

Enter the Manosphere: Mixed Languages, Misogyny and Gendered Discourse in Kenya's Online Spaces

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Abstract

On November 10, 2024, Qatari news channel Al Jazeera released a YouTube feature called "Kenya's Exploding 'Manosphere'" decrying the rise of online spaces in Kenya, populated by loudmouths, shock artists, and unapologetic chauvinists." The report drew reactions of anger, frustration, and derision from a portion of Kenyan commenters, who viewed it as an unfair attack on popular masculinity influencer Eric Amunga, also known as Amerix, and a blind imposition of Western gender realities onto Kenyan masculinity discourse. This paper situates those reactions within a broader literary and linguistic inquiry. Through a thematic analysis of the online comments, it identifies recurring articulations of masculinity in popular Kenyan discourse that Al Jazeera's framing overlooks. It completes a qualitative reading grounded in critical discourse analysis and social constructionist theory of 20 tweets made by Amerix in 2024, 2 episodes of the Man Talk KE podcast, and 2 episodes of Iko Nini to reveal how Kenyan men use language today to perform and negotiate masculinities in digital spaces and how foreign framing obscures this. Finally, it recommends that scholars undertake a more nuanced inquiry into the languages of African masculinities.

Key Words: Manosphere, Masculinity Discourse, Masculinities, Language, Digital Discourse

INTRODUCTION

Despite the many and meaningful efforts by scholars to decolonize epistemologies, Western framings remain the default lens through which we view the world. This treatment of knowledge creates what N'Diaye (1981) calls "cultural expropriation," in which African phenomena are constricted and contorted to fit Western truths, then exported back to African society.

The most recent iteration of cultural expropriation to hit the continent is the 'African manosphere.' Media agents and researchers have begun to apply the 'manosphere' tag to African and, specifically, Kenyan masculinity discourses,

labeling them 'dangerous,' 'misogynistic,' and 'anti-feminist.' Reports like Al Jazeera's link Kenya's "growing manosphere" to the country's rising femicide cases. While abounding in merit, these assessments of African masculinity discourse draw primarily from Western works and sources. Awwal (2024) wonders how such inquiries that ignore non-white perspectives and do not include or account for non-white variants of the manosphere movement can possibly delineate black men's gender discourse. His re-evaluation of the black manosphere produces a new definition of black masculinity discourse, in which racial and economic realities collide with gender debates to create a culturally – and politically – unique black men's movement.

This paper attempts a similar, if not more nuanced, treatment of the so-called African manosphere. It argues that the post-factum categorization of African masculinity discourse under the manosphere presents a familiar yet pressing crisis: the imposition of Western concepts onto African discourse practices that already have vocabularies and histories. It contends that this crisis threatens to decontextualize and obscure key avenues of meaning-making and identity creation present in African male-oriented online spaces and their languages.

The goal is not to remove African masculinity discourse from its global context or to deny the anti-gender rhetoric that often dominates male-oriented digital spaces, but to situate male conversations at the interface of local practice and imported trends. Using critical discourse analysis as a tool and theory, and borrowing from the theory of social constructionism, the paper analyzes the language of three Kenyan male-oriented digital spaces to decode and contextualize the meanings embedded in Kenyan masculinity rhetoric. It studies how men in Kenya use linguistic acts, local languages, and social interaction to produce, co-produce, negotiate, and perform masculinities in online spaces and how their creations diverge from or converge with global manosphere discourse.

THE GLOBAL AND KENYAN MANOSPHERE(S)

The United Nations (2025) defines the 'manosphere' as a "loose network of communities that claim to address men's struggles but often promote harmful advice and attitudes." It asserts that members of the manosphere share a common hatred of women and feminism, often using extremist language to normalize gendered violence. Manosphere discourse, the UN argues, is not about men's struggles, but their imagined social, cultural, and political oppression.

The word *manosphere* is a portmanteau of 'man' and 'sphere,' and a play on 'blogosphere,' an informal internet word that means 'an online network of

blogs.' It first appeared online in 2009 in a handful of blog posts as a shorthand for a growing collection of niche male-oriented online communities dedicated to topics like finance, gaming, relationships, sex, and fitness (Ribiero et al., 2021; Nagle, 2017; Ging, 2019). According to Ging (2019), the word entered popular lexicon around 2012 when journalists and scholars began to use it to describe men who had committed acts of violence and hostility against women.

