Language, Power, and Gender: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Social Media Chats on Intimate Partner Violence in Tanzania

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Abstract

This study examined how interlocutors create, recreate, and maintain gender identity and power relations in social media discourse. Using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, the article analyses 50 interlocutors' chats/comments on the killing of an intimate partner on the eve of 28th May 2022 in Mwanza, Tanzania, with the talks materialising on Instagram from 30th May 2022 to 2nd June 2022. The analysis of the chats produced a picture of social transformation in the division of gender roles occurring in the community as the hegemonic power of men over women faces challenges among interlocutors, albeit on a limited scale, even on social media. Gender equality and gender empowerment and outcomes are expressed as the result of the transformation. Nevertheless, the resistance to this transformation manifests in the chats and the analysis of the phenomenon in the acts of violence and threats toward the female partners. Even though society prefers gender equality, it has yet to materialise. Implicitly, gender empowerment interventions must target both men and women to realise the desired outcome.

Introduction

The debate on language/discourse and power has advanced significantly and has become an area of study. In his book *Discourse and Social Change*, Fairclough (1992, p. 12) illustrates that language embodies and reflects 'the relations of power and ideologies, and the constructive effects of discourse has upon social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief…'. Such a line of reasoning also accounts for why language is socially constructed and constituted in a particular discursive context. However, we must desist from treating the

construction of discourse as a one-way traffic because language also shapes how such construction is maintained and manipulated based on the nature of the discursive practice—type of event and context—and social practice. In other words, there is a dialectical relationship between discourse and social structure' (Fairclough 1992, p. 66).

Although Tanzania has made significant strides towards gender equality, 44 percent of women still endure physical or sexual violence at the hands of their intimate partners. Moreover, 30 percent of girls experience sexual violence before they reach the age of 18 (Gemma et al., 2022). This persistence of gender-based violence frustrates the efforts of the government and other actors aimed to realise gender equality by 2030 following the 17 sustainable development goals (i.e., goal number 5). Lately, social media has increasingly been providing space and serving as a platform for both men and women to interact with the world faster than it used to in previous decades. As Alsaadat aptly observes, 'social media is increasingly becoming an essential platform for social connectivity in our daily lives' (Alsaadat 2018, p. 3747). In Tanzania, social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, Jamii forum, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter allow men and women to engage in conversations with a broad range of audiences beyond their immediate social circles.

In fact, with the ever-rising number of individuals who own smart mobile-phones in Tanzania (Taylor 2022), social media has become more accessible, thus allowing people to receive information on various issues in addition to engaging in conversation with a broad network. In other words, individuals with access to social media spaces are often [mis]informed and/or exposed to public/private discourses that navigate on bad or good, negative or positive narratives of discursive events occurring in their communities and beyond, which may also concern them as male or female (Anderson & Cermele 2014).

In such network(s), language mediates and enables the community to communicate within a particular social media and share stories concerning their daily life. Language in this paper refers to the form of writing (text), visual expression, and/or recorded voice messages (Fairclough, 1992). As Norman Fairclough (1992) has argued, language (discourse) is never neutral since it stations the interlocutors about their power positions, gender, age, colour, or other social categories that the speaker may deem fit to associate or disassociate with in a discursive event.

In Tanzania, the increase in recent years of events on the killing of spouses (which is sometimes referred to as intimate killing) has generated unparalleled vibes and interest among social media interlocutors. The eerie feeling that such macabre incidents make them dominate public discourse whenever they become public knowledge through social media platforms, where they spread like wildfire, is an incentive for such reporting. In 2018, for example, five women and a man were killed by intimate partners (*The Citizen* 2018). On 28th March 2020, a woman in Ngara and on 14th April 2021, a woman in Mara region were charged with allegedly killing their husbands. On an unspecified date in May 2019, a man burnt his wife in Kigamboni, and on 28th May 2022, a man in Mwanza shot dead his wife. These morbid events triggered discussions in many media spaces, including on social media.

In this article, I follow the discussions on the 28th of May 2022 event involving the killing of a woman in Mwanza. The thrust of the article is to critically analyse the language and discursive events posted and discussed on social media regarding the killing of an intimate partner. Shreds of evidence indicate that victims and perpetrators of such gender-based violence were both male and female, even though males often outnumber females in intimate killing. In this study, I analyse how interlocutors position themselves on social media relative to the victims and perpetrators. The primary question was: How does the tone and genre of the discourse ascribe to a certain gender? In so doing, we also want to know how both male and female texters position their gender identities in these discussions to constitute the sense of masculinity and femininity, capable and weak, deserving and/or victim. Thus, the purpose of this article is not to be judgemental on the wrongdoing and the causes of the action(s) of the perpetrator but rather to grasp the power relations the discourse(s) on the event reveal about the gender of the victim and perpetrator.

