

## The Meanings of Face as Manifested in Moroccan Arabic Idioms and Proverbs

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### Abstract

Face plays a pivotal role in human interaction. Indeed, it is a multifaceted construct that has various connotative meanings in different cultures. It has been used, in various contexts, to refer to social value, social status, self-image, reputation, dignity, honour, and several other notions. In this regard, this study aims to explore the meanings and concepts associated with face in Moroccan Arabic (MA) idiomatic expressions and proverbs. To achieve this objective, the study used a corpus of 30 items from MA. Many expressions were collected by the researcher using his knowledge of MA as a native speaker and his discussions with different people both face-to-face and on social media. Some items of the corpus were collected from available collections of proverbs. The selection of the data has been based on the principle of currency. The data were transliterated and translated into English to explore the meanings and concepts associated with face in MA. The study showed that face in the Moroccan culture is closely related to shame or Moroccan H'shouma and that it is associated with the inner state and character of people more than it does in English.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Face is a key concept in both sociology and politeness research (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2006; Culpeper, 2011; Leech, 2014; O'Driscoll, 2017). It has been used to account for human interactions, face-to-face behaviour, and politeness in different contexts. However, the notion of face does not have a fixed unitary meaning. It is indeed a floating/empty signifier. As Chandler and Munday (2011) explained, an empty signifier has vague and unspecifiable significations. An empty signifier is subject to interpretations and means different things to different people, and face is an empty signifier par excellence.

Indeed, face has been used, in different contexts, with many meanings and connotations such as social value, honour, dignity, reputation, shame, and so on (O'Driscoll, 2017; Ruhi & Kadar, 2011; Yabuuchi, 2004). It has been used to refer to an image of the self, but it is also, in some accounts, something that can be shared. Face is indeed "a philosophical construct [that] boasts a history that dates to ancient civilizations" (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2006, p. 261). The purpose of this article is twofold. First, it discusses the meanings and nuances of meanings attached to the concept of face in Moroccan Arabic by studying the manifestations of the word face (Arabic: الوجه "Al-wajh") in idiomatic phrases and proverbs that are of high currency among Moroccans. Second, it argues that the way the face is used in Moroccan Arabic is broader than for it to be subsumed under politeness research.

## 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### 2.1. Previous Studies on Face

As has been noted above, the face is a floating signifier with highly variable and unspecifiable meanings. As the aim of this study is to explore the meanings of the face in Morocco, a brief discussion of the meanings of the face in previous accounts is due. Firstly, the Canadian American sociologist Erving Goffman (1967) was an influential scholar in face research. He defined face as:

### The Meanings of Face as Manifested in Moroccan Arabic Idioms and Proverbs

The positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes- albeit an image that others may share, as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing for himself. (p. 5)

By line, Goffman means the person's evaluation of himself and others. Goffman also explained that face can be shared. He stated, "In many relationships, the members come to *share a face*, so that in the presence of third parties, an improper act *on the part of one member* becomes a source of acute embarrassment to *the other members*" (p. 42, emphasis added).

In addition to that, Goffman seems to use the term "face" to mean pride and honour as is exemplified by his saying that if a person "is forced against his will to treat himself in these ways, his face, his pride, and his honour will be seriously threatened" (p. 32). Goffman discussed the notion of face concerning facework. By the latter, he means "the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face. Face-work serves to counteract "incidents" -that is, events whose effective symbolic implications threaten face" (p. 12). That is, facework includes several tactics and practices that a person employs to save their face and the face of others. He likened face-saving practices and behaviours to traffic rules. He stated that "to study face-saving is to study the traffic rules of social interaction" (p. 12).

Moreover, in politeness research, Brown and Levinson (1987) used face to account for politeness. They stated: "Our notion of 'face' is derived from that of Goffman (1967) and from the English folk term, which ties face up with notions of being embarrassed or humiliated, or 'losing face'" (p. 61). However, Brown and Levinson (1987) offered a slightly different account. They defined face as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (p. 61). They added that it consists of two related aspects:

(a) **Negative Face:** the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others.

(b) **Positive face:** the want of every member that he wants to be desirable to at least some others. (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 62)

In other words, Brown and Levinson's approach argued that some of our face 'needs' or 'wants' are about wanting to seem important and valued (positive face wants) whereas others are about wanting not to be impeded or constrained (negative face wants). Therefore, when we compliment somebody or offer them something, we are addressing their positive face needs. When we avoid imposing on them or limiting their options, we are addressing their negative needs.