Although the term is new, the ideology of the manosphere has existed for decades. Ribiero et al (2021) and Ging (2019) link it to the men's liberation movements of the 1900s that critiqued the traditional male gender roles of the time. According to Ribiero et al., around the 1970s, the men at the helm of these movements began to turn their attention to and blame their grievances on feminist and women-empowerment movements. This villainization of women and feminism set the foundation for modern manosphere discourse. Several online men's rights and pick-up artist platforms formed between the late 1900s and early 2000s, as evidenced by the 2013 release of *The Manosphere: A New Hope for Masculinity, How the Red Pill, Game, and the Internet Are Revalorizing Masculinity for the 21st Century*. The book, by pornography marketer Ian Ironwood, collects blogs, articles, and forum discussions on the manosphere and "delves deeply into gender relations from the masculine side" to show that "men today are struggling, searching, healing, and fighting" (Ironwood, 2013). Ironwood uses the term "red pill" in the book to describe men waking up to a new reality and redefining masculinity in a "post-modern, post-industrial, post-feminist world." He champions the manosphere, defining it as "a loose collection of blogs, books, and forums about men, male issues, and masculine interests."

Since its formation, a special jargon has developed within the manosphere to debate these issues away from what members consider a gynocentric world. Hodapp (2017) and Ging (2019) identify key terms and themes that constitute this jargon, such as the 'red pill theory' Ironwood mentions in his book. Within the manosphere, a man who has "taken the red pill" has "awoken to the reality of their oppression" and can redefine their masculinity away from the confines of female hypergamy (Ironwood, 2013). Other common manosphere terms include 'alpha,' 'beta,' soy boy,' and 'simp.' Soy boys and simps are blue-pilled men (those not awoken to the reality of their oppression) who give into the whims of women and oblige to their many needs and wants (Hopton, 2021).

Mainstream views of the manosphere differ greatly from Ironwood's. Like the UN, many researchers define the manosphere as a loose network of online forums, groups, websites, and social platforms characterized by anti-feminist,

misogynist, and masculinist ideology (Hodapp, 2017; Jane, 2018; Marwick & Lewis, 2017; Kennedy-Kollar, 2024). Hodapp (2017) and Suguira (2021) identify five communities that make up the manosphere: Pick Up Artists (PUA), Men's Rights Activists (MRA), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), Fathers' Rights Groups (FRG), and INCELS (Involuntary Celibates). While individual ideologies differ, scholars claim these groups are united in their belief that society is skewed against men and that feminism and women's empowerment movements endanger men's rights (Van Valkenburgh, 2019). Nagle (2017) and Zuckerberg (2018) link manosphere ideology to alt- and far-right rhetoric, a claim Ironwood rejects. Several scholars also link manosphere communities to the online harassment of women, gendered violence, and even mass shootings (Dewey, 2014; Lewis, 2019; Tye, 2021). Farrell et al (2019) see it as a radicalization tool through which young, lonely men are indoctrinated into misogynistic and anti-women beliefs.

The most popular figure associated with the global manosphere is Andrew Tate, an American and British businessman, social media personality, and self-proclaimed misogynist who has been banned from multiple social media platforms for his misogynistic viewpoints. Tate has a large social media following and has been dubbed "the King of Toxic Masculinity" by mainstream media (Sinmaz, 2023). He is currently being charged with rape, human trafficking, and organized crime in the US and Romania. Other key manosphere figures include Jordan Peterson, Roosh V, and Adin Ross (Wiki).

Several online platforms also market themselves as belonging to or representing the manosphere, including controversial podcast Fresh & Fit, which was demonetized by YouTube in 2023 for "repeated policy violations" (*Business Insider*, 2023). The podcast, which claims to address "females, fitness, and finances," has stirred mixed feelings over the years, amassing over 1.4 million followers and alienating an even greater number. The hosts, Myron Gains and Walter Weeks, advise men on how to be more attractive to women through financial planning, fitness training, and mindset change. They often host female guests whom Myron has been known to regularly berate, verbally and physically abuse, and kick off the show (Medium, 2024).