Language in social media

The analysis of discourse/language is based on Fairclough's (1992) and van Dijk's (1987) conception of the term 'discourse' as both a specific of social interaction (see van Dijk 1987) and as a social practice (see Fairclough1992). Language enables human beings to interact and understand each other in their respective communities. Conventionally, a language—as a structured

system of communication—enables human beings to convey meaning and create understanding among those involved in the conversation. In the past, communication through language required face-to-face interaction for verbal and manual communication or engaging in two-way writing—text as language.

However, over the years, communication has drastically changed, including the popular modes. Indeed, with increased mobile technologies, communication occurs regardless of place and someone's location. Additionally, the growth of social media technologies has given language human beings another space for communicating and expressing themselves. In this regard, Farzinadar and Inkpen (2015, p. 1) candidly observe that 'online social networking has revolutionized interpersonal communication' and interaction. Consequently, studies of language and social media have increased in psychology, education, linguistics, sociology, gender, and research in general.

Moreover, Farzinadar and Inkpen (2015, p. 2) classify social media into eight types: social networks, blogs, microblogs, forums, social bookmarks, wikis, social news, and media sharing. The difference between these social media types is based on the number of people who can connect, permissible content, and the technology in use. On the one hand, some of these media allow large and complicated content to be added or accessed, particularly in social networks such as MySpace, Facebook, LinkedIn, Meetup, and Google Plus+. And on the other hand, other platforms only allow simplified content in the form of small phrases and words, for example, Twitter and Instagram (Farzinadar & Inkpen 2015).

This study focuses on microblog communication, particularly those obtainable through Instagram content. Nevertheless, all social media share one thing—they use a language to share and communicate with members of the media. Our primary concern is how people use the media. People tend to use social media and, particularly, Instagram to create affiliation on the web (Zappavigna 2012). Although Anderson and Cermele (2014) saw changes in verbal aggression against women on Twitter, sexist language has continued unabated, implying that there is still a need to study genderised discourse on social media platforms as well.

Despite the generalised notion that social media usage broadens a person's network for both genders, social media may also be dehumanising (Kavishe & Naidu 2022). Several scholars (see, for example, Yusuf 2022; Phiri 2019)

have addressed social media and mainstream media as providing space for fostering gender-based violence. Usually, women get exposed to unequal relationships in social media discourse, which is linked to asymmetrical power relations between men and women (Kavishe & Naidu 2022; Phiri 2019). Girls and women are exposed to different forms of violence through social media. Phiri (2019) observed that the realities of gender violence on the ground were in stark contrast to the brutality on social media.

Nevertheless, gender violence is also prevalent in mainstream media. For instance, a study on the representation of violence against women and girls in Indonesian mainstream newspapers revealed that most of the mainstream media neglected their writing principles, hence resulting in insensitive articles, biased dictions, and excessive attributes (Yusuf 2022). Yusuf's (2022) account represents a situation where society grapples with distorted information, hence deprived of the right information. Moreover, writers pursue a particular discourse, which is not necessarily in the interest of the community, which appears connected to issues of power relations in the media and language in use serving the interest of a particular media.

Gender and identity creation

Implicitly, the exchange of texts in social media interaction is an integral part of the speech acts to which interlocutors ascribe meanings (van Dijk 1987). Discourse in social media reflects a particular social practice that conforms to particular social identities and subject positioning. As such, a text in social media can be construed as threatening, warning, discriminating, encouraging, supporting, or prejudicing (van Dijk 1987). Also imperative is how people perceive social interaction and the relationship that exists between the interlocutors. These relationships are often characterised by gender, ethnic, and religious identities.

Mosha (2007) portrayed gender violence in Tanzania's newspapers and found that violence against women is gendered and can be understood in the context of gender inequality, with the press playing a crucial role in raising gender awareness and changing public attitudes towards women (Mosha 2007). Similarly, Anderson and Cermele (2014) reported that sexist

language persists, with male intimate partners perpetrating aggressive language against women.

Venäläinen (2020) further observed that the contradictory positioning of men in Finnish online discussions on female-inflicted intimate partner violence was based on two types: neglected victims and naturally superior perpetrators. His analysis of the online discussions highlighted the complex nature of masculinity constructions and customisation in the context of meaning-making about intimate partner violence (Venäläinen 2020). The analysis draws attention to how these views both confirm and refute gendered disparities between men and women towards violence. In mainstream media, Nuria (2012) observed a growing trend of women's post-feminist portrayals in musical videos and over-representation of classical femininity while overcoming traditional limitations. The study also highlights teenagers' self-portrayals on the internet, which strongly resemble gendered representations evident in mainstream media (Nuria 2012).

The argument from the literature articulates the fact that media discourses shape and are shaped by gender identities and relationships and are particularly constituted in gender dynamics. The literature above has underscored the intersection between language (discourse) and identity creation, which again is constructed and reconstructed through language and gender stereotypes. Social media discourse conveys meaning that reflects identities (for example, ethnicity, religion, and gender) that are more often attributed to gender.