In addition to the conceptualization of face as a positive social value and as self-image, in some other contexts, face is strongly linked to other notions like shame and prestige. For example, in China, Hu (1944) argued that face is linked to prestige. He stated that "the study of the concepts of "face" in China is particularly interesting because it reveals two sets of criteria by which prestige is gained and status secured or improved". (p. 45). He explained that two words are used to mean 'face': *mien-tzu* and *lien*. Hu (1944) said:

*Mien-tzu* stands for the kind of prestige that is emphasized in this country [America]: a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation. This is prestige that is accumulated utilizing personal effort or clever manoeuvring... The other kind of "face", *lien* ... is the respect of the group for a man with a good moral reputation; the man who fulfils his obligations regardless of the hardships involved, who under all circumstances shows himself a decent human being. (P. 45)

Moreover, Strecker (1993) studied the cultural variations in the concept of the face by focusing on the face in the Hamar culture of southern Ethiopia. He reported that while the European and Mediterranean concept of *face* relates it to social fear and shame, the Hamar concept of *face* relates it to fortune and freedom of action.

Besides, Ukosakul (2005) investigated the significance of face as revealed in Thai ‘face’ idioms. She found out that the notion of face in Thai culture is equated with ego. She added that it is often associated with honor and shame which shows that face in Thai culture is highly valued in social interaction (p. 304)

Additionally, Labben (2017) investigated how face is conceptualized in Tunisian Arabic by studying a corpus of 139 expressions. She reported that face in Tunisian culture is closely related to identity and cultural values such as collectivism, honor and shame, and hospitality. Labben (2017) study seems to confirm Feghali’s (1997) account. Feghali reviewed Arab cultural communication patterns and she affirmed that the basic cultural values in Arab cultures are collectivism, hospitality and honour (pp. 352- 354).

In addition, Almusallam (2022) explored the concept of face in Saudi Arabic folk expressions and found out that face is seen as “individual’s or group’s property ... Face appears to be a valuable possession more oriented to in-group relationships rather than individual autonomy, and it is mainly enhanced by retaining group and cultural values such as collectivism, honour, and religion” (p. 1). She also reinforced Feghali’s basic categorization of cultural values in Arab cultures. She stated that “Arab cultures as collectivist nations...emphasize positive face and connectedness with others” (p. 3). Almusallam called for further research on face in the Arab world. She stated:

There seems to be very limited research on how face is conceptualized in Arab interaction. The scarcity of research in Arab cultures does not mean that face does not have an essential role in regulating people’s behaviour in the Arab world. (p. 3)

Therefore, it is to replenish this gap that motivated the current study. It primarily aims to explore how Moroccans perceive face and to find out whether there are any conceptualizations of face that are peculiar to Moroccan culture.

## 2.2.Face in Arabic and Moroccan Arabic

It is necessary for the purpose of this study to provide a few hints on the word “Face” in Standard Arabic and Moroccan Arabic. The equivalent of the English word *face* is “وَجْهٌ” (wajhun) in Standard Arabic (SA) and “وَجْهٌ” (“Wajh”) in Moroccan Arabic (MA). They are almost the same with a slight difference in pronunciation. The word “وَجْهٌ” in SA and MA has various derivatives and meanings. Its forms and meanings in SA are influenced by the language of the *Qur’ân*.

- **Face as a verb**

There are two verbs derived from the root “وَجْهٌ”: (1) “تَوَجَّهَ”, “to go towards” and (2) “وَجَّهَ”, which has several meanings. Here are the key meanings of the verb (2) “وَجَّهَ” from *Al-Mawrid Modern Arabic-English Dictionary* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Note that, interestingly, the verb “وَجَّهَ” means also ‘to honour and to distinguish’.

**Table 1:** Five Basic Meanings of the Verb “وَجَّهَ” (*Al-Mawrid: A modern Arabic-English dictionary*, R. Baalbaki, 1995)

1) Send, dispatch, forward	وَجَّهَ: أَرْسَلَ (1)
2) To aim at, to point at, to direct to	وَجَّهَ: صَوَّبَ، سَدَّدَ (2)
3) To turn, to direct	وَجَّهَ: وَلَّى، أَدَارَ (3)
4) To steer, to helm, to direct, to instruct	وَجَّهَ: قَادَ، أَرْشَدَ (4)
5) To honor, to distinguish	وَجَّهَ: شَرَّفَ (5)

- **Face as a noun:** “وَجْهٌ” as a noun appears in many forms and with very different meanings. *Al-Mawrid Modern Arabic-English Dictionary*, for example, provided many English equivalents for the entry of the noun وَجْهٌ. Here are the key ones:

**Table 2:** Six Basic Meanings of the Noun “وَجْهٌ”, (Al-Mawrid: A modern Arabic-English dictionary, 1995)

1) Face, visage, countenance	(1) وَجْهٌ (جمع: وُجُوهُ)
2) Front, face, front part, facade	(2) وَجْهٌ: واجهة، مُقَدَّم
3) Surface, face, outside, exterior	(3) وَجْهٌ: سطح، ظاهر
4) Appearance, look, face, guise	(4) وَجْهٌ: مظهر، هيئة، شكل
5) Manifestation, expression, indication	(5) وَجْهٌ: مظهر، تعبير، دليل
6) Intention, purpose, aim, objective	(6) وَجْهٌ: قصد، نيّة، غاية

In addition, the word *face* in the corpus of this study often appears with *possessive pronoun suffixes* attached to it. Table 3 summarises these possessive pronoun suffixes. (See Ryding, 2005; Sawaie, 2015 for more details.)

