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WHAT'S GENDERED ABOUT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE?

An Empirically Grounded Theoretical Exploration from Tanzania

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Violence is often considered gendered on the basis that it is violence against women. This assumption is evident both in “gender-based violence” interventions in Africa and in the argument that gender is irrelevant if violence is also perpetrated against men. This article examines the relation of partner violence not to biological sex, but to gender as conceptualized in feminist theory. It theorizes the role of gender as an analytical category in dominant social meanings of “wifebeating” in Tanzania by analyzing arguments for and against wife-beating expressed in 27 focus group discussions in the Arumeru and Kigoma-Vijijini districts. The normative ideal of a “good beating” emerges from these data as one that is supported by dominant social norms and cyclically intertwined with “doing gender.” The author shows how the good beating supports, and is in turn supported by, norms that hold people accountable to their sex category. These hegemonic gender norms prescribe the performance of masculinity and femininity, power relations of inequality, and concrete material exploitation of women’s agricultural and domestic labor. The study has implications for policy and practice in interventions against violence, and suggests untapped potential in theoretically informed feminist research for understanding local power relations in the Global South.

Keywords: *development; hegemonic masculinity; emphasized femininity; doing gender; partner violence; Sub-Saharan*

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In Sub-Saharan Africa, violence against women (VAW) as a policy, practice, and research field has mushroomed in the past two decades under the term “gender-based violence” (GBV). Initially dealing disproportionately with wartime violence and genital mutilation, GBV has come to include more common forms in less exceptional settings, such as domestic violence. In this burgeoning field, violence is increasingly referred to as “gendered” without a coherent idea of what this means (Scully 2010). Research has focused more on how domestic violence is related to health and development factors—including how it may interfere with women’s contributions as mothers and workers—than on how it is related to gender as a theoretical problem.

Undertheorized claims about the gendered nature of the violence are not unique to VAW research in Tanzania, but reflect the VAW research field in general (Hearn 2013; Hunnicutt 2009; Lewis 2003). Also reflected are North American approaches that erase gender from partner violence (Dragiewicz 2009; Kimmel 2002). Proponents of such “gender symmetry” views of partner violence claim their surveys prove that also in Africa, gender is irrelevant to partner violence (Straus 2008, 2010).

It thus appears timely for researchers who understand domestic violence in Africa as “gender-based” to address the important theoretical question “What *is* gendered about this violence?” I address that question along the lines recommended by Anderson (2005, 2009), extending previous work linking partner violence to gender (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Dragiewicz 2009; Johnson 2008; Stark 2007). I use feminist interaction theory, drawing on the work of Ridgeway (2007, 2009), Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), and West and Zimmerman (1987, 2009) to investigate how the partner violence known as “wife-beating” in Tanzania is gendered. I do so by exploring data I generated through focus group discussions about wife-beating in the Arumeru and Kigoma-Vijijini districts in 2007–2008 for the dominant norms discussants refer to and analyzing these in light of theory on the role of gender beliefs in a multilevel gender system (Ridgeway and Correll 2004).

GENDER AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The acknowledgement of gender in partner violence cannot be taken for granted. It is the most contested topic in the research literature on partner violence (Anderson 2013; Ferraro 2013; Kimmel 2002). Since feminist researchers placed wife-beating on the agenda as a “case against the patriarchy” in the 1970s and 1980s (Dobash and Dobash 1979),

increasingly influential conservative empiricists have challenged feminist claims about the violence's relation to gender (Felson 2002; Straus 2008). They point to Conflict Tactics Scale surveys where men and women report similar numbers of physically violent acts perpetrated by their heterosexual partner. This sex parity, whereby male and female partners are equally violent to one another, is interpreted as "gender symmetry" and is considered to be conclusive evidence that partner violence against women is unrelated to gender (Ferraro 2013).

Feminist scholars of violence have critiqued both the methodological foundations of the sex parity findings and the claim that such sex parity would prove the violence nongendered (Anderson 2009; Bumiller 2010; Dragiewicz 2009; Johnson 2008; Kimmel 2002; Stark 2007). Discussions about who hits whom cannot clarify if and how violence is gendered, since they do not connect with any current conceptualization of gender as a theoretical problem:

In their survey research program, "gender" is limited to a box on which respondents mark their sex category. They are thus unable to ask theoretically driven questions about how gender organizes the [respondents'] lives. . . . We need studies that analyze (rather than ignore or assume) specific theories about how gender influences violence and control in relationships. (Anderson 2009, 1455)

Thus, sex-symmetry surveys *ignore* theories of gender. Anderson points out, however, that when one *assumes* that VAW equals GBV without analyzing its relation to specific theories of gender, one also fails to analyze the gender–violence nexus in light of theory (Anderson 2009, 1454).

Investigating what is gendered about domestic violence requires a theoretically informed understanding of gender (Anderson 2005; Dragiewicz 2009; Ferree, Lorber, and Hess 1999). Feminist researchers have repeatedly identified domestic violence as a field where theoretical analyses have lagged behind other fields, while risk factor analyses and prevalence studies have accumulated (Dutton 2004; Hearn 2013; Hunnicutt 2009). A feminist reconceptualization of violence requires qualitative studies of "the meaning and purpose of these acts or how they are related to the performance of gender" (Bumiller 2010, 183) that encompass the Global South (Johnson and Ferraro 2000).