Gender and Power: Radical feminist perspective

The interplay between language and power manifestation as applied in gender embodies the constructive effects of discourse as reflected on social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief (Fairclough 1992, p. 12), part of which is articulated in the previous sections. The discourse in social media further helps to shape these narratives and influence the interpretation of the text and associated discussion. The subject position is demonstrated by the patriarchal system's construction of masculinities and femininities and is further reinforced by the disparities in power between the men and women participating in the discourse. For instance, Andreevskikh (2023) observed that the framing of intimate partner violence and survivors' narratives occur within wider discourses

on non-heteronormative masculinities, which tend to challenge stereotypes about non-heteronormative masculinities (Andreevskikh, 2023).

In this regard, I follow Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemonic power to reflect power in social media, which differs from common coercive power, which necessitates the use of state apparatus for enforcement. In this study, we also look at power as understood by radical feminism. Radical feminists challenge the traditional patriarch models, which surrender power to men who use it to oppress, control, and repress women. Vukoičić (2013, p. 36) sees repression against women happening in four folds: first due to obligatory motherhood and limited reproductive freedom, secondly, the social construction of femininity as well as female sexuality, which is evidenced by a submissive women's image, thirdly through violence against women, and lastly, through established institutions that support men's domination over women. In general, radical feminists see male domination as centred on controlling the female body and female thinking, making her insecure and assuming that it is the order (legitimizing oppression and control) (Reid 2005). Woman, through established patriarchal institutions such as religion is expected to succumb to the status quo. Additionally, once one denies such control, then violence develops because the man feels he is neglected (Vukoičić 2013).

Hegemony in social media is based on the consent of the media community, whereby the interlocutors influence and form alliances, collaborators, and supporters. The initiator of the text (conversation) anticipates collaboration with other contributors in the network. Al-Rawi et al. (2021) observed that discussions on Twitter were so gendered that women discussed domestic violence risks, financial challenges, and blood donation concerns, while men discussed the high death rates and negative sentiments (Al-Rawi et al. 2021). The study also underscored the importance of Twitter influencers in motivating discussions and positioning the direction of communication needs.

Extended conversations that get substantial support from the participants often express and rearticulate the subject positions of both the offender and the victim, as the events discussed in the mainstream media discourse illustrate. For example, King'ori (2022) found that most of the articles in the mainstream media had a negative tone, with the Nairobian sensationally

covering domestic violence using vivid and graphic language, whereas the Daily Nation used a conservative approach. The newspapers in Kenya framed the Nyeri woman as angry and violent and the Nyeri man as alcoholic and helpless. Previous gender media narratives paralleled the localised Nyerification effect (King'ori 2022). However, one's standing at the top of the power hierarchy changes throughout time. It fluctuates according to the coalitions forged and the articulational authority. Even if the group that appears to be in the majority may have an impact on discussions inside the network and be seen as important at one point, it is not the only group. There will always be a contest for position and re-articulation of the discursive event among subordinate groups. However, until the weaker organisations form solid alliances, the balance of power could shift in favour of the stronger group.

This section has provided a comprehensive and analytical exploration of gender, language, and discourse in social media, touching on Fairclough Critical Discourse analysis and radical feminism theoretical frameworks. I have tried to show how gender violence is also prevalent in mainstream media and how the discourse ascribes to a certain gender. As explained earlier on, the purpose of this article is not to be judgemental on the wrongdoing and the causes of the action(s) of the perpetrator, but rather to grasp the power relations the discourse(s) on the event reveal about the gender of the victim and perpetrator. The following section will focus on the methodology and methods that were employed to meet the aim of this article.

Methodology

This study aimed to understand how interlocutors create and maintain gender identity and power relations in the social media discourse. Employing a qualitative methodology, the research used fifty chats (texts) on Instagram conversations to investigate how the discourse is articulated and rearticulated, as well as how this articulation offers interpretation, significance, and depiction of gender and power dynamics concerning intimate partner violence and homicides. The study included chats that happened between 30th May 2023 and 2nd June 2023 only.

In this article, Instagram refers to social media to illustrate the point in question and provide evidential statements. Both men and women

interlocutors widely used Instagram (i.e., MillardAyo), hence its selection and, therefore, provided texts useful in gaining insight into of people's interpretations, perceptions and meanings attached to discursive events regarding intimate partner violence.

Although the conversation on Instagram happened in public for everyone's consumption, to maintain ethical issues, all interlocutors' identities remained hidden, and thus, only their voices and gender are presented as evidence to the interpretation and analysis of the text. The qualitative approach also facilitated the analysis of online conversations to understand the meaning people attach to their opinions and articulations. For data analysis, Instagram texts were subjected to socio-cognitive critical discourse analysis (CDA), which is explained in extenso hereunder.