**Table 3:** Independent and Possessive Pronoun Suffixes in Arabic

Independent personal pronouns الضّمائر المنفصلة	Meaning	Possessive pronoun suffixes الضّمائر المتّصلة	Meaning	Suffixing possessive pronouns to nouns
أنا	I	ي	My	My face وجهي
أنت	You (sing.)	ك	Your	Your face وجهك
هو	He	هـ	His	His face وجهه
هي	She	ها	Her	Her face وجهها
نحن	We	نا	Our	Our face وجهنا
أنتم	You (pl.)	كم	Your	Your face وجهكم
هم	They	هم	Their	Their face وجههم

Furthermore, the phrases associated with face in English such as “to lose face” and to “save face” also exist in Arabic. *To lose face* is translated as “فَقَدَ ماءً وجهه” and *to save one’s face* is rendered as “حَفِظَ ماءً وجهه” (See Arts, 2014; Harrel & Sobelman, 2004)

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study aims to answer two research questions:

**RQ.1.** What are the main meanings of face in Moroccan culture as manifested in Moroccan Arabic idioms and proverbs?

**R.Q.2.** Are there any meanings of face that are peculiar to Moroccan culture?

To answer these research questions, the study used a corpus of about 60 idioms and proverbs. However, since it has not been feasible to analyse all the collected items, the study reduced the corpus to 30 items. Items that reflect the same meaning and connotations were omitted from the final corpus. The corpus on which the current study is based included data collected from three main resources:

- 1) The researcher himself, being a native speaker of Moroccan Arabic (MA).
- 2) From other speakers of MA, via Facebook and WhatsApp groups, in which members were asked to share any expressions with the word “face”.
- 3) From the following three comprehensive works on Moroccan proverbs.
  - Dadoune, Idriss (2000). *Moroccan popular proverbs*<sup>1</sup>
  - The Academy of the Kingdom of Morocco (2011). *A corpus of the Moroccan colloquial proverbs*<sup>2</sup>
  - Westermarck Edward (1930). *Wit and wisdom in Morocco: A study of native proverbs*

Many of the idioms are included in the مَثْن (“*Matn*”, corpus) by *The Academy of the Kingdom of Morocco*. This reference work is the most comprehensive collection available and

<sup>1</sup> إدريس دادون (2000). الأمثال الشعبية المغربية

<sup>2</sup> أكاديمية المملكة المغربية (2011). متن المثل المغربي الدارج

it includes more than 17.000 idiomatic expressions and proverbs. Some of the proverbs and idioms in this study are also recorded in Dadoune (2000)<sup>3</sup> and Westermarck (1930)<sup>4</sup>.

It should be noted here that the retained corpus for this study was selected on the basis of *currency*- that is the idiom or proverb has to be current and of high usage among Moroccans. After the selection, the source items were transliterated and translated into English. Although all the translations of the MA idioms and proverbs are literal so as to maintain the word *face* in the translations, I have tried to provide hints to their communicative meaning where possible. The corpus was analysed thematically, according to the shared meanings of face as it appears in them.

#### 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of MA face expressions is carried out in a thematic way, using clusters of idioms and proverbs which approximately refer to shared meanings.

##### 4.1.Face as Honour, Dignity, and Reputation

According to *Cambridge Online Dictionary*, *dignity* refers to “the importance and value that a person has, that makes other people respect them, or makes them respect themselves”, as is shown in “How could you wear something so indecent? Have you no dignity?” and “He longs for a society in which the dignity of all people is recognized”. As for *honour*, the same dictionary defines it as “a quality that comprises respect, being proud, and honesty”, as in “a man of honour” and “he fought for the honour of our country”.

With regard to Arabic translations of these two concepts, they are rendered by these renowned dictionaries as follows:

**Table 4:** *Translations of Honour and Dignity Into Arabic*

Honour	<i>Cambridge English- Arabic Dictionary (online)</i>	شَرَفَ ●
	<i>Oxford Arabic Dictionary: Arabic-English, English-Arabic</i>	reputation شُمُعة ● a mark of esteem شَرَف ●
	<i>Al-Mawrid Al-Hadeeth: A modern English-Arabic dictionary</i>	شُمُعة حسنة- احترام ● فَخْر- مصدر شَرَف ●
Dignity	<i>Cambridge English- Arabic Dictionary (online)</i>	رِصَانَة ●
	<i>Oxford Arabic Dictionary: Arabic-English, English-Arabic</i>	وَقَار ● هَيْبَة ● كِرَامَة ●
	<i>Al-Mawrid Al-Hadeeth: A modern English-Arabic dictionary</i>	جَلال- وقار ● ثُبُل-سُمُو ● شَرَف-كِرَامَة ●

<sup>3</sup> Dadoune’s collection of proverbs includes 2302 proverbs. They are written in Moroccan Arabic and explained in Standard Arabic. I have surveyed the whole corpus of proverbs in Dadoune’s collection, and found out that *about 22 proverbs* contained the word *face*.

