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# Transitivity and Gender Bias: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Women's Social Position in the Middle East

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**Abstract:** The current study, entitled "Transitivity and Gender Bias: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Women's Social Position in the Middle East," explores the impact of media discourse on the social positioning of women, particularly in the Middle East. Utilizing critical discourse analysis (CDA) and one of systemic functional linguistic tools (namely transitivity), set of comments from two videos that depict incidents of domestic violence against women are analysed. The analysis aims at revealing structures of transitivity that shape, reflect and reinforce gender biases. Thus, it aims at revealing the way language structure changes and reflects social perceptions about Middle Eastern women. The study concludes that female characters, the victims, are depicted as responsible for their abuse, while male characters, the abusers, are framed in a sympathetic scenario. The study, further, shows that both visibility and tonality bias are utilized in the process of switching victim/attacker roles in the comments.

**Keywords**: CDA, gender, bias, media, transitivity.

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## 1. Introduction

CDA as a bunch of scholars emerged in the 1990s. The emergence was resulted from a small cycle debate in Amsterdam in 1991. The pioneers who first initiated the idea were Teun van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, Gunther Kress, Theo van Leeuwen and Ruth Wodak,. They spent two days together in the Amsterdam University and discussed theories and methods to establish critical discourse analysis as a field of study interested in social issues rather than mere linguistic analyses (Wodak and Meyer, 2009:3)

Gender issues are one of the main social issues that usually attract critical discourse analysis studies. Two reasons can relate. Firstly, gender bias against women is a topic that has been largely of a specific interest to both scholars and the public as it causes a series problem of inequality in societies. Secondly, critical discourse analysis approaches aim to uncover and de-mystify ideologies and power relations in discourses, namely problematic social issues such as issues of bias, discrimination, oppression, inequality etc.(Wodak and Meyer, 2009:2)

Gender bias on media specifically is a powerful kind of discourses and a more effective issue. Media

discourses are some of the most effective discourses as they spread highly and easily reached by everyone. When biased portrayals of gender are consistently presented on media, normalization of discriminatory and abusive attitudes and practices occur, making those attitudes and practices seem even acceptable and expected in society. This study hypothesizes that discourses surrounding women's positions in society directly affect women's cultural and socio-political contexts. It also hypothesizes that media plays a vital role in shaping perceptions of women through language in the Middle East. More specifically, the study hypothesizes that transitivity language plays essential role in shaping women's position in the Middle Eastern society.

Accordingly, this study tries to answer the following questions: (i) how do media discourses affect women's shape in societies? and (ii) how do transitivity choices reflect implications on women's position in the Middle East? So the aims of the following study are: (i) investigating how media language affects women's position in society and (ii) analysing transitivity choices on media and identifying their implications for the social positioning of women in the Middle East.

## 2. Critical Discourse Analysis

As a result of the advancement of critical studies, critical discourse analysis appears as a new field of study that adopts a critical direction. Within any critical study or approach, Rogers (2004:3) asserts that the analysts only aim to "disclose power dynamics and demonstrate inequalities embedded in society". Van Dijk (2003) says that CDA focuses on "how the mental deception of social groups affects social structures" and criticizes it. To clarify what CDA is, Fairclough and Wodak (1997 cited in Jahedi et al , 2014:29) present eight main tenets of CDA as a field. Those are:

(1) Social problems are the main concern of CDA.

(2) The relations of power are always discursive.

(3) Culture and societies are mainly constructed by means of discourses.

(4) Discourses serve ideologies.

(5) Discourses are historical and almost never original.

(6) There is a mediation that links language and society.

(7) CDA is an explanatory as well as interpretative field.

(8) Discourses are social forms.

Wodak and Meyer (2009:1) also try to summarize the most important perspectives and principles embedded in CDA .The principles involve:

(1) A main dimension within any CDA study is the existence of a social problem, CDA investigates the role of language use in dealing with and constructing those problems which they always have to do with dominance and power abuse matters.

(2) CDA links the gap between power and language and, thus, raises awareness on the role of language in power relations.

(3) CDA considers language as a form of social practice. It believes that both language and society affect one another and therefore the relationship between them is a two-way relationship. That is, it is language what shapes and controls societies and it is the societies that construct the language used for their own favor.