A Critical Discourse Analysis

In the fields of sociology, political science, psychology, linguistics, and language studies, a Critical Discourse Analysis, or CDA, has grown in acceptance for its ability to show 'how the discourse is shaped by relations of power, ideologies and the construction of social identities, social relations and system of knowledge and beliefs' (Fairclough 1992, p. 12). CDA considers how human beings are active actors since they consciously participate in discursive practices after assessing their positions (van Dijk 1987). Moreover, the interlocutors are aware of the respective social contexts of their discourse (Fairclough 1992, p.12). In this study. Therefore, we adopted Fairclough's (1992) three levels of analysis: linguistic practice, discursive practice, and social practice (Fairclough 1992, pp. 73-78) with the addition of the socio-cognitive insights, as further suggested by van Dijk (1987). To van Dijk, the discourse has to be analysed within the context in which it emanates and the fact that human beings consciously engage in a discursive event as active agents (Sambaiga 2013). The first level of CDA analyses of linguistic practice focusing on the four main aspects: vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and text structure (Fairclough 1992).

This study focused on vocabulary (individual words). Fairclough (1992) recommended that textual analysis can focus on rewording and repeating works, metaphors, and word meanings (Fairclough 1992). The second CDA

level analyses the discursive practice, which refers to the process of text production, consumption, and distribution, particularly to answer the question of how the text was produced, distributed, and consumed. This type of analysis also deals with matters of intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Fairclough 1992, p. 85). Intertextuality and interdiscursivity will focus on the relationship between other texts and discourses, to which interlocutors refer to draw justification during the discussion.

Social practice, as the final level of analysis, focuses on the socio-cognitive effect of the text. At this level, the concentration is on the constructive effect of the discourse in making and remaking social identities and knowledge about intimate killing in Tanzania. We will interrogate the conversation in social media about power relations and ideological inclination (Fairclough 1992, p. 86) at this level.

Case study: A husband shoots dead his wife in Mwanza

On the eve of 28th May 2022, a man, [name withheld for social ethics] shot his wife, [name withheld for social ethics] aged 26, dead in their marital house at Buswelu suburban in Ilemela district, Mwanza region. The couple had only been married for five months. On the material day, the wife allegedly returned to her parents' house located in Kirumba. The husband called his wife 42 times, and when the wife picked the phone up, he ordered her to return to cook for him a meal because he was very hungry.

In the interview with MillardAyo TV, the mother of the deceased confirmed to overhear their conversation in which the husband was shouting at her. She also reported that the shouting continued when the wife reached home and, consequently, the wife was shot several times until she died. Two days later, the lifeless body of the husband was found floating on Lake Victoria with a bullet wound to his head.

The interview of the mother of the deceased was shared in several media channels including the mainstream, blogs, and YouTube. For instance, the interview in MillardAyo can be accessed through this link: https://www.instagram.com/reel/CeLMsdyjfoC/?igsh=MWc4dWI0b DY2Y21ubQ%3D%3D. The interview generated mixed feelings from the

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interlocutors, who positioned and repositioned both the perpetrator and the victim in different spaces in the social media discourse following the harrowing ordeal.

Findings and analysis

This section presents the findings obtained from the MilardAyo Instagram chats dated 30th May 2023 to 2nd June 2023. In all, the study analysed fifty chats that generated insights to illuminate the subject matter. The analysis of these chats occurred at three levels: linguistic practice, discursive practice, and social practice as promised in the methodology section:

Linguistic Practice

According to Fairclough (1992, pp. 73-78), text analysis involves looking at the wording and/or rewording, vocabulary relative to a particular discourse style. In this regard, we looked at the discussion on Instagram to determine how the interlocutors enmeshed themselves in the discourse on the intimate killings. We begin by looking at the interlocutors' texts to designate the happening followed by the descriptions of the perpetrators and the victims of the events.

Instagram discussion between 30th May 2022 and 2nd June 2022

Interlocutors on Instagram space were both male and female. These interlocutors labelled the act of intimate killing as an act of brutality, animism, stupidity, jealousy, lack of tolerance, ill feelings, and insecurity. In this regard, a female interlocutor said: 'Ugly! Meeenn be so insecure', attributing the perpetrator's gender and collectively to the male gender. She also described the function as ugly, meaning something bad had been occasioned by what other interlocutors related to, for example, men's brutality, stupidity, jealousy, insecurity, and lack of tolerance. There was consensus to the effect that the event was neither normal, acceptable nor humane. A male interlocutor texted the legal term: killing is a criminal offence (*kuua ni kosa la jinai*).

The discussion also centred on the alleged perpetrator (male) and the victim (female). The vocabulary describes the perpetrator as 'a rock like' (*mwamba kama mwamba*), brother, victim, relative, and a man and a half. These labels were texted by interlocutors, mostly male, to show their solidarity, support, and sympathy with the perpetrator. In this regard, a male interlocutor said: 'I support this brother. Big up! Women like these one should be stopped' (*Mie namuunga mkono uyu bro bigap mkome wanawake wa namna hii*). By calling the perpetrator 'a brother', this male interlocutor assumed responsibility for his utterance as a call for brotherhood support. In addition, 'big up' seeks to encourage others to act similarly to the perpetrator, which could lead to increased gender-based violence. Nevertheless, this text corroborated with those of other interlocutors, as of those who labelled the perpetrator *mwamba* ('a rock') or a man-and-a-half, which attributed the brutal action as heroism and/or masculinism.