"Rather than ask 'Who uses violence?'" argues Stark, investigations of the violence–gender nexus should "identify how violence functions in relationships to preserve and extend gender inequalities" (Stark 2010, 209). Analyzing the meaning of violence, rather than simply quantifying

it, can enable violence researchers to “put the claim that domestic violence is gender neutral to rest and to reignite feminist theoretical debate about how and why domestic violence is gendered” (Anderson 2009, 1455). This article contributes to such renewed theoretical debate by examining the meanings of male-to-female partner violence in Tanzania in light of specific analytic conceptualizations of gender (Ferree, Lorber, and Hess 1999; Ridgeway 2007; Risman 2004).

“Gender-Based” Violence in Tanzania

Tanzania is a theoretically valuable African case because it is more representative of the continent than South Africa and the war-affected countries currently dominating the literature on GBV in Africa. Tanzania is, like most of the continent, marked by poverty, but not by the generalized violence or extreme wealth inequality that characterize South Africa and conflict zones (Human Security Report Project 2012). The example of Tanzania thus challenges gender-symmetry scholars’ claim that partner violence in Africa is related not to gender but to the high tolerance of violence in “these countries.”¹ Africanists know Tanzania as a remarkably *non-violent* society, where conciliation and social harmony are prized values. This makes tolerance of wife-beating there intriguingly conspicuous and theoretically interesting.

Tanzania is one of the world’s poorest countries, ranked at 152 of 187 countries by the Human Development Index. Seven in 10 Tanzanians live on less than US\$1.25 per day. Income inequality has remained low and stable for the past two decades, with a Gini coefficient of 0.34 to 0.39. By the Gender Inequality Index, however, the country ranks 119 of 148 countries (United Nations Development Programme 2013).

Smallholder subsistence farming accounts for 80 percent of employment. Most farmers produce food crops on plots of between one and seven acres using hand hoes (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS] [Tanzania] 2009). The agricultural workforce is predominantly female, and most women work their husband’s land. A woman works 12–16 hours a day, and her husband half of that, yet most of the decisions and income from her agricultural work are considered his. Growing food for the family is a woman’s job, as are some or all tasks in the husband’s cash crop production (Leavens and Anderson 2011).

A third of Tanzanian women ages 15–49 are estimated to have experienced physical partner violence in the past year (NBS [Tanzania] and ICF Macro 2011). Prevalence rates vary across Africa: The same survey yielded lower figures for Ghana (17 percent) and higher for

Uganda (36 percent) (Ghana Statistical Service, Ghana Health Service, and ICF Macro 2009; Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2012). A considerable proportion of Tanzanian men (38 percent) and women (54 percent) find wife-beating justifiable (NBS [Tanzania] and ICF Macro 2011). Domestic violence is not specifically criminalized in Tanzanian statutory law,² and is permitted by customary law (Myamba 2009). Although it can be prosecuted as physical assault, most cases go unreported (McCleary-Sills et al. 2013).

Tanzanian feminists have organized against partner violence since the 1980s, and produced the first VAW surveys (Sheikh 2002). After international health and development agencies became involved in the late 1990s, research on the scope and prevalence of the violence and its correlation with health, education, and economic indicators has burgeoned (McCleary-Sills et al. 2013; McCloskey, Williams, and Larsen 2005; World Health Organization 2005). While providing invaluable support for policy and practice, this research operationalizes gender as biological sex and leaves the social meaning of the violence and its relation to gender unexamined. One qualitative study provides health personnel with descriptions of perceptions of wife-beating, but does not relate to theories of gender and violence (Laisser et al. 2011). Thus, the research on gender and violence in Tanzania resembles VAW research elsewhere in Africa (Lewis 2003, 64) and the Global North (Hunnicuttt 2009): Amid amassing studies, theoretically informed analyses remain scant. The most important partner violence study in Tanzania, the Demographic and Health Study cited above, exemplifies these limitations (NBS [Tanzania] and ICF Macro 2011). By operationalizing GBV as VAW, it fits Anderson's critique of partner violence studies that atheoretically *assume* gender. At the same time, by equating "conflict tactics" with GBV, it *ignores* theorized gender, which also negates it.

African scholars have produced much thoughtful work on violence against women and gender (e.g., Bennett 2010; Mama 1997). Nevertheless, no published study to date places wife-beating in Tanzania within the aforementioned discussion about how to theorize gender's role in partner violence vis-à-vis the gender-symmetry point that men are also beaten. The surge in research that calls violence gender-based without a theoretical understanding of what *is* gendered about it reflects the conditions for knowledge production in Tanzania. Social research in Africa is dominated by international development agendas (Arnfred 2004; Mama 2011). The ubiquity of the term "gender" in violence research reflects its mainstreaming into development institutions, where its adoption has involved an

emptying of its theoretical and political content: The term is used mainly as a neologism for “women” or biological sex (Cornwall, Harrison, and Whitehead 2007; Longman 2010; Mama 2011). In the “gender industry” created through this depoliticization, “gender phrases are remarkably authoritative” while simultaneously “superficial and complacent . . . as though rhetorical force were being substituted for any real reflection on actual gender relations” (Lewis 2008, 83).