Accordingly, the main principle that every critical discourse analyst agrees on is that CDA is highly interested in discourses that communicate social issues. Gender issues, thus, are one of the main social issues that usually attract critical discourse analysis studies. The reason can be related to the fact that gender bias against women is a topic that has been largely of a specific interest to both scholars and the public as it causes a series problem of inequality in societies. Also, literature documents a wealth of data

on the negative stereotypes established along the history against women. This is actually a point where critical discourses analysis meets in goal with the famous movement of anti-oppression against women: feminism. In terms of gender issues, both critical discourse analysis and feminism stand against oppression and inequality. However, the focus of critical discourses analysis is mainly on how oppression and discrimination established through discourses and reflected on the reality. Furthermore, the increase of public sphere's interest to social media platforms alongside with the increase of controversies on gender discrimination issues in this age have worked as two additional reasons for calling for more and more critical discourse analysis investigations of gender issues on media.

## 3. Bias and Gender

Bias is the unobjective tendency of a person or a group towards another. It is "the negative evaluation of one group and its members relative to another". The evaluation is always based on unjust readings of events and contexts (Blair et al,2011:12). Studies discuss the fact that bias can sometimes be explicit and other times implicit. The explicit bias is the overtly expressed accuracy, inequality, prejudice in the language used in respect to certain issue. Explicit bias or prejudice is the very open negative addressing or viewpoint against some people who are considered out-groupers. Implicit bias is the association made against something or some individuals without awareness, i.e. automatically. It is to establish a negative view or reaction or action unconsciously (Dovidio and Gaertner, 2010). In simple words, the difference between explicit and implicit bias lies in whether an individual's conscious is aware or unaware of the action.

Further, literature on bias studies on media defines three main types of bias. Those three are:

(1) Visibility bias: this type of bias is decided on the relative amount of visibility of the target groups or individuals. That is, the space given, i.e. coverage amount, to certain individual in comparison to its opponent determines the visibility bias (King, 2002).

(2) Tonality bias: this type of bias reflects the evaluation of one group or individual compared to other. In other words, a group of people might be always associated with certain negative evaluations on media (i.e. certain "bad" qualifications) while the opposing group is found to be associated with positive evaluations.

(3) Agenda bias: this types measures the stories covered in respect to a group of people versus stories covered in respect to another group of people. This means that journalists or authors might decide to cover stories that benefit or fall in the favor of one group while shed light on stories that might undermine the other group. The coverage in this case is said to be serving certain agenda of certain group.

A linguistic bias is one specific form of bias that all the three above are linked to. It refers to the "systematic asymmetry in word choice as a function of the social category to which the target belongs". "Linguistic biases result from, and facilitate the transmission of essentialist beliefs about social categories" (Carnaghi et al., 2008).

## 4. The Middle East

The Middle Eastern society is known for certain cultural codes of life performed among individuals, families and men/women. Some of the main codes can be precisely stated as below:

1. Certain restrictions are applied between strange men and women and their interactions. Key point to those restrictions is that intimacy is not favored.
2. Certain boundaries are displayed in husband and wife relationships where the husbands are seen as superior to wives.
3. Family honor, which is directly related to women honor, is given high importance. All kinds of sacrifices are expected to save family honor.

4. Family plays central role in deciding marriage and divorce.
5. Arranged marriage is the defined style of proper marriage.
6. Women are not equal to men, neither in inheritance nor in testimony.

Further, statements on women's status in the Middle East vary according to the country discussed. For instance, in Syria, Turkey, Jorden, Lebanon and Egypt, educated and working women have been very active in the society. In the Persian Gulf States and Iraq, most women have not been working until lately. Those who used to work before the age of modernization , work only and only in all-female environments such as girl schools and stores and banks for women, except the medical profession. So, opposing the popular opinion of archetypal Middle Eastern woman, Middle Eastern women are not a homogeneous region and a uniform. Middle Eastern women are rather "inserted in quite diverse socio-economic and cultural arrangements" (Moghadam, 1993: 10). However, it is quite clear that modernization naturally poses a basic challenge on the traditional codes of life related to women in general.

Dating back the issue of women in the Middle East society to its very start, women in per-Islamic Arabia was considered a property to men. They –women- had a very little and sometimes even no power to decide their destiny and life direction. "Female infanticide was common, as was the overall subordination of women" (Esposito 1998, xii). So, in pre-Islamic society, the abuse of women was made an acceptable aspect of life.

After the rising of Islam, women were in a better status. Yet, over time, men started to interpret Islamic verses in specific negative way that serves their own interest. This behaviour was a means to reestablish a blind power on women and their life in the Middle Eastern societies. In a report entitled "Violence Against Women in Arab and Islamic Countries", it is emphasized that reading fairly the Quranic verses shows that unjust treatment of women generally and wife abuse specifically is a fruit of cultural traditions not religious laws (Douki et al.,2003:165). This phenomenon is recorded in the literature as Islamization.