On the other hand, other texts did not collaborate with interlocutors who labelled the perpetrator as a hero. Terms such as hooligan and a cheat were employed to label the perpetrator, but they formed the marginalised voices in the discourse. For instance, a female interlocutor described the perpetrator as a cheat as she envisioned him having several women on the side, justifying her dislike of the killing of the victim: 'If you cannot control leave her, you have no power of ending her life' (*ukimshindwa muache huna mamlaka ya kumtoa uhai*), hence suggesting fairness in treating others in addition to acknowledging the limitation on one's authority over the life of another person. She also suggested that there was a way to control a wife — a skill that the perpetrator lacked.

The victim, on the other hand, was classified as a beautiful woman (*mrembo*); as such, the husband and/or a man has to be tolerant, including of her supposed infidelity (*Mwanaume ukioa mrembo uwe mvumilivu sio unamfuatilia fuatilia tu kila mahali*), said a male interlocutor. Other labels symbolised her allegiance based on the colour of the T-shirt she was wearing during the incidence. As such, she was labelled *mwananchi* (contextually a citizen) and utopolo (a nick name for Yanga's fans) assumed to be a fan of the Young African Football Club (Yanga). These labels support the victim, hence indicating she was wronged by the perpetrator, at the same time showing apathy by trivializing the incident.

On the other hand, some of the interlocutors texted messages that blamed the victim. Some (both male and female) portrayed her as a woman, who

was not ready to settle with a husband; she had many things (*Huyo dada anaonekana alikua na mambo mengi wacha auliwe*); she was 'arrogant' (*kiburi*); and was 'ill-mannered' (*jeuri)* because she did not receive her husband's missed calls, which were 42 in all and, thus, she endangered her life due to her bad-mannered behaviour. The use of word arrogant (kiburi) and ill-mannered (jeuri) constituted gender stereotypes against women, hence justifying the perpetuation of violence against women and legitimizing the act of violence by men.

The keywords in the Instagram discussions regarding the incidence included 'gender roles', which were described in terms of cooking for a husband; 'courtship' as a necessary step before marriage; 'fairness' in a relationship; 'affiliation to sports club' – in this case Yanga; and 'masculinity' and 'femininity' – 'do not marry beautiful women' one interlocutor texted. These aspects informed both the victim and the perpetrator and, consequently, the [mis]understanding of the later actions.

Discursive Practice

The analysis of discursive practice is threefold: firstly, at the level of text production that entails identifying the producer of the text; secondly, focusing on the channels/ways used to distribute the text to different audiences after the text has been produced; and, finally, the consumption of the text whereby the analysis concentrates on how the text has been received, and how people have interpreted (individually and/or collectively) the text exposed to them.

Production of the text

In the production of the discourse, we examined the process by which the discourse occurred (Gülich & Kotschi 2011, p. 30). Using Fairclough's (1992, p. 78) advice on analysing the discourse which has been produced under the context in which the discourse was produced, the study found that the producer of the texts was the mother of the deceased (Swalha) and the interlocutors which happened concurrently. The mother of the deceased narrated the event through an interview held with MilardAyo Online TV. Her narration (video) generated mixed reactions from interlocutors on Instagram. These texts are the focal point of our analysis aimed at understanding how interlocutors create and

recreate gender equality, power, and identity during social media discourse. Interlocutors on Instagram engaged in a conversation with each other regarding what the mother of the deceased reported. Also, these interlocutors re-narrated the event while referring to other discursive events in a bid to justify their interpretation of the situation.

Interlocutors were also able to connect to the different discursive events related to the discourse, such as parenting, sports, hell/heaven, and westernisation. For instance, referring to westernisation, one interlocutor said: '*Bahati mbaya nyingine wa2 wanaweka uzungu mwingi kwenye ndoa ki2 kisichowezekana*' (Lit: 'another sad thing is that people put a lot of westernisations into a marriage, something which does not work'). This interlocutor said the blending of different cultures (i.e., western and Tanzania) led to what Samuel Huntington dubbed a clash of civilizations (Huntington 1996). In the text, the interlocutor also used both letters and numbers (as in *wa2* instead of *watu,* i.e. people in the English language), indicating a particular way of texting, which does not conform to the normal and yet positioned himself to belong to social media culture or youth culture and portraying his conservative position which disapproved the transformation happening in the family as an institution.

Another discursive space to which some interlocutors referred, was the museum. In this regard, a male interlocutor texted, '*Fuvu la huyu jamaa liwekwe makumbusho ili wanawake wenye tabia za kijinga wawe wanaenda kuliona maana itatusaidia kuwa liwatishatisha kila wakikumbuka kilichotokea kwa mwenzao*' (Lit: 'The skull of this guy should be placed in the museum so that women with stupid behaviour can visit to see [and learn] to remind them about what transpired with their fellow woman'). Besides showing allegiance with the perpetrator, the text also indicates a conservative message alleging some women exhibited inappropriate behaviour. Yet, strategically placing the skull of the perpetrator in a museum calls for a continuation of the violence against women and could also legitimise intimate-based killings. Statements like this one can also lead to a backlash and discredit the efforts exerted in fostering gender equality in the country. Sofia and Hearn (2022) relate these acts of violence as means that men deploy to control over and subjugate women and, thus, threats like the interlocutors suggest of putting the skull of the perpetrator can constitute a mechanism men use to undermine women's struggle against men's domination.

