypnotised by discursive commentary. In summary, the significance of the televised image teemed with codes and signals lies in considering it as a tool for transmitting an encrypted message in a way that is consistent with the data available in physical reality or imagination of the viewers and fans.

Conclusion:-

In conclusion, Moroccan viewers can assist in breaking down the illusions fabricated by the BeIN sports channel commentators by covering the Africanity of North Africa in the course of broadcasting international Morocco live matches. It is highly recommended that Morocco should better benefit from non-repetitive lessons out of the World Cup Qatar 2022 for the sake of organising a Moroccanised, clean, and inclusive World Cup 2030. Instead of revisiting its extremist and discriminatory propaganda politics, BeIN sports beseeches the sports entertainment concerned international bodies, organisations, and governments across the world to denounce BeoutQ's 'theft of sport and entertainment'. To reverse the discourse, BeIN sports has made live football matches broadcasted a triple burden in the face of loyal fans in underdeveloped countries. The triple burden refers to the payment (contrary to soft power), pan-Arabism (Masking differences in North Africa), and discrimination and marginalisation (uprooting pan-Africanity from North African viewers) of Moroccan Africanity. Through interviews, statements, ceremonies, statements of players, trainers, and club leaders put BeIN sports propaganda in stark contrast and cynicism with the parochial pan-Arabism discourse, which renders it a fiasco although the Qatari BeIN sports fuelled its omnipresence in every single match. Now it is a lesson to Qatar that hypocrisy taking the form of double discourse is the only vice that is unforgivable. Islam is relegated to the presence of ethnicity, which should be the opposite in reality. They pretend to be Muslim without Islamness (erasure of oppression, discrimination, exclusion, and forgery). Here is a general rule to follow to put an end to the ills of politics like racism, and xenophobia and replace pan-Arabism with Pan-Africanism to all peoples in Africa.

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