In the last decades, a level of societal Islamization in countries where Muslims are the majority- the Middle East- has gained a momentum. This means that transition towards a more religious style of life in those societies has occurred. As a result, a higher level of traditional values and conservatism within those societies become common. An undeniable consequence of such a transition has been the development of a less sympathetic sense and mindset towards women's abuse matters and the conception of equality between the sexes (Saadallah, 2001:123)

Interestingly, in the 1990s, an obvious shift has happened resulting in the emergence of transnational feminism movements incentivizing feminist individuals and scholars to study and cover Arab women issues and status. Yet, these movements have been cautious about the specificity of Arab culture. They have shown a kind of respect to some of the sensitive and sacred traditions, specifically those related to Islam. Scholars have noticed that some serious social and political struggles in the Arab world have worked as an opportunity for women to dig and search for new identities and try get parts in economic and legal aspects of life within their societies (Saliba, 2000). History also relates the rise of those Islamic women's movements to the Western feminist movements where the former has been a kind of reaction to the latter. Those movements have come out with number of notes which are:

- "The first was criticizing the current situation of Arab women while perceiving traditions or Islam as ideals in need for respect if women situation to improve."
- "The second position put traditions and Islam as reasons for the deteriorated situation of women in the Arab world. However, what both positions might be understood to argue for is the need to handle Arab feminism within Arab and Islamic history not within some universalized Western feminist history." (Magdy,2021:327)

Another central aspect of Middle Eastern society and women is the avoidance of help seeking when an abuse occurs. Factors leading to such reluctance to seek help from support services vary. Some of those

factors, as sociocultural studies show, can be the following:

1. Family honor: in the Middle Eastern society, there seems to be a tradition in a form of socio-cultural constraint that aims at protecting family honor by never disclosing negative secretes of home such as abuse. This is found to be a main reason that prevents women from seeking official and formal help as well as not deciding to leave the abusive partner or relationships. Women there believe that disclosing abuse brings disgrace and dishonor to the whole family including themselves. Therefore, they prefer to save their own face instead of saving their dignity, safety and psychological health. (Anderson et al.,2003)
2. Husband superiority: this is another code in the Middle East traditions where wives are expected to please their husbands despite the circumstances. It is a defined condition that a good wife is defined as good by the amount of effort she takes to please her husband. So, wives feel afraid and ashamed to be described as disobedient to their husbands if they disclose abuse and seek help. This code clearly shows how women are held the responsibility of keeping a marriage successful and functional and how they are blamed for any failure. (Chaudhry, 2013:250)
3. Lack of formal support to domestic violence act: Vetten (2014: 30) argues that although there is a formal rule on providing the abused person with a protection order from the abuser, the actual application of this rule is declined. The reason is related to the lack of support which results in failure in applying the protection order.
4. Sexism: abuse can result from sex problems which makes the topic even more sensitive and the abuser even more afraid to disclose the issue. Mikolajczak & Pietrzak (2015:169) state that “women are either revered or reviled as they fulfill or violate expectations of their gender roles”.
5. Afterlife Award: Most Muslim wives convince themselves that what matters is the hereafter not this life. For this, they tolerate abuse by holding a hope for a better afterlife. The idea of being rewarded for keeping a family together despite the abuse seems to root in their mind. (Chaudhry, 2013:250)
6. Self-Blame: Most women are programmed to shift the blame on themselves. Therefore, they consider the abusive acts of their husbands as disciplinary acts for the purpose of punishing them on certain mistakes. (ibid)

Despite the diversity within the Middle East referred to earlier, Middle Eastern women are underpinned by a specific shared interpretation of gender as a social category. Current discussions, as many scholars argue, continue to invoke the religion of Islam as a guide to gender positioning and organisation, and the literature on Middle Eastern women assumes that an “Islamic culture” takes the most prominent part with whatever has to do with gender.

Another fact that needs to be stressed on this concern is that whatever role scholars might ascribe to Islam in respect to gender relations, it should be emphasized that the Middle East is not accurately synonymous with Islam. Islam as a religion itself is performed heterogeneously. So, although most Middle Easterners are Muslims, there exists diverse application of Islam. There are noticeable differences between Sunni and Shi’a versions on Islam for example, as well as other Islamic groupings. Even individuals interpret and perform Islam differently (Eickelmann, 1998).