Other interlocutors' texts referred to God as the supreme judge of people's behaviour on earth and, thus, after death, one must account for one's deeds, as one male interlocutor postulates: '*Mungu amsamehe kwa alilo kosea, kama kweli umeoa bas utajua kwann alifikia hatua mbaya kama hiyo…R.I.P.*' (Lit: 'God should forgive him for what he has done; if you are married you will understand why he had to take that bad step… R.I.P.'). This was corroborated by another male interlocutor, who said: '*Pumzika kwa Amani Mwanaume na nusu. Angalau wamekuwa na heshima kidogo*' (Lit: 'Rest in peace a man-and-a-half. At least now they [women] have a bit of respect). However, this appeal to supernatural power by the male interlocutors was not supported by other interlocutors, including males. One female interlocutor texted in resistance to the earlier text, '*Wala hata usipumzike kwa amani…*' (Lit.: 'No, you should not even rest in peace…'). Surprisingly, in the texts, interlocutors never mentioned the victims' vindication of the supernatural being. There was a silence that indicated her irrelevance in the afterlife. In other words, her participation in the discursive even was judged to belong to the negative side and affirmation of her innocence, whereby it was okay for her not to happen in the discourse of the afterlife. The study concurs with Sofia and Hearn (2022: 319), who pointed out that "women are located in subordinate positions by both structural discrimination and ideologies that legitimate and rationalise that situation." Also, a male interlocutor said: '*Ina maana hujui kama mwanamke ndo alimponza Dingi Adam na Uncle Samson? Nyinyi ni Nuksiii!!*' ('So, you do know that it was a woman who let down our father, Adam, and Uncle Samson? You (women) are a curse!!). This interlocutor referred to events that are recorded in the Bible and/or in the Quran, positioning women as betrayers. All-in-all, it seemed that what was happening in the community occurred because 'there is no fear of God' (*Hofu ya Mungu hakuna*), and thus, 'sexual relationships have become a business' (*Siku hizi mapenzi ni biashara*).

Distribution of the text: The story was distributed via different channels, including the main news media, such as newspapers, television, and radio stations, as well as social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and YouTube. The event was also reported in several blogs, especially those belonging to the mainstream media and internet channels. For this article, discussions that were posted and reposted on Instagram serve the purpose of exploring the subject matter.

Consumption of the text: The distribution of the text in several media implies that the text was designed to be consumed by a diverse audience who subscribe to the media. In this article, we have analysed the interpretation of the audience on Instagram. For instance, interlocutors interpreted defending and/or blaming the victim and/or defended/blamed the perpetrator's action instead of vice-versa. In this regard, one male interlocutor lamented: '*Huyo dada anaonekana alikua na mambo mengi wacha auliwe*' (Lit: 'it seems that sister had many things; she deserves to be killed'). Another male interlocutor said: '*Wanawake wa staili ya aina hii wanahitaji kufa tu…hawana maana*' ('Women of this calibre deserve to die….they are worthless). This was corroborated by another female interlocutor who said, '*Na nyie wanawake wenzangu kama unajua hujamaliza shida zako za ujana tulia kwa wazazi wako*' ('And you fellow women, if you know you still have unfinished youthful businesses, stay with your parents [instead of getting married]). The assumption was that the victim was preoccupied with other things, which presumably were extramarital activities occurring outside her homestead. Other interpretations allude to the woman's infidelity, as noted by another interlocutor who pointed out: '*Alikua malaya huyo*' (Lit: 'She was a prostitute').

Implicitly, the transformation in the community where the woman's space is being redefined and reconstructed insists on something that should be adopted. In this regard, a female interlocutor said, '*Wazazi fundisheni mitoto yenu kujipikia*' (Parents teach your children how to cook for themselves). Interlocutor applied an interdiscursivity referring to family discursive events and parenting. In the past, only girls were taught how to cook, and it was an obligation for women to cook for men in the household. Now, women also engage in activities outside the household, and, as such, men must also learn how to cook for themselves and their women. This also reproduces the idea that gender equality campaigns that have been conducted in the country are producing outcomes. Moreover, this female interlocutor viewed the debate on social media as centred on controlling the female image and constituting the traditional patriarchal standards. To her, that was not the order, and thus, times have changed where women cannot succumb to men's domination and/or directives.

Whether these outcomes are positive or negative in society is something scholars of gender studies should work on; nevertheless, women demand equal footing as one another female interlocutors texted: 'Ugly meeenn be so insecure!! And cannot let their beautiful wives have a life apart from

staying home and cooking for them.' Such arguments also signal a struggle between the previous/traditional discursive practices that confine a woman's space to the household (cooking and caring for a husband) — domesticity — and the contemporary society where a woman's space has expanded to cover other areas such as visiting the sports arena and entertainment/leisure venues.