<sup>4</sup> Westermarck’s collection of Moroccan proverbs includes 2013 proverbs, translated and discussed in terms of themes or topics. Westermarck’s collection includes *about 13 proverbs* with the word *face*.

### The Meanings of Face as Manifested in Moroccan Arabic Idioms and Proverbs

These two notions are closely related to face in Moroccan Arabic as is shown in these idioms and proverbs<sup>5</sup>:

I no longer have a <b>face</b> to meet him	<i>'Ma bqa 'andi wajah bash nqablu'</i>	(1) ما بقا عندي وجه باش نقابلو
I will stain his <b>face</b> with soil (I will blame him severely)	<i>'Ghadi nmarmmad lih wajho fatrab'</i>	(2) غادي نمرمد ليه وجهه فالثراب
You blackened our <b>face</b> (face of the family)	<i>'Ka.hhalti lina wajahna'</i>	(3) كحلتني لينا وجهنا
You reddened my <b>face</b> (you did me credit)	<i>'hammarti lia wajhi'</i>	(4) حمرتي ليا وجهي
I will show him his <b>face</b> in the mirror, who he really is, and what is worth is.	<i>'Ghadi nwarih wajhou fi lamraya, çashkon huwa u çash tayaswa'</i>	(5) غادي نوريه وجهه في لمرايا، أشكون هو، وأش تيسوي.
I respect you for the sake of the white beard that is on your <b>face</b>	<i>'Anna waqqartek 'la shib lli fwajhak'</i>	(6) أنا وقّرتك على الشيب لي فوجهك.

Idiom (1) shows that face is closely related to dignity and esteem. It is often said when someone has done something that resulted in loss of face, and hence may cause others to stop respecting them. Thus, a Moroccan person may not wish to meet someone just to save face. In addition, idiom (2), *'Ghadi nmarmmad lih wajho fatrab'*, is said when someone is offended by another person. The offended person blames the offender by stating that they would stain their face in soil; thus, referring to the fact that they intend to blame, reprimand and scold the offender severely. The offender then would feel ashamed and lose face. Here *staining face* refers to tarnishing the reputation of the offender by showing them who they really are. This will affect their honour, dignity, reputation and self-respect.

In addition, item (3) *'Ka.hhalti lina wajahna'* literally translates as “you blackened our face”. A more communicative translation of this idiom would be “you tarnished our reputation”. This idiom means that someone’s deeds affected the self-image of the family or group. Their deeds have brought about shame or Moroccan *H'shouma*- a notion that is highly related to losing face as will be shown in section 4.3 below. Also, item (3) displays an interesting point about Moroccan face which is the idea that *face is shared*. This expression is often associated with the family. That is, when someone does something that is shameful, a member of their family would utter that phrase referring to the idea that this person tarnished the reputation of the family. The idea that face can be shared was also recorded to be part of American culture (Goffman, 1967) and Tunisian culture (Labben, 2017). Additionally, idiom (4), *'hammarti lia wajhi'*, which literally translates as “you reddened my face”, is used to show that one has done me credit and brought about praise and respect for me, and hence saved my honour and dignity.

Moreover, proverbs (5) and (6) both show that Moroccan face is closely intertwined with dignity, honour and social worth. Proverb (5) *'Ghadi nwarih wajhou fi lamraya, çashkon huwa u çash tayaswa'*, which translates as “I will show him his face in the mirror, who he really is, and what he worths”, makes it clear that face is equivalent to social worth. It is said of someone who insulted, discredited, or affronted your self-image and dignity. As a punishment, a Moroccan person may utter that expression to mean that they will show the offender his real value and real reputation. As for proverb (6) *'Anna waqqartek 'la shib lli fwajhak'*, which translates as “I respect you for the sake of the white beard that is on your face” shows that face brings about “*alwaqar*” which is equivalent to *dignity and respect*. (See table 4 above). In Morocco, most people would respect someone for the sake of their face, especially if that person is older enough and has grown grey hair on their face.

<sup>5</sup> Transliterations are enclosed in inverted commas ‘...’. See Appendix A for system of transliteration.

Therefore, items (1-6) show that face is closely related to honour, dignity, respect, self-image, and shame. This reveals that face plays a pivotal role in Moroccan interaction and face to face behaviour. Face guides the way Moroccans handle interaction with others. Saving face is important for the reputation and self-image of both the individual and the group, and losing face affects the reputation and dignity of both the individual and the group as well.