**5. Transitivity: the Study Model**

Transitivity is the linguistic system that links the outside world to language. It is a system that works on the ideational or experiential meaning or function of the text (Ying,2008:565). In other words as Halliday (1985:101) explains, language is a reflection of experience, reality , thought, and feelings. Therefore, building a "mental picture of reality" and making sense of or comprehending the inner and/or external experiences are established by the use of language

Analysing the transitive language structure contributes in identifying the following (Halliday,1985:103):

a. “who is doing what to whom in what situation, and

b. how certain things or events are foregrounded over some others and for what reason.

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004:177) show that there are three major components that works together to constitute the transitive language structure. Those are (i) processes (which are established via the verbal elements of a language), (ii) participants (which are shaped via the nominal elements), and (iii) circumstances (which are expressed via the adverbial or prepositional elements). Halliday (1985:103) further puts forward six classifications of transitivity processes. Those processes are: *material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal, and existential*: The processes with their sub-categories are precisely summarized by Mohammed (2019: 28) in the table below:

| Process type | Category of Meaning | Participant |
|---|---|---|
| 1. **Material processes** :<br>a. Actional : physical activities by human being . It is in turn sub-divided into (i) intentional actions ,i.e., intended e.g/ I sent a message . (ii) supervention actions ,i.e., not intended . e.g/ the baby trembled.<br>b. Event processes : either (i) inanimate e.g/ the sun rises . or (ii) an anatomical element of a character is the agent if animate | Verbs of doing , happening ,and creating. | Actor and Goal |
| 2. **Relational processes**:<br>a. Attributive<br>b. Identificative | Being(…is), having (..has), attributing, identifying . | Carrier , attribute , identified , identifier , token , and value |
| 3. **Mental processes** :<br>a. Perception<br>b. Affection<br>c. Cognition | Sensing , seeing , feeling , thinking | Senser and phenomenon |
| 4. **Behavioral :**<br>a. Physiological<br>b. Psychological | Behaving<br>Breathing<br>smiling | Behaver |
| 5. **Verbal processes** | Saying | Sayer , receiver (target) |
| 6. **Existential** | Existing | Existent |

It is worth mentioning that transitivity analysis is adopted in this study to reveal ideological perception of women the Middle Eastern society rather than just describing the structure of the language. This means that the main theory the analysis follows reads as: the use of a structure rather than its alternative is an obvious indication of ideological choice.

## 6. Data Collection

The data for this study is taken from Youtube, which is a famous social media app and website for videos. Two videos are selected. The videos tackle two incidents of domestic violence that have been live-streamed on YouTube and gained a high fame. The stories are as follows:

### Sample A: Hayah Abdullah: A victim of domestic abuse- Egypt

Hayah Abdullah is a 21-year-old Egyptian woman who went live on Facebook to plead for help, revealing that her husband had been beating her severely, causing serious injuries. Her videos garnered widespread sharing, sparking an online campaign to rescue her. In the video, she pleaded for help from her friends or relatives to intervene and stop her husband's abuse.

The footage showed her desperate plea to her husband: 'Open the apartment door for me so someone can come and take me away. I will not leave on my own. I have no safe place here. Find someone to come and take me.' In the comments, she mentioned that the abuse occurred after he returned home intoxicated from drinking alcohol.

**Sample B: Muthey and her daughter: vivtims of abuse- Saudi Arabia**

Muthey is a Saudi mother of a young girl and a young boy. In a video, she is seen holding a stick and shouting, 'I am waiting for the police to come. I have been beaten and abused for 15 years, and now it is time to put an end to this oppression. I have evidence of the harm you have caused me, and I am going to make you pay for everything you have done.

On the other hand, her husband recorded a video of Muthey and their daughter shouting at the door, demanding help from authorities. He also shows his broken arm in the video. The daughter shouts that she broke her father's arm while trying to stop him from beating her mother multiple times.