Multiple scholars disagree with the manosphere's mainstream portrayal and recommend an alternate and more nuanced inquiry of the subject. Jane (2018) notes a sense of vulnerability and isolation in how young men frame manosphere conversations and warns against large-scale readings. However, she does not defend the manosphere or its rhetoric. Other commentators consider the manosphere narrative an attack on free speech (Steele & Judge, 2025).

This paper takes the position the manosphere is a Western social concept with some but not many direct applications to African society. It does not attempt to expand or refute any of these definitions, situates the global manosphere within the Kenyan context. Few African scholars have performed a direct inquiry into the African or Kenyan manosphere as of the writing of this paper. Nigerian scholar Jegede's (2025) comparison of the language of the #MeToo movement to manosphere discourse is monumental in that it reveals the role of language in contemporary gender debates. However, it is not situated on the African continent.

Interestingly, the term *manosphere* did not exist in the Kenyan lexicon until 2020. Its earliest use is in a blog post dated February 26, 2020, titled "*The Manosphere is Tired of Boring Sex Tapes*," in which blogger Slade Jeff uses it to denote some kind of online male community. His placement of *manosphere* in the title and nowhere else in the post suggests his audience's relative familiarity with it. It also suggests that some fringe forums and platforms may have been using the word at the time. As a cultural phenomenon, the manosphere gained mainstream attention in Kenya between 2022 and 2023, when top publications started to publish articles and reports referencing a "growing digital misogyny." Notable works from this time include "*Red Pill: Explosion of Digital Sexism*" (Daily Nation, 2022) and "*Why Are Young Men in Kenya So Angry at Women? A Manosphere Crisis Unfolds*" (Daily Nation, 2022). A 2023 article by *The Standard* on failing millennial marriages blames, among other things, "a growing 'manosphere' community where men are becoming more vocal about their resistance to feministic ideas" (*The Standard*, 2023).

The first in-depth analysis of the Kenyan manosphere appeared in the British Newspaper *The Guardian* on October 2, 2023. Written by Kenyan journalist Caroline Kimeu, it defines the manosphere as a "loosely connected network of websites and social media platforms that promote misogyny online" and post a barrage of misogynistic tweets on X designed to denigrate, shame, and endanger women, including by encouraging men to assert control over them. Kimeu notes a shared jargon within this manosphere, in which words like "gynocentric," "red pill ideology," "simp," and "soy boy" are popular. Members of the manosphere, she says, use these words to disseminate "damaging narratives" grounded in the belief that women have socially and culturally subjugated men.

Another manosphere analysis, released about a year after Kimeu's, links these narratives to the country's growing femicide and gendered violence cases (CNN, 2024). The study is called "*The Cost to Women of the Overlooked Rise of Kenya's Manosphere*" and was conducted by CNN through a funded project dubbed "As Equals," which "aims to reveal what systemic gender

inequality looks like.” In it, CNN claims to have studied “the Kenyan arm of the more global ‘manosphere’” between January 1, 2020, and March 21, 2024, using keyword research to reveal discourse trends, and found that while the manosphere is a largely Western concern, the global South, and Kenya in particular, has a growing manosphere problem. It offers as evidence a noted growth in the use of manosphere terms like ‘soy boy,’ ‘simp,’ ‘red pill ideology,’ and Kenyan variants like “kafukuswi” on Kenyan X within the period of study. However, it cautions the wholesale reading of these findings, given that the study’s keyword research method failed to account for context (CNN, 2024).

The CNN feature stands out, nonetheless, because it puts two faces to the Kenyan manosphere. It identifies the “torchbearers” of the Kenyan manosphere movement as Eric Amunga, also known as Amerix, and former radio presenter Andrew Kibe. Andrew Kibe is almost certainly the “shock-jock” Al Jazeera refers to in her YouTube report. The radio-host-turned-podcaster is popular for a brash kind of gender rhetoric that media commentators have labeled “harsh, reductionist,” and “toxic” (Ghafla, 2024). His unfiltered and often rude takes on women and Kenyan gender relations have seen him de-platformed from YouTube several times, including once by CNN request, but also gain a loyal following of over half a million Kenyans. In one podcast, while wearing a t-shirt emblazoned with “emotional men are women,” he claims phrases like “woman pastor,” “female therapist,” and “woman boss” are oxymoron because women cannot hold power over men. He says this in reference to popular female Kenyan gospel musician Size 8 being ordained as a minister. Kibe also taunts Size 8’s husband for supporting her pastoral aspirations, calling him a *Kafukuswi*, a Sheng word of his own making which loosely translates to ‘soy boy’ or ‘simp.’