#### 4.2. Face as a Gateway to a Person's State, Emotions, and Character

In both Classical Arabic (CA) and MA, face is highly linked to the person's inner state and emotions. This aspect was not emphasized in Goffman's account. In CA and MA, face reveals much about the inner state, emotions and character of people. Consider these verses from the Quran and their translations by Al-Hilali and Khan (1999) or Abdel Haleem (2004):

1. " وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ تَرَى الَّذِينَ كَذَبُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ وُجُوهُهُم مُّسْوَدَّةٌ " (سورة الزُّمَر، الآية 60)  
'wayawma lqiyamati taraa lladhina kadhaabou 'ala llahi wojouhohom moswddatun'  
"And on the Day of Resurrection you will see those who lied against Allāh (i.e. attributed to Him sons, partners) - their faces will be blackened." (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1999, p. 805)
2. " سِيمَاهُمْ فِي وُجُوهِهِمْ مِنْ أَثَرِ السُّجُودِ " (سورة الفتح، الآية 29)  
'Simaahum fi wojuhihim min athari ssujudi'  
"The mark of them (i.e. of their Faith) is on their faces (foreheads) from the traces of prostration (during prayers)" (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1999, p. 895)
3. " وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ مُّسْفِرَةٌ " (سورة عَبَسَ، الآية 38)  
'Wojuhun yawmaçidin mmosfiratun'  
"Some faces that Day will be bright" (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1999, p. 1059)
4. " وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّاعِمَةٌ " (سورة العَاشِيَةِ، الآية 8)  
'Wojuhun yawmaçidin nna'imatun'  
"(Other) faces that Day will be joyful" (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1999, p. 1082)
5. " تُعْرَفُ فِي وُجُوهِهِمْ نَضْرَةَ النَّعِيمِ " (سورة الْمُطَفِّينِ، الآية 24)  
'ta'rifo fi wojuhihim na.drata nna'imi'  
"You will recognize on their faces the radiance of bliss" (Abdel Haleem, 2004, p. 413)

These verses, along with many others, clearly show that face in Arab and Moroccan culture reveals much about the inner state of people so that happiness, bliss, sadness, regret, and character in general are shown on people's faces. Since Moroccan Arabic is highly influenced by the vocabulary of CA, many of the face idioms and proverbs in this study describe people's states, emotions, and character. Consider items (7- 17) below:

The face of hardship.	'Wjah tamara'	(7) وَجْه تَمَارَة
The face of misery.	'Wjah alqahra'	(8) وَجْه الْقَهْرَة
The face of jinx.	'Wjah anna.hs'	(9) وَجْه النَّحْسِ
The face of curse	'Wjah annaqma'	(10) وَجْه النَّقْمَة
The face of mercy, and the heart of coal.	'Wjah rrahma u qalb 'alfa.hma'	(11) وَجْه الرَّحْمَة وَقَلْب الْفَحْمَة
The face of goodness	'Wjah alakhir'	(12) وَجْه الْخَيْرِ
The face of gain is clear	'Wjah rba.h bayn'	(13) وَجْه الرَّيْحِ بَابِيْن
His face is lightened	'Wajho mnawwar'	(14) وَجْههُ مَنْوَّرٌ
His face is cheerful	'Wajho mabshor'	(15) وَجْههُ مَبْشُورٌ
You face is not for joking	'Wajhak mashi dyal lamza.h'	(16) وَجْهْكَ مَاشِي دِيَال لَمْزَا ح
He who hides his hunger, on his face will it appear.	'Alli khabba' ju'o 'la wajhou kayban'	(17) اللَّي حَبَّ جَوْعُهُ عَلَى وَجْهُهُ كِيْبَان.

### The Meanings of Face as Manifested in Moroccan Arabic Idioms and Proverbs

All these 11 idioms and proverbs use the word “وجه” to describe people and comment on their appearance, state and character. Items (6-7) describe someone who looks miserable and poor, and express disapproval of them. Item (9-10) is used to speak to, or of, someone who is believed to be jinxed and whose company will just lead to bad luck and cause trouble. Item 11 is used to describe someone who pretends to be kind-hearted by making faces, but who actually is a hard-hearted person who holds grudges and malice to others.

Moreover, items (12- 15) use the word face to express approval of others and their character. Thus, they all describe someone who brings good luck, gain, happiness, and bliss. Item (16), ‘*Wajhak mashi dyal lamza.h*’, comments on the solemn character of someone - that they are to be respected and be held in high esteem, and that they are not someone to joke with. As for item (17), it shows that the face is the mirror of the physical feelings and well-being of others. It is said of someone who pretends to be poor but, in reality, they are rich or vice versa.