Ten comments are randomly selected from those made on these videos (the two samples). The comments are stated below in a table in addition to their translation and transliteration.

| Sample No. | Comment No. | Slang Arabic | Transliteration | Translation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sample A | A.1 | اكيد مواعدة عشيق ثاني دي مستحيل تكون بنت ناس او بنت اصول | ạkyd mawāʿida ʿasẖīq tẖạny dī muštaḥīl takawũn biṅt nās ạw biṅta ạṣwl | She is certainly dating a second lover. It's impossible that she is from a respected family or a girl with principles. |
| | A.2 | سماع القصة من الطرفين امر ضروي | samāʿ ạlqiṣã mina ạlṭãrifīn ạmr ḍarẘay | Hearing the story from both sides is essential. |
| | A.3 | عايزة تعمل ترند على حساب زوجها .. لو صحيح كانت اتصلت في شرطة النجدة احسن ما تعمل بث مباشر | ʿayza taʿmal trynd ʿala ḥisāb zaẘjahā .. laẘ ṣaḥīḥ kạnt ạitãṣalaṫ fī sẖurṭaï ạlnãjda ạḥsan mā taʿmal batẖ mubāsẖir | She wants to be a trend and exploits her husband for that. If it's true, she should have called emergency services instead of live streaming |
| | A.4 | للبيوت اسرار.. كل البيوت فيها مشاكل وضرب لكن تحل المشاكل داخل البيت وليس بهذه الطريقة . وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي افسدت الناس | liلbuyūt ạsrạr .. kul ạlbuyūt fīhā masẖākil wa ḍarba lakin taḥal ạlmasẖākil dākẖil ạlbaẏt wa laẏsa bihadẖihi ạlṭãrīqa. wasāyịlu ạltãwāṣul ạlạiịtimāʿī ạfsdt ạlnãạs | Homes have secrets. Every family has issues and conflicts (suffer abuse), but the problems should be resolved within the household and not in that way. Social media has corrupted people |
| | A.5 | كفاية فضايح حلو مشاكلكم داخل بيوتكم | kifãya fḍạyḥ ḥalū masẖākilukuṁ dākẖil buyūtikuṁ | Enough with scandals. Solve your problems within your homes |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | A.6 | متى اصبحتم تقدسون النساء فلا خير فيكم؟ فلا خير فيكم يازمن النساء وانعدام الرجولة .. كانت المراة عند اسيادكم الذين سبقوكم تخاف من ضلها | mataɣ ạṣbḥtm tuqadīsūna ạlnīsāʾa falā kẖaẙruⁿ fīkuṃ ? falā kẖaẙruⁿ fīkuṃ yạzmn ạlnīsāʾa wāiṅʿidāma ạlrūjūlaïti .. kạnt ạl̊marāïti ʿiṅda ạsyạdkm ạlādẖīna sabāqūkuṃ takẖāfu maṅ ḍalāhā | Whenever you start venerating women, there is no good in you! There is no good in you, oh age of women and lack of manliness... Women used to fear their masters who preceded you |
| | A.7 | يجب سماع القضية من الطرفين لنعرف السبب | yajib samā ạl̊qaḍīā mina ạltẵarifīn li nʿrf ạlsẵbab | It's important to hear the case from both sides to understand the reasons |
| | A.8 | والله العظيم اسد والد اسد | wAllh ạl̊ʿaẓīm ạuṡd wālid ạuṡd | I swear to God, you are a lion ( a brave man) |