Amerix, meanwhile, is a quieter, albeit more prominent version of Kibe. A reproductive health specialist, fitness coach, and social media personality, he is known for his strong and often controversial takes on health, relationships, and masculinity. He claims to use “unique wellness plans” to “[help] men regain their health, pride, self-esteem and a sense of masculinity” and has been called severally a ‘fat loss’ coach due to his strong takes on body weight and weight loss programs. Amerix’s ideologies show strong traditional and religious leanings. His most popular campaign is a “ban” on masturbation among his followers because it “contaminate[s] their souls” (Amerix, 2025). He also teaches financial and sexual discipline, calling to men to seize opportunities and pursue excellence and money instead of women. In one post, he warns his followers not to:

sleep with a woman older than them
sleep with a woman who has several body counts
sleep with sluts
forgive a cheating wife
watch pornography
masturbate
lick a woman's vagina
have sex with animals

Amerix's most popular invention is the 'MasculinitySaturday' hashtag, which he uses to drive masculinity discourse on X every week (*Daily Nation*, 2020). He calls it a "space for men ... where [they] gather to share their challenges and rediscover their gender roles." Amerix claims to have launched the space in 2019 after one of his patients reached out to him for help navigating a depressive episode and suicidal thoughts, saying he has used it since then to share his thoughts on masculinity. #MasculinitySaturday is the subject of the Al Jazeera report that inspired this paper. Al Jazeera calls it a "weekly ritual" for the over 2 million followers who engage with Amerix's masculinity discourse on X every Saturday. #MasculinitySaturday is one of Kenya's most-trending hashtags.

Multiple scholars and commentators, particularly those with feminist leanings, have criticized Kibe's comments and Amerix's teachings as misleading and harmful (Schmidt, 2022). They have associated them with rising "right-wing disinformation" movements (*The Republic*, 2025) that leverage young men's need for guidance and community to spread harmful authoritarian and anti-women rhetoric. Amerix says he does not mind the backlash since "women are naturally reactionary and hence emotional" (*The Standard*, 2023). Ghafla (2024) suggests a less reactive assessment of the two, wherein we ask why Amerix and Kibe's rhetoric are so popular with Kenyan men. It concludes that these men speak to a portion of Kenyan men whose masculinities and, therefore, identities are threatened by feminism and changing gender roles. Kibe's followers value his honesty and lack of regard for political correctness, often branding his style of rhetoric "refreshing" (Ghafla, 2024). Amerix's followers, on the other hand, find safety in the traditional ideals he espouses. All these people are renegotiating their masculinities online and in real-time.

OF AFRICAN MASCULINITIES AND MASCULINITY DISCOURSE

While Amerix's and Kibe's platforms are wildly popular, they are two in an extensive collection of Kenyan digital spaces dedicated to men's issues. Platforms like *Mashada*, *Wazua*, and *KenyaTalk*, launched in 2000, 2009, and

2014, long offered discursive avenues for Kenyan men to dissect issues of politics, finance, relationships, health, and gender relations in uniquely Kenyan registers. More recent additions to this repertoire include popular podcasts *Man Talk KE*, launched in 2020, and *Iko Nini*. These platforms and the conversations they foster follow in a long tradition of Kenyan men congregating in barber shops, gyms, pubs, sports bars, betting shops, and video game arcades to discuss the politics of the day, complain about their wives, and share business ideas (Schmidt, 2022). The conversations held in these spaces, online or otherwise, form avenues through which men create, perform, refute, and negotiate African masculinities.