Feminist researchers, meanwhile, have been discouraged from theoretical engagement by the widespread acceptance in the North of the claim that social theory, especially gender theory, is inapplicable to Africa (Bakare-Yusuf 2004). As African feminists have pointed out, the fixation with “difference” and Africanity among North-based researchers has undermined possibilities for critical gender research in Africa (Lewis 2004; McFadden 2001, 2004), and may not even be historically accurate (Salo 2001). Regarding gender and partner violence, the result has been a certain theoretical paralysis.

I build on postcolonialist work that questions the ethical and epistemological superiority of the stance that theory developed in the North should not be used in the South (Dixon 2004; Mbembe 2001; Narayan 2009; Sitas 2006). Framing Africa as primarily *different* from the Global North is as ethnocentric and imperialist as assuming *sameness* (Narayan 2009), and effectively excludes Africa from the remit of social science, exempting power relations there from theoretical analysis (Mbembe 2001; Sitas 2006). Rather than assuming that all or no “Western” theory applies to Africa, this article “loots the conceptual toolbox” (Dixon 2004) for theories that help to make sense of social phenomena, letting resonance with local data and context guide the choice of theory.

“Doing Gender” in a Multilevel System

Theoretical understandings of what the social phenomenon gender “is” have been cumulatively refined in the past two decades (Correll, Thebaud, and Benard 2007; Ferree, Lorber, and Hess 1999; Risman 2004). Most contemporary gender scholars see gender as “an institutionalized system of practices for constituting people as two different categories (men and women), and organizing relations of inequality based on this difference” (Correll, Thebaud, and Benard 2007, 1). Rather than an individual trait, gender is understood as an organizing principle for both structure and interaction in society. It is recognized as a multilevel system, operating at macro, interactional, and individual levels simultaneously, through mutually reinforcing processes (Ridgeway 2007; Risman 2004).

West and Zimmerman's (1987) article "Doing Gender," showing gender as something one *does*, rather than *is*, was seminal in this development. They distinguished between "sex," "sex category," and "gender." By guessing someone's sex as male, we assign that person the sex category "man" and hold that person accountable to society's ideas of how a man should behave. Doing gender is how people accomplish gender through interaction. Expectations of how men and women should behave are key to understanding doing gender (West and Zimmerman 2009), and buttress the multilevel gender system (Ridgeway and Correll 2004, 511). Conceptualizing these expectations as "hegemonic gender beliefs" (Ridgeway 2009) enables Gramscian analyses of how the dominated become complicit in their own domination by sharing the ideas legitimating it. In hegemony, coercion and complicity are not either/or, but coexist (Lears 1985) in various combinations over time and space (Stark 2007, 171–97). Insofar as people solve the "coordination problem" by relating to one another according to sex category, gender acts as "a primary cultural frame for organizing social relations" (Ridgeway 2009, 147). It is in this role that "gender spreads beyond individual interests to become a multi-level system of social practices that permeates social institutions" (Ridgeway 2007, 312). Analyzing gender as a cultural frame on the interpersonal level can therefore illuminate its workings at macro and individual levels.

The intermediate level forms a convenient vantage point for seeing also the interplay *between* levels. The duality of gender as a structure entails cyclical relations between means and outcome whereby gender processes at different levels reinforce one another (Martin 2003; Risman 2004). The way gender is both a practice and the result of that practice can be especially difficult to capture (Martin 2003), yet will emerge from the analysis presented here.

Anderson points to such interconnections (also noted by Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Ferree, Lorber, and Hess 1999; and Risman 2004) to explain why investigating the gender–violence nexus "requires attention to multiple aspects of gender and how these levels interact" (Anderson 2009, 1452). Most research analyzes the connection at only one level (Anderson 2009, 1450). Studying the connection at one level might show violence as *based on* gender, while at another level violence may *affect* gender, and both processes may reinforce one another (Anderson 2005).

Connell and Messerschmidt make a similar point in reformulating their interactionist construct, hegemonic masculinity, "within a multidimensional understanding of gender" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 842).

Hegemonic masculinity and its tandem construct, emphasized femininity, are hegemonic ideals for masculine and feminine discursive positionings and, as such, are broadly compatible with Ridgeway's concept of hegemonic rules for how men and women are expected to relate. I draw on these works in an integrative manner to understand "how we create gender inequalities based on embodied cultural expectations" (Risman 2004, 435).

METHODS

This theoretical exploration of the "good beating" forms part of my larger study (Jakobsen 2012) of the norms and values people refer to when discussing wife-beating in Tanzania. I generated data through 27 focus group discussions (FGDs) in two disparate districts: Arumeru and Kigoma-Vijijini. In choosing sites, I aimed to encompass the main lines of diversity in Tanzania: urban/rural, Muslim/Christian, rich/poor, and Westernized/traditional. Arumeru is one of the country's most developed districts, in terms of education, trade, income, and infrastructure. It is also one of the districts most exposed to foreign influence, with the longest history of European presence, and is a hub for tourism, multinational agribusiness, and aid agencies. Kenya is an hour's drive away, and the region's airport is international. Kigoma, in contrast, is one of the least researched, least developed regions, with the lowest education and health indicators, the furthest away from the capital and with poor road connections.