| | A.9 | كلامها وحركاتها ماعجبتني باينة جاية تشتهر | kilāamhā waḥarakāthā mạʿjbtny bāyina jāya tasẖtahir | I didn't like her language and body language. It's obvious that she wants to become a trend. |
| | A.10 | صارت النسوة تفضح ازواجها على الفيسبوك | ṣārat̊ ạlnīs̊wa taf̊ḍaḥ ạzwạjhạ ʿala ạlfysbwk | Women are now exposing their husbands on Facebook |
| Sample B | B.1 | طيب ليش الفضيحة و الصوت العالي خلاص الناس جنبكم عندهم هموم زيكم وماكلين تبن وماطلعو الشارع يصارخون اجلسي ببيتك وكلمي الحكومة | ṭayīb lysẖ ạl̊faḍīḥa wa ạlṣẵẘt ạl̊ʿālī kẖulẵạṣ ạlnẵạs jaṅbakuṃ ʿiṅdahuṃ hmwm zīẵkuṃ wmạklyn taban wmạṭlʿw ạlsẖẵạriʿ yṣạrkẖwn ạiỵlisī bibaẙtik wa kalimīī ạl̊ḥukūma | Why the scandal and loud voice? People around you have worries like yours. They're not taking to the streets and shouting. Stay at home and call the authorities. |
| | B.2 | هههههههه يااختي لو ان معك تقارير وضاربك كان قدر يوقفك الحين عند حدك وماخلاك بالشارع كذا تصارخين | hhhhhhhh yạạkẖty laẘ ạnã maʿak tqāryr wa ḍāribak kāna qaḍr yūqifuk ạl̊ḥaẙn ʿiṅda ḥadīka wmạkẖlạk biạlsẖẵạriʿ kadẖā taṣārkẖaẙn | Hhhhh Sister, if you had reports and evidence that you've been mistreated, your husband would have been able to stop you by now and not let you roam the streets screaming like this. |
| | B.3 | المرة ذي عاصية ومو صاحية | ālmarã dẖī ʿāṣīa wa mw ṣāḥīa | the wife is rebellious and not sensible. |
| | B.4 | مافي عنف ضد المراة الان هم انسخلوا عن دينهم.. والي تنسلخ عن دينها مالها حقوق | mạfy ʿuṅfa ḍidī ạl̊marā ạlān .. huṃ ạnskẖlw ʿaṅ dīnihiṃ wālī taṅsalikẖ ʿaṅ dīnihā mālahā ḥuqwq | There is no violence against women now. They deviated from their religion, and those who deviate from their religion have no rights |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B.5 | هي لو كانت تعاني عنف ماكان نطرت 15 سنة | hīa laẘ kạnt tuʿānī ʿun̊f mākān naṭarat̊ 15 sana | If she was suffering from violence, she wouldn't have waited 15 years. |
| | B.6 | كفوو عليه .. هي سليطة لسان | kfww ʿalaẙha .. hī salīṭaẗ lisān | Well done/ bravo to him... She's outspoken. |
| | B.7 | تسلم يدك ذي تحشر عيالها على ابوهم | tusalĩm yaduk dẖī taḥ̊sẖur ʿīāluhā ʿalay ạbwhm | Good job on his part... She's incentivizing her children against their father |
| | B.8 | مرة مستهترة وناقصة رباية | marã mus̊tah̊tira wa nāqiṣa ribāīã | An irresponsible and poorly-raised woman |
| | B.9 | واضح الرجال مبتلي بيهم | wāḍiḥ ạlrũjãạl mub̊talĩ bīuh̊m | It's obvious that the man is being tested by them |
| | B.10 | هي لو متربية وعندها اخلاق ماتعيط بالشارع | hīa laẘ mut̊rabīa waʿin̊dahā ạkẖlạq mạ tʿyṭ biạlsẖãạriʿ | If she was raised well and had morals, she wouldn't shout in the street |