#### 4.3. Face and Shame

When someone is shameless, bold, or behaves in rude way, Moroccans would criticize him by stating that he has no face to feel shamed about. Consider items (18- 23) below:

His <b>face</b> is hard (= shameless)	<i>‘Wajho qa.sa.h’</i>	(18) وجهه قاصح
His <b>face</b> is tin-like.	<i>‘Wajho mqa.sdar’</i>	(19) وجهه مقزذر
He has no <b>face</b> to feel ashamed about.	<i>‘Ma ‘andoush lawjah ‘lash ya.hsham’</i>	(20) ما عندوش لوجه علاش يحشم.
Is that your <b>face</b> or your nape?	<i>‘Wajhak hadak zola qfak’</i>	(21) وجهك هناك أو لا قفاك
A <b>face</b> of clay, which never feels ashamed.	<i>‘Wjah m.san.sal ma kaya.hshamsh’</i>	(22) وجهه مصنصل ما كيحشمش
May God give us your <b>face</b>	<i>‘Llah ya ‘tina wajhak’</i>	(23) الله يعطينا وجهك

Items (18), (19), and (22) show that someone is shameless, and that his face is so hard as to display feelings of shame and shyness. They mean that someone is bad-mannered and rude, that he is not brought up well. Item (20) tells us that someone who is not ashamed by others is someone who has no face. With regard to item (21), ‘*Wajhak hadak zola qfak*’, it is a severe scolding for someone who has done wrong. It also indicates that he has no face. Item (23) which translates as “May God give us your face” is said to someone who is shameless in a blatant way. The person who says this does not mean that they wish to be like them, but rather the opposite. It is an ironic expression.

In Moroccan culture, unlike in many Western cultures, shame, or Moroccan *H’shouma*, is inextricably related to face. This notion of *H’shouma* affects social behaviour and interaction in enormous ways. York (2022), in her account of Moroccan customs and culture, explained that there are numerous ways in which one can attract *H’shouma* in Morocco, including anything that is against social norms and religion, sexual deviancy, or anything that is unacceptable by one’s family. I add to this that even such behaviours as smoking, talking to girls, and accompanying bad friends bring *H’shouma*. In Morocco, *H’shouma* is a characteristic of child-directed speech. Every child is exposed to many utterances like “Don’t play here, *H’shouma*”, “don’t throw bread here, *H’shouma*”, “don’t take your brother’s cake, *H’shouma*”, “don’t wear this, *H’shouma*”, and so on. It is a socialisation technique from childhood.

In fact, the linking of face to shame is characteristic of many Arab cultures. (Feghali, 1997; Hargraves, 2006; Labben, 2017). For instance, Feghali (1997) explained that children are reared to feel ashamed when others have noticed them to act wrongly or shamefully. This is different from Western guilt. Benedict (1946) described the characteristics of a shame-oriented culture as opposed to a guilt-oriented one in the following way:

True shame cultures rely on external sanctions for good behavior, not, as true guilt cultures do, on an internalized conviction of sin. Shame is a reaction to other

people's criticism. A man is shamed either by being openly ridiculed and rejected or by fantasizing to himself that he had been made ridiculous.

(Benedict, 1946: 223, cited in Ukosakul 2009, p. 292).

In addition, most people who write about Moroccan culture and social etiquette will sense the impact of *H'shouma* on social behavior. For instance, both Hargraves (2006) and York (2022) included a section for the notion *H'shouma* in their books on Moroccan culture and etiquette. Hargraves (2006) emphasized that the concept of '*H'shouma*' is so crucial for Moroccans. He explained that shame is different from Western guilt. He affirmed:

It is important to understand a fundamental difference between Moroccan *H'shouma* and Western guilt. Guilt arises when one's conscience notes that one has done wrong. Shame arises with the awareness that others know one has done wrong. Guilt plays very little or no part in the conduct of Moroccan life; shame, on the other hand, is paramount. It's the censure of others that a Moroccan shrinks from, since his or her self-image is derived from others and is not cultivated internally. (p. 53)

Besides, York (2022) provided another testimony to the prevalence of *H'shouma* in Moroccan life. She stated that "unlike Western-style guilt, or the knowledge that you have done wrong, *H'shouma* is best explained as the knowledge that others know that you have done wrong" (p. 51). These are testimonies to the idea that what makes a Moroccan lose face is others' knowledge of their wrong deed. This means that loss of face leads to the experience of negative feelings such as shame, embarrassment and loss of honour.

As Ukosakul (2005, p. 298) said of Thai people, shame in Moroccan culture is *the effect of loss of face*. When a Moroccan loses face by doing something shameful, and others start viewing them as shameless, they feel that their dignity, their honour, and their pride is lost. As Hargraves asserted above, I add that the censure of others is an agony, and kind of torture for Moroccans, for their face is sacred, as Goffman (1967) also stressed.

The idioms above, and many others, clearly show that face is associated with the concept of shame/*H'shouma*. One has to save face in order to stay away from the censure and the gossip of others. When others know that someone has done wrong, they tend to discredit them and hence make them feel shamefaced. In general, Moroccans do anything to save face and avoid shame. When someone is shameless, Moroccans describe them as having a "*hard, tin-like, and clay-like face*".