Respondents fit what most Tanzanians understand as *wananchi*—ordinary people. They live in villages surrounding each district's capital. Kigoma respondents were Muslims and Christians of Ha ethnicity. Arumeru respondents were mostly Christians of Meru and Arusha ethnicity. Some groups were snowballed friendship groups while others were village cooperatives, and in two groups the respondents did not know one another. Each consisted either of men or of women, of ages either above or below 40. When recruiting in a village, I asked whether people would feel more comfortable in a group where everyone resembled them in terms of religion, ethnicity, wealth, or schooling, so some groups were homogenous also along one of these dimensions. Each group consisted of eight to 10 respondents.

FGDs are unreliable for individual opinions, because of the group presence central to the method itself. Group participants are influenced by what others may think, especially powerful members of the group; these social dynamics shape what each person says (Barbour and Kitzinger 1999). When deliberately used precisely for their group and interactive

nature, however, focus groups are arguably the best method for generating data on *performed* social norms rather than *pre-formed* individual opinions (Bloor et al. 2001; Puchta and Potter 2004), allowing researchers to tease out shared beliefs that are so tacit and taken for granted that neither researcher nor respondents have ready words for them (Bloor et al. 2001; Lloyd-Evans 2006).

Gender beliefs consist of norms almost every member of a society knows, expects others to hold, and feels accountable to. They are “hegemonic” not because many endorse them, but because they “are the ones most likely to be enforced by socially advantaged actors and are the default beliefs that individuals presume to prevail” (Ridgeway and Correll 2004, 517). This is precisely the type of data FGDs generate: What people say there reflects their assessment of what can be said in front of others (Bloor et al. 2001).

Seeing the steep power gradient between myself and respondents as a threat to data quality, I tweaked the FGD method to address this and other alterity and positionality concerns endemic to research in the Global South (Jakobsen 2012). I minimized my presence by leaving the group to discuss among themselves (knowing their voices were being recorded) after I had presented each conversation starter. Respondents called me back when they were done with one and ready to move on to the next. Conversation starters consisted of Swahili vignettes and role-plays around the following questions:

A younger woman comes to tell you she’s had enough of being beaten. She wants it to stop. What would you say?

A man tells you he beat his wife yesterday. What might he tell you, for you to chastise him about it? What might he tell you, for you to say he was right?

A man says he’ll never beat his wife. What do you think of this man?

Do women sometimes get beaten without deserving it?

Can a man sometimes be right to beat his wife?

What should one do if one hears one’s neighbor beating his wife?

I conversed with respondents in Swahili. In my absence, they sometimes switched to local languages. Native speakers of Kiha, Kiarusha and Kimeru assisted me in transcribing and translating the discussions.

I analyzed the transcripts for the shared norms people referred to when arguing for and against wife-beating. This first stage of “logical analysis” (Bloor et al. 2001, 70) aimed to capture the respondents’ own logic on wife-beating. I identified themes that recurred across more than ten groups, and that emerged in both districts, among both Christians and Muslims, men and women, and that did not vary significantly by any of these dimensions. In the second stage, I used analytic induction, analyzing the themes iteratively with theory and finally interpreting them using the theoretical concepts that resonated best. The resultant overall analysis is one that incorporates all themes and groups, and is in this sense a “comprehensive data treatment” (Silverman 2009, 298).

NORMS SUPPORTING A “GOOD BEATING”

A shared notion of a beating that society considered justified emerged from the analysis. This was not a necessary evil or a forgivable sin, but a *good* beating. The good beating is an ideal justified beating that respondents presume to be widely supported. Regardless of how many supported the notion of a good beating themselves, participants reckoned with it as a widely shared ideal. By “shared,” then, I do not mean that the ideal went uncontested, but rather that participants had a clear idea of what it was that they were contesting. The outline of the idea that was shared in this way by proponents and opponents varied across discussions, but a central core of it did not. I call the core that remained constant across discussions “the good beating.”

Not all beatings were deemed good. To fully delineate the good beating, we need to know what “bad” beatings it was contrasted with. The most commonly described “bad beating” was an undeserved beating. For example, when a woman was innocent of the fault she was beaten for, or when a man used beating to defend his own wrongdoing, the beating was undeserved. Excessive injury could also make a beating bad, for example, injury that required medical attention or hindered a wife’s work. A beating whose severity exceeded the offence was just gratuitous—as was beating out of anger or drunkenness. Only a beating that served a justifiable social purpose could be good.

The good beating was not only accepted but supported. Certain norms recurred throughout discussions as part of this presumed-to-be common knowledge about the good beating. Here, a group of Arumeru men in their 30s are responding to a vignette where a husband decided never to beat his wife:

Musa: ³ Let's start with the fundamentals: The whole family is required to *respect the father who is the head* of the house.

Michael: That's it, the head of the house.

Marko: They should *work for him—to recognize him as the head of the house*.