## 7. Data Analysis and Discussion

The investigation of gender bias in this study is going to be conducted in three steps: (1) textual analysis (to figure out the transitive structures in the selected 20 comments) , (2) bias identification ( to pin point the means by which transitivity analysis uncovers bias against women) and (3) discussion ( to discuss the findings from a cultural and historical perspective)

### 7.1 Textual Analysis

The following table shows in detail the transitivity structure in each of the 20 comments selected:

| **Sample No.** | **Comment No.** | Participants | Processes | Circumstances |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sample A | A.1 | Hayah : the actor | actional | -“is dating another lover”<br>-not from “a respected family” and has no “principle” |
| | | The attacker: the affected | Implicitly indicated | The commenter implicitly indicates that the attacker is the victim of a hypothetical scenario (cheating) |
| | A.2 | The audience: the actor | Actional | Via actional process, the commenter sets the action that audience should adhere to in order to decide whom should they sympathize with, otherwise it is unjust to the husband . |
| | | The husband (the attacker): the affected | Implicitly indicated | |
| | A.3 | Hayah: the actor | Actional | -“be a trend”<br>-“exploits her husband”<br>-“should have called emergency services” |
| | | The husband (the attacker): the affected | Identificative | Being exploited |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | A.4 | Hayah: the actor | Actional | The comment criticizes the actions of the actor "going on a live-stream on social media" and not considering the domestic violence as a normal part of marriage. |
| | | The husband (the attacker): the affected | Implicitly indicated | -- |
| | A.5 | Hayah: the actor | Actional | The commenter identifies the action done by the actor as a scandal. In other words, exposing a domestic violence is an action of scandal. |
| | A.6 | The audience: carrier | Identificative | The commenter attributes men's respect to women and their understanding to women suffering with a negative circumstance, namely " no good in you" |
| | A.7 | The audience: the actor | Actional | Via actional process, the commenter sets the action that audience should adhere to in order to decide whom should they sympathize with, otherwise it is unjust to the husband . |
| | A.8 | The husband (the attacker): carrier | Identificative | The commenter attributes a positive circumstance to the actor by describing him as a brave man. |
| | A.9 | Hayah: the actor | Actional | -"become a trend" |
| | | The husband (the attacker): the affected | | |
| | A.10 | All the women in general and Hayah in specific: the actor | Actional | ""exposing their husbands on Facebook" |
| | | The husband (the attacker) and all the men : the affected | actional | -being exposed |
| Sample B | B.1 | Muthey: the actor | Actional | -creating "scandal"<br>-loud voice<br>-should" call the authorities" |
| | B.2 | Muthey: the actor | Actional | -explicitly: "yelling"<br>-implicitly: a liar |
| | | The husband (the attacker): the affected | Actional | -being affected by the lies of his wife on social media |
| | B.3 | Muthey: the behaver | Behavioral | -" rebellious and not sensible" |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | The husband (the attacker): the affected | Actional | Implicitly: a victim of the wife's behavior. |
| | B.4 | All the women in general and Muthey in specific: the actor | Actional | -"deviated from their religion and those who deviate from their religion have no rights" |
| | B.5 | Muthey: the behaver | Behavioural | -implicitly: a liar |
| | | The husband (the attacker): the affected | Verbal | Implicitly: a victim of the wife's behavior. |
| | B.6 | Muthey: the behaver | Behavioural | -" outspoken" and that's why she deserves to be disciplined |
| | | The husband (the attacker): the actor | Identificative | The commenter attributes a positive circumstance to the actor by praising his action. |
| | B.7 | Muthey: the affected | Actional | -" incentivizing her children on their father" and that's why she deserves to be disciplined |
| | | The husband (the attacker): the actor | Actional | The commenter attributes a positive circumstance to the actor by praising his action. |
| | B.8 | Muthey: the actor | Behavioural | "irresponsible and poorly raised" |
| | B.9 | The husband (the attacker): the affected | Actional | -"being tested" |
| | B.10 | Muthey: behaver and the affected | Behavioural and actional | -"shout in the street " for not being "raised well" and that's why she deserves to be disciplined |

### 7.2 Bias Identification

Although both of the videos- where the comments are taken from- depict incidents of domestic violence against women, the selected comments obviously communicate a declination of abuse occurrence. On the base of the transitivity analysis presented above, bias is nuanced by means of the following patterns of participant representations:

(i) In nine comments (out of fifteen comments in which direct reference to the female characters are made), female characters, who are the victims, are presented as actors. Actors are the participants who are supposed to cause the incident or do it. That is, the nine instances where the female participants are presented as actors indicate that females are held responsibility for the abuse occurring. So, the actional processes attached to them are always completed by negative circumstances. Examples are: A.1 (the actor, Hayah, is defined as doing a "cheating" which is the implied actional process in

"dating another lover" which is the negative circumstance) , A.2, A.3, A.4, A.5, A.9, A.10, B.1, B.2, and B.4 .

(ii) In five comments, reference is made to the behavioural processes of the female participants. In those comments, the female characters are behavers and their behaviour (circumstances) is always negative and presented as either a sold excuse for deserving abuse or as a direct cause for the abuse. Those comments are B.3, B.5, B.6, B.8 and B.10.

(iii) In only one comment (out of 20), the female character is given the affected role. However, even as an affected participant, female role is attributed with a negative circumstance. In comment B.7, the abusive action is admitted and the male character is defined as the doer (the actor) but the representation still indicates that the victim is not a real victim and deserves the abuse for she "incentivizes her children against their father", which is a hypothetical scenario is supposed by the commenter.

(iv) Male characters, on the other hand, are positively depicted whether as an affected or as a carrier. As affected participants, male characters are presented as being victims of their wives' lack of discipline or disobedient personalities. By presenting male characters as affected participants, two facts are admitted: one is that the abuse has been occurred and the other is that the action of abuse is not a favourable thing. However, the essence of representing the characters as affected participants is not to admit the two facts mentioned above, but it is to present excuses for the actions and get everyone to sympathize with the abusers.

(v) Presenting male characters as carriers or actors is done to praise their action rather than criminalizing them. In two instances where men are presented as carriers and one instance where they are seen as actors, men are praised for doing the action they have done.

(vi) In two comments, reference to audience is made. The commenters sometimes try to incentivize the audience (the readers/ video viewers) to also be biased against women. This is obvious in A.6 and A.7. In A.6, on the one hand, audience is structured as a carrier. The carrier is identified according to a biased condition, namely carrying a negative quality if they consider respecting women. In A.7, on the other hand, the actional process of audience is defined and once again is completed with a negative conditional circumstance against women.