Contrary to those who positively subscribed to transformation, some were still wary about what was reproduced in the text. As one male interlocutor pointed out, '*Shetani wa 50 kwa 50 anatenda kazi kila mtu ni mwamba*' (lit: 'The Satan of 50 to 50 is working. Everyone is a rock'). For this interlocutor, gender equality discourse is to blame for the violence because it hints at a struggle whereby both males and females demand equal footing. To him, this is evil (Satan) because it creates problems (including killing) in the family, as corroborated by another female interlocutor who said: '*Shetani ana chezea ndoa zetu! Tuombe sanaa kina mama tutaishaa*' (Lit: 'Satan is playing with our marriage. Women, let us pray, or we will perish). This interdiscursivity entailed a backlash of the feminist argument on gender equality. Instead of embracing the positive aspects of gender equality, people are inclined to the negative impacts justifying male domination, centred on controlling the female body, thinking, and movement to make her insecure and, in so doing, maintain the patriarchal status quo.

Moreover, another female interlocutor construed that the victim's behaviour was devoid of respect and obedience to her husband. For instance, a female interlocutor described women's behaviour thusly: '*Wanawake tupunguze viburi; utii ni bora sana*' (Lit: 'Women, Let us minimise our arrogance; obedience is much better'). This kind of interpretation belonged to the dominant discourse, the position that works toward maintaining the status quo of men's domination over women. The patriarchal system ensures that this position of women is maintained through appearance (the body, beauty) and motherhood (getting married, having children, and caring for the husband, children, parents, and the sick) standards. Women who dare to challenge these standards are construed as different (i.e., arrogance) and should be silenced through violence and institutions that favour male domination over women, such as religion and

traditional family norms. Obedient women were construed as ideal wives and supposedly avoided violence from men.

Social Practice

Social practice is the last level of analysis in which the focus is on the social effect of social media discourse and the impact it emanates through hegemonic power and gender relations produced on the social media discourse and its implication in the community (Fairclough, 1992). The discourse surrounding the incidence was construed around gender relations and ascribed to gendered roles. In this regard, one female interlocutor lamented: 'Oosh, you have a husband, and you fail to cook food for him so that he may find it by the time he returns home. Anyway, those are marital issues, but we do not know how many times they had fought'. This interlocutor painted a picture of a well-known gender role for a wife at home, which included cooking for a husband, failure of which could lead to quarrelling. In the same vein, another female interlocutor said: 'When you get married, settle at your home and find children (twin) …. Then where will you get the energy of visiting your parent's home?' This interlocutor suggested that the first role of a wife was to procreate.

This centres on the preconceived role of women, i.e., caring for the children and a husband, relegating the duties of women to be at the household. Society usually treated those who go outside the marriage as irresponsible and who instigate trouble (as was in this case killing) – 'only six months you are going back to your parent's home? To do what? Settled down at your home, or else bullets will be your destiny', said a female interlocutor) or doing uncouth things ('that woman was a prostitute,' as specified by one interlocutor). Some female and male interlocutors pointed out that the standard rules that sanction a woman as a mother and/or a wife were expected not to be broken or challenged and are maintained and reconstituted through hegemonic power and violence, which makes gender discrimination part of the social order.

Another issue that featured in the Instagram discussion was related to decision-making in the family. According to the interlocutors, some decisions were still not made by a woman without permission from her husband or parents. On this aspect, a male interlocutor explained: 'According to that mother's comment, it was clear that the husband was not informed about the girl's visit to her parent's house.' The interlocutor's

voice appears to allude to the relationship a wife has with her husband. Empowered women like the wife of this perpetrator thought the opposite and decided to go against established norms and values—that women can also make their own decisions on whom to see, where to go, and at what time without the consent of the spouse. However, this produced a clash between traditions and gender equality ideas of empowerment which was expected to be negotiated through convivial communication and socialisation, which seemed to be lacking to both the perpetrator and the victim.

Interlocutors also cited economic differences between men and women. They reported that men were positioned higher than women, hence assuming patriarchal power to dominate women in marital relationships. Consequently, gender violence (and intimate killing) appears linked to the economic position that men have over their womenfolk. In this regard, one female interlocutor said:

> Oosh! Men of this design pretend to have true love! They can give you gifts here and there; they will call you all the time! When you fail to pick up, it is trouble! He just wants to frustrate you! Moreover, threats are like a watch arrow in an hour. When we see these, we should get far away from them. I see this girl was coming from a humble family; she knew she would liberate her family [from economic difficulty], but aah! Mhh! Let us not be driven by the lust for money.

Besides economic positioning in which the male-dominated women in the community, the interlocutor also singled out men as the common perpetrators of gender violence. Nevertheless, there are signs that women should move out of such poisonous relationships. After all, ceaseless threats signal trouble ahead, so an individual (a man or woman) should be courageous enough to break away from such a relationship before it translates into intimate killing. This marries the radical feminism argument that advocates for women's emancipation from men's york and domination (Vukoičić 2013). Furthermore, women's empowerment is coupled with economic freedom, which can make women 'reject patriarchal imposed traditional gender roles and how women are presented/constructed in the

language, the media, as well as in their personal lives' (Vukoičić 2013, p. 36).