Michael: So the woman, she should *know that she's a woman*. A woman is a woman. She's the mother there. For her to *be seen as that*, she must . . . well, we know that a woman is inferior to her husband. So when a man tells his wife to do something, and when the woman shows signs of refusing, rejecting something which her husband directs her to do—well! This woman, I mean, she'll *seem completely inappropriate*. So, for her to *appear fitting*, she must undertake those things a man is directing her to do. It should be “Do this,” and she does it, and “Let's go this way,” and she goes that way.

Musa: Exactly. So, to not beat her—now, we have the foundation. It'll bring problems. You cannot give her all those chances. *She should not supersede you, but be under you*.

Michael: Yes. And so . . .

Musa: And that's when *you tell her, and she obeys*.

Marko: Even the children, they know. The voice of the mother and the father—the children know the father's voice is very harsh. The mother—well, the child can hear her and may not listen, but when he hears the father, he'll listen. The child can ask, “*Mother, can you beat me?*” *The child knows. The authority, it's with the father.* [younger men, Arumeru]⁴

I present this excerpt as emblematic of the findings because it contains references to the themes that together recurred across all discussions. These are italicized here, and in the heading of each section that expands on them. Every discussion included references to at least one of these themes. Each of the excerpts that will illustrate each theme represents more than 10 groups, cutting across ethnicity, age, sex, religion, district, and socioeconomic and educational differences.

To understand wife-beating, says Musa, “Let's start with the fundamentals.” And so Musa, Marko, and Michael get down to laying out the fundamentals of wife-beating by talking about what it means to be the man and the woman in a marriage. These fundamentals resemble Ridgeway's concept of hegemonic gender beliefs: cultural instructions for how people should interact as men and women.

Relations of Inequality: “*It Should Be ‘Do this,’ and She Does It*”

The first of these fundamentals is the norm that husband and wife should be unequal. The beating was not part of a mutual monitoring of

“different but equal” tasks, as gender-symmetry scholars claim. Rather, the relations it enforced were a chain of command: “It should be ‘do this,’ and she does it,” as Michael said. That a woman should respect her husband by doing as she is told was a recurrent issue in discussions of deserved beatings:

The way to respect a husband is when he assigns you work, you must be ready to do it. She’ll be beaten if she doesn’t respect the husband. [older Christian women, Arumeru]

Participants discussed the good beating as discipline for breaches of a work-centered chain of command:

You may say, “Wife, do this,” and she doesn’t do it. That causes you to punish her. [younger Muslim men, Arumeru]

The relations the good beating supports are hierarchical relations, where the man tells the wife what to do. A beating that made a wife comply with the husband’s commands and preferences was presented and accepted as a good beating:

The woman being beaten, it could be her own fault. Like, let’s say her husband forbids her from visiting friends during the day. And yet she does. Or the schedule he sets for her, she goes different from it. Or let’s say he wants her to cook with palm oil, and she cooks with another oil. She just doesn’t *stick to her husband’s rules and the way he wants things*. In that case, I’d have to tell her, my dear, the problem lies with you. [younger Meru women, Arumeru]

Participants who opposed the good beating also understood it as enforcing a wife’s subordination, arguing that it was only proper if the gender hierarchy was proper:

I think it’s not good to beat her, it’s wrong. Why? Because she’s a human being, just *like you*. *You’re the same*. [older Muslim men, Kigoma]

Thus, approval of beating was tied to approval of inequality. Most discussions of extreme situations where a beating would be so well deserved as to be *called for* turned to wives’ explicitly demanding equality as an obvious case. These were hypothetical situations, since no sensible woman would do this—or rather, no woman sensible of how hegemonic the rules she was violating were:

Maria: Let's say you come home, and he asks where you've been. You start answering badly, like a crazy person, saying, "We the women of Africa have been created with a certain right of control too, who are you to say that *men should have more power than women?*" He just asks you, and you answer carelessly, rudely, like that! Of course he must beat you.

Fatma: Well, he can choose: He doesn't have to . . .

[laughter]

Maria: Of course. But, I mean, you must expect it. You can't shout like you're surprised or innocent. [older women, Kigoma]

In this way, the violence maintained gender as understood by most contemporary gender theory: a "system of practices organizing *relations of inequality*" (Correll, Thebaud, and Benard 2007, 1). The good beating, as promoted, defended, and opposed, was violence of the more powerful to the less powerful, to maintain inequality (Walby 2009). The good beating was supported by the gender rule that a wife should obey her husband, and in turn enforced this rule. As such, it enforces "the processes by which gender inequality is recreated through everyday social relations" (Ridgeway and Correll 2004, 512).

Hegemonic Masculinity: "Head of the House"

The hierarchy the good beating should enforce entailed specific expectations for how each spouse should behave. A man was expected to control his woman and household:

Issa: I am the head of the house. So there's nothing that can be done in my home without me knowing. All final decisions are mine. Mine, because I'm the —?

Daudi: The man.

Issa: Because I'm the man. The woman's like a child in there. If there's money to use, I have the final say. Isn't that why we say the man is the head of the house? Because all final decisions are whose?

Several people: His.