Enriching the bias identification process in this section, two kinds of bias are further figured out below:

1. Visibility bias: this is the kind of the bias that can be detected by means of examining the prominence given to the role attached to each character. In most of the 20 comments analysed, female characters are directly referred to as actors or beavers with negative surrounding circumstances. There is no visible role to them as actual victims. Male characters are contrarily less visible. In most of the cases, there is an implicit reference to them which is done in a form of affected participants or carriers of a positive quality. No explicit reference is made to their role as actors of bad actional processes. This means there is a visibility bias against women in the texts analysed as their experiences are not given central focus, but rather they are overshadowed by other elements.

2. Tonality bias: this kind of bias comes from the evaluation of the commenters and their emotions towards the participants. Tonality bias against women is obvious. Disparaging terms and negative attributes are attached to women via behavioural processes such as "lack of discipline", "disobedient", "outspoken", etc. Male characters, on the other hand, are positively depicted despite of being the attackers. Their actions are praised and their personalities are positively carried.

Accordingly, bias against female characters is obvious specifically as commenters eagerly attend to the above mentioned structures although the stories clearly show who the victim is and who the abuser is. The unjustified blame shift is the core of bias identification.

### 7.3 Discussion

Given the facts analysed in 7.1 and 7.2, the transitivity patterns and structures in the 20 comments contribute to the establishment and reinforcement of biased gender norms and stereotypes. Generally, it is apparent that women are often depicted negatively as actors surrounded by negative circumstances, whereas men are portrayed as affected by the incident despite being the attackers which is a positive identification. Interestingly, a detailed discussion of three specific ideological tendencies is able to further clarify the style of gender bias against women in the Middle East.

The first biased tendency is the volatile role given to women in the Middle Eastern society. The analysed comments show that women are sometimes given a passive role and some other times are given an active role. Passive role is seen in the cases where women have no right to even step out of home or ask for help when needed without the permission of a male partner. The passive role is a factual element of the Middle Eastern women identity. It is almost accepted by women themselves. This is another obvious fact in the comments as comments made by female commenters are not much different from those made by male. However, the treatment completely takes a different shape when an incident of male/female kind requires someone to take the blame. In such moments, everyone starts attaching female participants an active role. Active role in such an occasion means to have the power and the ability to stop or avoid the occurrence of a negative incident. That is, women are powerless until there is a situation that requires holding responsibility. Comments where women are defined as being the causer of the abuse are clear evidence.

The second tendency which proves a naturalized bias against women is the reaction of commenters, both male and female, to the specific idea of asking for help by means of social media. In story A., the video is live-streamed by the victim, i.e. the female character. Commenters' reaction is highly negative. Everyone criticizes her for exposing her family issues online. Also, everyone misjudges her for the way she chose to call for help. However, in the story B, the male character is the one who uploaded his fight with his wife online. Surprisingly, no one blamed or criticized him for that. Further, people keep blaming the wife for making her man feel enable to deal with her! In both cases, female characters are blamed and in both cases female characters are depicted as liars and disrespectful.

The third tendency is the high level of visibility and tonality bias against women. The analysed comments reveal that the Middle Eastern people seem to be programmed to normalize and trivialize abuse against women. The repeated adherence to patterns where the seriousness of such abusive acts and domestic violence are minimized establishes and reinforces harmful and unfair stereotypes about women. The further such comments are made the more the victimization theory with regard to women in the Middle East society is poisoned.

## 8. Conclusion

This study reveals significant patterns of gender bias by examining the role of transitivity on media discourses related to domestic violence against women in the Middle East. This study has found out that:

1. Women are frequently positioned as responsible actors in these abusive narratives, while men are depicted as victims or justified actors. This transitive representation perpetuates harmful stereotypes and reinforces societal norms that normalize violence against women.
2. Two kinds of bias against women are identified: visibility bias and tonality bias. The two kinds highlight a pervasive disregard and cancellation for the victimization of women, overshadowing and underestimating their experiences and minimizing and trivializing the severity of the domestic violence experienced.
3. Obvious ambivalence towards Middle Eastern women's roles is detected. Women are rendered powerless until blame is required. This is a reflection of deep-rooted cultural practices and attitudes.

4. There is a massive and serious need for more equitable, critical and nuanced representations of gender in media. Such representation may contribute to shifting and reshaping perceptions and fostering a more fair social environment for women in the Middle East.

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