 Additionally, interlocutors implore those entering marriage to not be influenced by the urge to accrue economic gains. In this regard, a male interlocutor said that to-date sexual relationships in many circles constituted a business transaction, with women banishing men on account of lack of monetary gains: '*Siku hizi mapenzi ni biashara, wanawake wakikomesha wanaume kwa kuwapiga hela*' ('Currently, love is a business, women serve men right by squandering their money'). Meanwhile, a female interlocutor insisted: 'Let's us not be driven by the lust for money.' A male interlocutor also quipped, 'It is not about instilling fear, but you [women] need to listen to your husbands' demands. Lust for money is bad; there is no nonsense man'.

In Tanzania and perhaps in other parts of the world, education is considered a key to socio-economic mobility. Similarly, marrying a wealthy family is another key to a good life, as explicitly explained by Sambaiga (2013). The only difference with Sambaiga's (2013) study is that his study was an ethnographic inquiry on adolescent sexuality in urban southern Tanzania, while this study's focus is on adult intimacy relationships as it is reflected in the social media discourse. Nevertheless, gender violence is not something to celebrate with, as a female interlocutor aptly explained, the perpetrator 'made a very big mistake, and thus, his wealth and everything he has is not equivalent to a person's life.'

Moreover, the evidential statements suggest a transformation and redefining of gender roles in the community. Staying at home does not necessarily mean a woman has to cook for a working husband as one male interlocutor elaborated: '[man] you are hungry, why can't you prepare tea so that you can have it with bread? Why do you have to call your wife to come to cook for you? Did you marry her so that she can cook for you?' As regards the gender equality debate, family chores are shared and are not a means to control a woman and make absurd demands such as needing food to be prepared by a wife. Of course, the traditional standard of relations between the genders has not been completely abolished, and remnants of such standards are manifested in interlocutors' utterances such as the following: 'Daah! I am also disturbed by this cooking issue...you come home at eight or nine or ten at night, and she does not work, she is only at home….on this, you need to change', lamented one male interlocutor.

This shows that in society, there are contending views and struggles that must be resolved amicably. On the one hand, a modern man subscribing to Western cultures sees gender roles as dynamic, whereby roles previously considered feminine can also be performed by men; on the other hand, another man remains conservative and has yet to accept the new and redefined gender roles under modernity. In the former, their relationship will be characterised by compromises, fairness, and respect, whereas the latter scenario signals the presence of antagonism and violence.

The conservative individuals want to strive to maintain the status quo based on patriarchal norms and values accounting for the hegemonic power that men are predisposed to have over women, whereas the present struggles and positions oppose and challenge men's status quo and hegemonic power that legitimised such dominion: 'More than 6 calls *unanipigia nakublock ukapeleke utaahira kwenu huko…Una njaa hujui kupika au kununua au mikono huna?*!!!' (Lit: (if)you give me more than 6 calls, I block you so that you take your mental illness to your home….you are hungry, but you do not know how to cook or buy, or you do not have hands?), said a female interlocutor. From the radical feminist point of view, men use traditional roles to maintain control and oppression over women, which, according to the above female interlocutor claim, has to be contested, not to be legitimised, and should be abolished altogether. This also indicated that although the patriarchal model is dominant in the community, there is a constant struggle from empowered women whose arguments are constituted and reconstituted on gender equality premises.

Conclusion

In this article, I have demonstrated that there is contestation and mixed feelings about the intricate between intimate killings and gender as articulated through language in social media. The article has articulated that gender violence is prevalent, some quarter celebrates gender violence because of the deep-rooted patriarchal norms and values. Nevertheless, there is resistance from both males and females against gender violence, and thus, intimate killings are something that is not accepted in modern

society. Nevertheless, the discourse in social media signals that women's empowerment is increasingly challenging the status quo engendered by patriarchy, specifically by re-imposing the division of gender roles and social relations. The hegemonic power of men over women, the study illustrates, also attracts questions and interrogations. Moreover, the patriarchal system continues to maintain a stranglehold and re-structure itself to counter the societal gender transformation with acts of threat and violence, the opportunities social media platforms provide notwithstanding. Implicitly, when hegemonic power fails to legitimise the dominance of men over women, it changes from using non-coercive force to coercive force, as evidenced by social media platforms. In this situation, social media serves as a channel for perpetuating gender [in]equality. The impact of intimate partner violence is also immense and slows down the transformation and achievement of gender equality interventions and development while exacerbating poverty and ill-health, including mental illness in the community. In this regard, social media platforms are extensions of the socio-cultural beliefs of the wider society. On the other hand, the transformation evident in the country, including the changes in the gendered role, signals a positive trend toward achieving gender equality, something that social media platforms can exploit to further gender equality in social media discourses.

Declaration of interest statement

The authors declare that the study was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could constitute a potential conflict of interest.

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