Paul: And the woman must respect her husband whatever he tells her: He's the husband, he's the head. [younger educated men, Kigoma]

The belief that a man should be "head of the house" recurs throughout the discussions as a hegemonic masculinity ideal "constituted in men's interaction with women" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 849). Men talked about this as a position of dominance on which they had only a tenuous grip, but which it was imperative they maintain. Given the chance, a wife might take over, unleashing unnatural disorder on the household and society:

Peter: The head, the leader of the house, is the father. He must be above the mother. He must control her.

Lawi: And if the father doesn't control the mother, the house . . .

Mwisho: Ah! They cannot have good lives!

Lawi: They cannot have good lives. The children will be on the streets, they won't respect anyone, so the father must be the head, he must control the house. If a mother controls . . . the children become uncontrollable, without respect for anyone! If he wants to speak, she'll say, "No way!" No discipline in society, everything let loose. So it must be the father who is the head!
[older wealthier men, Kigoma]

Hegemonic masculinity is not in itself violent (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 834). Rather, the "head of house" ideal served to legitimate the violence: Beating a wife to maintain this dominant position was a good beating. Without it, some wives would usurp the very meaning of being a man:

A woman beaten a lot is a woman who wants to call all the shots. She wants to be the man. She doesn't want to obey the man, she wants to be the man. She's the mother and she wants to be the father. That's where the problems start. [young Christian women, Arumeru]

These discussions illuminate the role of a fragile masculine identity in partner violence. It is because of the belief that a man must either control the household or lose his man-role to the woman, and that such a role reversal is an ever-impending disaster, that beating seems necessary. This resonates with the literature on how domestic violence can "bolster a threatened or unstable sense of masculine identity" (Anderson 2005, 862).

Thus beating was gendered in the sense that it supported, and was supported by, the masculinity ideal that to be a man was to be in charge. In addition, to beat *was* to be in charge, and was masculine in itself. This was what Marko was referring to in the emblematic discussion of the "fundamentals" of wife-beating presented earlier:

The child can ask, "*Mother, can you beat me?*" *The child knows. The authority, it's with the father.*

Marko equates authority with the ability to beat—even a child knows that both are masculine traits. Being the boss equaled being the beater:

Maria: Next topic: "For a woman to be the head . . ."

Sofia: *She cannot beat him. Like, you're the boss now?* If you raise your arm as if to beat him, of course he'll just go ahead and beat you. You'd have no cause to complain there. A woman cannot beat a man! It just . . . it just makes no sense. I mean . . . what? [Older women, Kigoma]

The violence is gendered in an additional sense here: To be able to beat is to be in authority, and to be in authority is to be a man. Thus, beating to control is an enactment of being a man, of being the head of the house, of inhabiting the role of control that is a masculine role. In addition to *enforcing* gender, beating is *doing* gender: It is not only *effecting* gender, and thus a “gendering practice,” it is also a practicing of gender, in that it is in itself a *performing* of gendered behavior (Martin 2003). The good beating both maintains masculinity and is an enactment of it. Gender is in both the act of beating and in the subordination that results, illustrating the aforementioned duality of gender as a social structure that often eludes the researcher.

Performing Femininity: “To Appear Fitting”

The first two norms—that relations should be unequal and that husbands should be in charge—imply the third: that women should submit. The hegemonic gender beliefs whereby women comply with their own subordination is theorized in tandem with hegemonic masculinity as “emphasized femininity” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). What I will add here, then, is the discursive-performative dimension of this norm of wifely subordination. A wife should not only be submissive, she should also *appear* submissive.

One of the “fundamentals” of wife-beating, according to Michael in the emblematic excerpt, was that the wife “be seen as” a woman, that she “appear fitting” instead of “completely inappropriate.” This resonates throughout the discussions, as respondents contrasted *inabidhi* (socially required) appearances with *haistahili* (completely inappropriate) appearances. Discussants used these Swahili terms frequently and exclusively about wives who deserved beating. In discussing submission, they explicitly underlined the importance of appearances. The *display* of emphasized femininity was a normative ideal in its own right, in addition to *actual* compliance. For instance, a wife answering the husband too casually should be beaten, even if *he* did not mind, because of what the neighbor would think:

Lukas: She cannot answer like that! It is not done! I mean, maybe you don't care, you get used to it, and one day the neighbor hears . . .

Mohamedi: He'll be, like, "Your wife . . . ? Completely inappropriate, man!"
 Lukas: A woman is required to greet her husband respectfully. [younger educated men, Arumeru]

Thus while for a husband a beating could enact masculinity, for a wife it could mean that she had failed to perform emphasized femininity. Feminist criminologists have shown how VAW makes women "self-police" their femininity performances to avoid men's violence (Stanko 1997). Women self-regulate to avoid not only the bodily violence but the condemnation, exclusion, and loss of respectability that violence entails, where it is associated with failing to perform respectable femininity (Stanko 1997, 498).

This was the case in the discussions. Participants described proper wifely conduct as a performance required not only by the husband but also by the community, which would support its enforcement. For instance, women expected the social denigration of wives who did not exhibit appropriate femininity to be so strong as to effectively stigmatize them:

Hawa: A woman like this [who objects to beatings], she has the habit of trying to rule her own life, or even to rule her husband. Someone with this kind of behavior can say something in front of people and never be accepted. Even if what she says is well founded, people will disregard it because it's coming from her. It's unsuitable that she should talk, that she should be listened to.