#### 4.4. Face Prescribes Many Deeds

An interesting way in which face affects interaction in Morocco is that people may do something they do not like just for the sake of others or just to do them a favour. This is shown in the following idioms:

My face beats me	' <i>Kayaghlabni wajhi</i> '	كَيْغَلْبِنِي وَجْهِي (24)
Just do it for my face	' <i>Ghir dir bwajhi</i> '	غَيْرِ دِيرِ بُوَجْهِي (25)
Just take into account the face of our friendship	' <i>Dir bwjah al'ashra</i> '	دِيرِ بُوَجْهِ الْعَشْرَةِ (26)
Just for the sake of your face	' <i>Ghir 'la wajhak</i> '	غَيْرِ عَلَيَّ وَجْهَكَ (27)
For the face of our beloved ones	' <i>Fawjah la.hbab</i> '	فَوَجْهَ لِحَبَابٍ (28)

Item (24) shows that one may do something undesirable just because they want others to hold them in high esteem. This is something that many people disapprove of because it encourages favouritism. In addition, items (25, 26, 27, and 28) also display the same tendency of doing something for the sake of saving others' faces. Using Goffman's account, these expressions show that Moroccans use face as a *protective* measure, to protect loss of the others' face.

In particular, expression (27) shows something interesting about Moroccan interaction, especially in relation to requests. When you ask a Moroccan for a favour, he may respond, ‘*ana n’awnu ghyr ‘la wajhek*’, “I will help him just for the sake of your face”. This means that Moroccans will do something just to show respect for someone they hold in high esteem and for saving their own face too in front of them. This goes hand in hand with Goffman’s rules of self-respect and considerateness. In the same vein, York (2022) provided a good explanation for such behaviours. “If you were to ask a Moroccan for a favor he could not grant you, for instance, instead of saying no he might postpone the favor indefinitely in order to save face and avoid *H’shouma*. No malice is intended” (pp. 51-52).

#### **4.5. Face as the Most Cherished Possession**

Several other face expressions in Moroccan Arabic show that face is the most cherished possession for Moroccans. They use it to swear or bet as these two sample expressions manifest:

I bet you with my face if you succeed      ‘*Ha wajhi ila .tafartih*’      ها وجهي إلى طرفتيه (29)  
Here is my face if I forgive you      ‘*Ha wajhi ila bqat fik*’      ها وجهي لبقات فيك (30)

Using face as a bet as in (29) and (30) above, and not another part of the body or another object, shows that Moroccans risk their most cherished thing just to say that they are certain that something will or will not happen. This is a manifestation that face is the most precious thing for Moroccans.

### **5. CONCLUSIONS**

The study aimed at investigating the meanings of face as manifested in Moroccan Arabic idioms and proverbs. The first research question of the study was related to meanings and connotations of face in Moroccan culture. The second one was about whether there are any meanings of face that are peculiar to Moroccan culture.

In regards to the first research question, the study showed that in Morocco, face is related to several notions that are emphasized worldwide such as dignity, honour, pride, reputation, and social value. As to the second research question, it was found out that face in Moroccan culture is closely tied to shame (Moroccan *H’shouma*) and to the individual’s inner state and character, which is not emphasized in previous accounts of face.

Indeed, the first main finding and contribution of the study is that face is closely related to shame, or Moroccan *H’shouma*. In fact, loss of face brings about *H’shouma*. The latter occurs when others realize that one has done something wrong or shameful. As shown in the discussion, Moroccan culture is a shame-oriented culture that is different from Western guilt-based cultures. Facework in Moroccan culture is affected by shame, which in return results from loss of face. A Moroccan would do anything to escape the *censure* of others.

The second main finding of the study is that face is viewed as the gateway to the inner state of the individual and his character. This conceptualization of face is not stressed in Western accounts of face such as Goffman’s (1967). Face in Morocco is taken as a reflection of the character of the individual and of his inner state. The study explained that this conceptualization of face is partially influenced by the language of the Quran. Interestingly, the finding of this study that Moroccans use face to refer to a person’s inner state and emotions was not emphasized by Labben (2017) and Almusallam (2022) who investigated the conceptualizations of face in Tunisia and Saudi Arabia, which are both Arab cultures as Morocco is.

Moreover, the study also showed that face prescribes many deeds and that face is the most cherished possession for a Moroccan. Furthermore, it has also been shown that the idea that *face can be shared* is more widespread in Morocco as a collectivistic culture. Finally, the study indicated too that face is more common in Moroccan Arabic idioms which reveals its importance in Moroccan interaction and social behaviour. The implication of the study is that

face is conceptualized in different ways in different cultures and that more research is needed on face as used in Arab speaking countries and collectivistic cultures in general, for it is conceptualized differently from Western accounts of face.