The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines masculinity as “the characteristics that are traditionally thought to be typical of or suitable for men.” There is debate over whether masculinity is synonymous with the biological male sex or a distinct social construct (Martin et al, 2010). Some scholars argue that to be male is to be masculine (Grosz, 1995; Heyman & Giles, 2006), while others, informed by gender theory, argue that masculinity is a performance influenced by biology, society, culture, and context. In her book, *The Continuing Significance of Gender*, Constance Shehan (2018) argues that masculinity is a social construct. Societies assign meaning to behaviors, labeling them “masculine” or “feminine” and then reward members who affirm these meanings. For example, in the Maasai community, lion hunting, or *olomaiyo*, is a male-coded behavior. Young men who participate in a hunt are considered brave warriors, and the man who strikes a lion first receives community honor, lifelong respect, and female admiration (*Maasai Association*, 2007).

Because gendered traits and the rewards associated with them are subjective, masculinity is a socially-negotiated identity that varies across cultures, time, and social groups. What is masculine in Nigeria may not be masculine in Kenya, and masculinity standards among the Maasai, who live close to game parks and can hunt lions, differ from masculinity standards among the Luo, who live in Kenya’s lake region. Similarly, what was masculine for a group of men in 1938 may not inform the masculinities of their descendants today. Therefore, masculinity can be defined as the socially-negotiated behaviors considered acceptable for men, which vary across cultures and contexts.

It thus follows that different cultures have different understandings of masculinity. Western cultures define masculinity relative to femininity. Men and women are mirror images of each other; what one is, the other is not. This means that power cannot be shared but remains the domain of one side. Where the hegemonic man is strong, assertive, dominant, and logical (Phoenix & Frosh, 2001), the hegemonic woman is delicate, submissive,

compliant, and emotional (Bose et al, 2024). If the woman, due to the social and political gains of feminism, becomes strong, assertive, and independent, the man becomes weak, submissive, and subjugated, hence the need for a manosphere to “deliver him.” Masculinity in Western contexts is thus a performance of how “not feminine” a man is (Connell, 1995). This binary logic is evident in how researchers define the manosphere. Kessler (2020) and Ging (2019) refer to manosphere ideology as 'anti-woman' and 'anti-feminist,' and Horta Ribiero et al (2019) contend that the manosphere exists as a reaction and in opposition to feminism. The language of the manosphere is also described as 'anti-feminist,' 'anti-women,' and 'misogynistic' or woman-hating.

In contrast, African cultures tie multiple meanings to masculinity. Uchendu (2008) identifies several dimensions of African masculinity tied to social roles and collective responsibility. In his assessment of several African communities, he finds that African men are defined through family (marriage and children), community, economic occupation, spirituality (relationship with God and the environment), and competition. A man may be defined familiarly by marriage status, number of children, and ability to provide for his dependents (Silberschmidt, 2001) or communally by his age set, initiation rites, community associations, and ability to fulfill social responsibilities (Ouzgane & Morell, 2005). Spiritually, a man's masculinity may lie in his regard for traditions, rites, God, and the ancestors or in his mastery of natural resources, as in the hunting traditions of the Maasai, herding, or farming (Hodgson, 1999).

Masculinity definitions also vary by era. Post-colonization, African masculinities are informed by the lingering impacts of colonization, decolonization efforts, Western religion, urbanization, neoliberal politics, and transnational migration (Pasura & Christou, 2017). These political events induce social restructurings that alter how African men of a given time produce gender identities (Morrell & Ouzgane, 2005). Colonization and Christianity, for instance, produced and perpetuated the idea of the “male breadwinner” so that the post-colonial African man defined his masculinity by his ability to provide a living for his family. The economic upsets of the 2000s, the increasing number of women in the blue collar jobs, and the resultant joblessness and poverty have shaken this identity, forcing many African men to restructure their masculinities.

Geography is another factor that informs African masculinities. In a study of African migrant men in London, Pasura and Christou (2017) find that African men who move to foreign countries are forced to reimagine and reconstruct their ideas of manhood to form “respectable forms of masculinity” that fit

into their new societies. This usually means, among other things, navigating the stereotypes a community has about African men and masculinities. The internet, social media, and the spread of neoliberal politics have made this transnational dilemma universal so that African men on the internet must restructure their masculinities to cater to global audiences and perceptions.