Margaret: Yes, a woman like that! [younger women, Kigoma]

A woman's awareness that society holds her accountable for the performance of emphasized femininity aids husbands' wife-beating. A man's equivalent awareness that society holds *him* accountable to *his* sex category would not aid a wife's husband-beating in the same way: A man is not expected to perform husbandly submission. What the beating enacts is behavior society allocates to men, and what it enforces is behavior allocated to women. As Anderson (2009) points out, "Men are more able to achieve control through the micro-regulation of the performance of gender because the performance of masculinity involves controlling others." Women comply with the perpetrator's demand that they must "perform a particular type of femininity . . . because they recognize that they are held accountable for the performance of femininity and because their resistance leads to punishment" (Anderson 2009, 1447).

Emphasized femininity is not purely symbolic (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), but this symbolic aspect of it—the preoccupation

with *appearances* of emphasized femininity—is fundamental to the effectiveness of the violence. A husband could enforce accountability to certain behavioral expectations with a good beating because society expected women to perform that same behavior.

SEX/GENDER AS A PRIMARY CULTURAL FRAME

As we have seen, cultural rules of how spouses should behave within relations of inequality supported the good beating. According to contemporary gender theory, however, gender is not just any “system of practices organizing relations of inequality” but one that does so “*based on a two-sex difference*” (Correll, Thebaud, and Benard 2007, 1). Gender has been proclaimed irrelevant to Africa by arguing that while gender may be a primary frame in “the West,” it is trumped by other differences in Africa. It cannot be taken for granted, then, that the cultural rules were based on a two-sex difference. Did respondents really suggest that spousal relations should be determined by who was male and who was female?

Some respondents did—explicitly and emphatically. The following exchange on how a wife must do the jobs allocated to her by the fact that she is a woman—that is, by her sex category—flowed from a discussion of how some women “deserve to be beaten”:

Miriam: She must cook! She cannot ask him to cook! Well, I mean, sometimes, she may be sick, or there may be reasons why he can cook. But in general, as a woman . . . ! There are responsibilities that come to you, that belong to you, it is only fitting that that job is for you. So she must cook, because there *it's her sex that decides*.

Fatima: It's, like, you're helping one another, but he has his title, he's the head, and you, you have your jobs, *you're the woman*. So—of course you must do your jobs! [older wealthier women, Kigoma]

Not all groups had a participant who spelled this out as explicitly as Miriam does, but all discussions did assume that biological sex should be the basis for task division. Participants referred to this assumption in explaining the good beating, although several characteristics by which spouses might differ emerged in discussion: One spouse might have completed secondary school, while the other might be almost illiterate, or they might be from different religious, ethnic, or socioeconomic backgrounds. Among all these differences, the one by which spousal relations should be coordinated—the characteristic by which roles and responsibilities should be allocated—was that of biological sex. Thus, sex was a primary frame

for “solving the coordination problem” of how to relate to one another (Ridgeway 2007, 313). In enforcing this, the good beating is enforcing “an important means by which physical sex is culturally transformed into social gender” (Ridgeway 2007, 317).

“She should *know* that she’s a woman,” said Michael in the emblematic discussion, going through the fundamentals of wife-beating. That the division of roles should be determined by whether one was a man or a woman was discussed as common knowledge. Most groups talked about how a woman should know “who” she “is” in relation to the husband, “who” he “is” to her, what being a wife means, and that she is “the one who should” do certain tasks and be in a certain position in relation to him. This further converges with Ridgeway’s conception of how sex is used as a primary frame for determining how to relate to one another: “To solve the problems of coordinating social relations . . . people need to share not just any common knowledge, but a particular type of such knowledge. What people need are shared cultural systems for categorizing and defining ‘who’ you and the other in the situation ‘are,’ and, based on that categorization, how you are expected to behave” (ibid., 315).

In other words, sex is “a primary cultural frame for organizing social relations” (Ridgeway 2009, 147). It was this key element in the transformation of physical sex into social gender (Ridgeway 2007, 316–17) that behavior worthy of beating subverted. A woman who did not behave as a wife should was denying knowledge of this rule: Such a conspicuous act of defiant rebellion needed correcting. A good beating would enforce this knowledge and suppress the acting out of “pretend” realities. Thus, a good beating ensured the “accountability to sex category membership” that is key to doing gender (West and Zimmerman 2009). A wife’s behavior should be determined by her sex category. In enforcing this cultural frame, the violence supports one of the most fundamental ways by which biological sex is constructed into gender, and by which gender becomes “a multi-level system of social practices” (Ridgeway 2007, 312).