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### The Meanings of Face as Manifested in Moroccan Arabic Idioms and Proverbs

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#### Appendix A: System of Transliteration

<i>Symbols</i>	<i>Arabic Alphabet</i>
ç	ع
b	ب
t	ت
th	ث
j	ج
.h	ح
kh	خ
d	د
dh	ذ
r	ر
z	ز
s	س
sh	ش
.s	ص
.d	ض
.t	ط
.z	ظ
'	ع
gh	غ
f	ف
q	ق
k	ك
l	ل
m	م
n	ن
h	ه
w	و
i	ي
Vowels	
a	اَ
o /u	اُ

i                      9  
a                      |

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*Note:* Gemination is shown by doubling the consonant.

**Appendix B: The Corpus of the Study**

Thirty Moroccan Idiomatic Expressions and Proverbs with the Word Face

English Translation	Transliteration	Expressions in MA
<b>Face as Honour, Dignity and Reputation</b>		
I no longer have a face to meet him	<i>Ma bqa 'andi wjah bash nqablu</i>	1. ما بقا عندي وجه باش نقابلو
I will stain his face with soil (I will blame him severely)	<i>Ghadi nmarmmad lih wajho fatrab'</i>	2. غادي نمرمد له وجهه فالتراب
You blackened our face- face of the family (you tarnished the reputation of the family)	<i>Ka.hhalti lina wjahna (wjah al'ailçila)</i>	3. كحلتني لينا وجهنا (وجه العائلة)
You reddened my face (you did me credit/ you brought about praise and respect)	<i>.hammarti lia wajhi</i>	4. حمرتني ليا وجهي
I will show him his face in the mirror, who he really is, and what is worth is.	<i>Ghadi nwarih wajhou fi lamraya, çashkon huwa u çash tayaswa</i>	5. غادي نوريه وجهه في لمرايا، أشكون هو، وأش تيسوي.
"I respect you for the sake of the white beard that is on your face"	<i>Anna waqqartek 'la shib lli fwajhak</i>	6. أنا وقرتك على الشيب لي فوجهك.
<i>Face as a Gateway to a Person's State, Emotions, and Character</i>		
The face of hardship.	<i>Wjah tamara</i>	7. وجه تمارة
The face of misery.	<i>Wjah alqahra</i>	8. وجه القهرة
The face of jinx.	<i>Wjah anna.hs</i>	9. وجه النحس
The face of curse (a cause of trouble)	<i>Wjah annaqma</i>	10. وجه النقمة
The face of mercy, and the heart of coal	<i>Wjah rrahma u qalb alfa.hma</i>	11. وجه الرحمة وقلب الفحمة
The face of goodness	<i>Wjah alakhir</i>	12. وجه الخير
The face of gain is clear	<i>Wjah rba.h bayn</i>	13. وجه الربح باين
His face is lightened	<i>Wajho mnawwar</i>	14. وجهه منور
His face is cheerful	<i>Wajho mabshor</i>	15. وجهه مبشور
You face is not for jest	<i>Wajhak mashi dyal lamza.h</i>	16. وجهك ماشي ديال لمزاح
He who hides his hunger, on his face will it appear.	<i>Alli khabba' ju'o 'la wajhou kayban</i>	17. اللي خبّع جوعه على وجهه كيبان.
<b>Face and Shame</b>		
His face is hard (= shameless)	<i>Wajho qa.sa.h</i>	18. وجهه قاصح
His face is tin-like.	<i>Wajho mqa.sdar</i>	19. وجهه مقردر
He has no face to feel ashamed about	<i>Ma 'andoush lawjah 'lash ya.hsham</i>	20. ما عندوش لوجه علاش يحشم.
Is that your face or your nape?	<i>Wajhak hadak çola qfak</i>	21. وجهك هذاك أولا قفاك
A face of clay, which never feels ashamed.	<i>Wjah m.san.sal ma kaya.hshamsh</i>	22. وجه مصنصل ما كيشمش
May God give us your face	<i>Llah ya'tina wajhak</i>	23. الله يعطينا وجهك
<b>Face Prescribes Many Deeds</b>		
My face beats me	<i>Kayaghlabni wajhi</i>	24. كيغلبني وجهي
Just do it for my face	<i>Ghir dir bwajhi</i>	25. غير دير بوجهي

Just take into account our friendship	<i>Dir bwjah al'ashra</i>	26. دير بوجه العشرة
Just for the sake of your face	<i>Ghir 'la wajhak</i>	27. غير على وجهك
For the sake of our beloved ones	<i>Fawjah la.hbab</i>	28. فوجه لحاباب
<b>Face as the Most Cherished Possession</b>		
I bet you with my face if you succeed	<i>Ha wajhi ila .tafartih</i>	29. ها وجهي إلى طرفرتيه
Here is my face if I forgive you	<i>Ha wajhi ila bqat fik</i>	30. ها وجهي لبقات فيك

### **AUTHOR'S BIO**

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