Material Implications of Enforcing a Cultural Frame

The purpose of enforcing this cultural frame went beyond the symbolic-discursive realm. The good beating was not just about keeping up appearances. It had, and *should have*, concrete material consequences. The relations it supported demanded that the fruits of the wife’s labor accrue to the husband:

Since the father's the head, his food should be set aside, you know? If there's meat, it's set aside for him, especially the fatter parts. The food for the father should be better than the rest, right? If it's baked maize, the sweeter maize goes to the father. It can't just be left for the children or mother to eat. The higher standard of everything must go to him, the head. *That's why we mustn't forget who's the head.* [younger, less wealthy women, Kigoma]

Discussants who supported beating to maintain these relations were unequivocal that being "the head" meant having privileged access to material resources. Regardless of the type of resource, the structure remained the same: Wealth should accrue to him.

If you send your children to school and make them study, there's something they'll bring their father at home, because he's the head. You the father are given gifts. Just like when a goat is killed, the children will bring you the best part: *All the good things gained, they should come to you, the head.* [older, less wealthy men, Arumeru]

Participants supported the discrepancy between who did the work and who reaped the benefits explicitly, on the basis that this was what marriage was about. No correspondence was necessary between who did the work and who benefited from it:

Robert: The way I see it, I'm the one who married her. I proposed to her. So I'm the one who deserves to take the wealth. I take it from the house to me. In short, I'm the head. It comes to me.

Rudo: Yes, and even if, imagine, we truly, truly found the wealth together—like, we cultivated, or worked for it, together—still, the income comes to my pocket.

Rafeli: Your pocket. So, if she doesn't keep busy farming, you'd need to beat her. You know, if she says she'll go farm, but doesn't, then . . .

Robert: Yes, laziness! Plain laziness! Gotta beat her. [older Christian men, Arumeru]

Here a beating is deemed necessary if that is what it takes to maintain the structure whereby the wife works and the husband benefits from her work. The current structure in Tanzania, as mentioned, is one in which men work half as much as women on the farm, yet control the income from it. Thus, the good beating supports not only gender as interactive

performance but also as a structure of material exploitation.

The symbolic gender beliefs that the beating enforces have concrete material implications on the structural level. The fact that this emerges from an analysis of the social rules guiding interaction supports the claim that analyzing gender as a primary cultural frame on the interaction level can throw light also on structure-level gender dynamics (Ridgeway 2007).

CONCLUSION

This study has several implications for how wife-beating relates to gender. First, it shows how interactional, structural, and ideological levels of gender were explicitly linked to wife-beating as locally understood and supported by respondents. Thus wife-beating is gendered regardless of how many violent acts wives perpetrate against husbands in gender-symmetry surveys. Second, it shows how the violence is more than based on gender: It is intricately intertwined with it. Gender norms do support the violence, but violence also enforces the performance of gender, maintains gender hierarchies, and is in itself an enactment of gender. As such, and finally, the good beating, being simultaneously both a practicing of gender and a gendering practice, shows how practices and practicing fit together. All this is missed by nonfeminist approaches that consider violence gender-based simply insofar as it targets women.

Thus, the findings evidence the shortcomings of addressing the violence as based on this socially constructed yet naturalized sex category. The problem lies not in the term GBV itself—the violence is deeply gendered—but in its depoliticizing adoption. This article shows the violence as intrinsically political. To intervene against wife-beating as it is locally understood and supported is to intervene against a means of maintaining structural privileges for one social group. Hence, the effectiveness of efforts to address the violence by side-stepping marital power relations is illusory. In contrast, when interventions against this gender–violence nexus are undertaken with the understanding that to challenge accepted violence is to challenge the enforcement of an exploitative structure, policymakers and practitioners are better equipped to handle resistance and backlash.

In addition to contributing to GBV policy and research, the study speaks to the broader applicability of gender theory in the Global South. While quantitative and atheoretical research can document the existence and prevalence of social phenomena, it cannot help us understand how gender inequalities are extended and maintained; a theoretically informed

analysis of qualitative data can. By looking for commonalities across internal difference, while assuming neither sameness nor difference with “the West,” and by letting resonance with local data determine which parts of Western theory to use, the most egregious mistakes of imperialist social science can be avoided without abandoning attempts to make theoretical sense of local power relations. Using theory about hegemonic gender beliefs to analyze talk about wife-beating in Tanzania sheds light on how force and consent collude there to extend gender inequalities. Tanzania is by no means identical to the Global North in the actual form these coercion–complicity dynamics take, or in the content of dominant gender norms; nevertheless these theoretical constructs aid in understanding partner violence. To the extent that the theory resonates with the data and enables an improved understanding of the local context, this study shows that drawing on the theoretical heritage of “doing gender” can aid comprehension of social phenomena in the Global South.

NOTES

1. Muray Straus (2010) explained his Dating Violence Survey findings in Tanzania by saying, “People are just quicker to resort to violence in general in these countries.” Felson (2002) claims that violence against women rates correlate with rates of violence against men across nations, and that wife-beaters are *generally* violent.

2. It is absent from the Penal Code beyond general interpersonal violence (Section 135). The Law of Marriage Act (1971) forbids inter-spouse “corporal punishment” without definition or penalty. The Constitution forbids courts from enforcing gender equality (Article 7.2).

3. All names are pseudonyms.

4. Characteristics in brackets are those shared by members in that group. As explained in the Methods section, the finding each excerpt illustrates is not limited to respondents with those characteristics.

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