These conditions paint a picture of an African masculinity that is dynamic and fluid, open to influence and change. Western analyses like to present this as a crisis, but many scholars find this view myopic. Another way to look at it is that African men are constantly finding ways to adapt their masculinities to rapidly changing realities. In an ethnographic study of migrant men in Johannesburg, Musariri and Moyer (2020) find that rather than descend into chaos, as Western analyses would suggest (Davies, 2007; Gibbs, 2014), African men thrust into racial, economic, and political upheaval carve out enclaved urban spaces, where art and conversation form avenues for masculinity renegotiation. This dynamic quality of African masculinity discourse generates what Musariri and Moyer describe as “multiple and unstable masculinities in a perpetual state of becoming.” Russel (2019) observes the same in his study of Ugandan men living with HIV.

Contrary to studies of the continent that attribute low medication intake to African masculinities, Russel's examination uncovers a conscious renegotiating of masculinities among male HIV patients that improves medication uptake. The men in Russel's study redefine themselves as fathers and important members of the community, so that getting HIV medication becomes a practice in staying alive and regaining their strength so they can provide for their families and participate in the community, rather than a sign of weakness. This restructuring, Russel concludes, signifies an innate agency of African men to “refashion [their] masculine identities to match their new realities.”

Dynamism is true of Kenyan masculinities as well. Kenyan men, like other African men, define and redefine their masculinities in relation to the social, political, cultural, economic, and geographic realities of the day. A key concern for the modern Kenyan man is reconciling remnant patriarchal and religious definitions of masculinity that cast him in the role of breadwinner with the female empowerment movements of the 21st Century that threaten this role (Silberschmidt, 2001). He must perform this reconciliation at the intersection of economic instability, resurging traditional values, and globalization. The interplay of these factors creates a “vulnerability and marginalization that produces complex forms of male identity” (Ouzgane & Morell, 2005).

Amidst all the moving pieces of masculinity discourse, language remains the most potent tool through which Kenyan men negotiate. Like the discourse it drives, this language is dynamic and colorful, featuring metaphors, euphemisms, allegories, and rhetorical devices strewn across different registers and platforms. Several scholars have studied how it shows up in masculinity discourse in magazines (Yieke et al., 2020), newspapers (Kamiri, 2017), and music (Nduku, 2020). Omollo (2015) investigates how language choice and lexical tools like noun modifiers, metaphors, euphemisms, and pronouns reinforce and reject patriarchal masculinity standards through masculinity discourse on Kenyan radio. In her study of radio conversations, she notes the placement of modifiers such as “real” before the noun “men” to form definitions of the hegemonic Kenyan male and others. These choices also reveal hierarchy within male groups, with ‘traditional’ men being deemed more masculine than “*wanaume wa siku hizi*” (modern men). This phrasing establishes ruggedness as a feature of desirable masculinity. Additionally, Omollo notes elements of aggression in euphemisms, such as when men associate masculinity with bulls and cocks, creating a definition of “the man” as dominant and confrontational. Speakers also use pronouns like “we” or “they” to identify with or separate from certain male groups and masculinity presentations.

Another study by Gichohi and Nirmala (2022) reveals how Kenyan men use metaphors to negotiate masculinities on X, formerly Twitter. The researchers zero in on descriptions that establish Kenyan men as “stoic,” “savage,” “dominant,” and “self-victimizing,” an approach they believe generates a “toxic masculinity” designed to initiate a return to patriarchal ideals. Gichohi and Nirmala base their work on the theory of hegemonic masculinity by R. W. Cornell (1995), which attempts to explain how men achieve and maintain dominance over women and other feminine identities in society. While some scholars believe this theory offers strong conceptual bases upon which to study gender discourse in mass media, many, including this paper, criticize it for building arguments on stereotypical depictions of “the man” as stoic, dominant, tough, brutal, and violent and neglecting positive or differential expressions of masculinity (John, 1994; Scott, 2015). This informed analysis is based on the theories of critical discourse analysis and social constructionism.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as presented by Norman Fairclough (1992, 1995, 2019), views language as a social practice that informs and is informed by power relations. It is interested in the interactions between language and society, particularly in how language contributes to and fits within different social realities. Fairclough argues that language, as the primary avenue through which ideologies are formed, negotiated, and disseminated, is key to establishing, restructuring, reinforcing, and undoing

the power relations that exist in society. Kenyan masculinity discourse exists at the interface of many power struggles: struggles between men and women, between male hierarchies and conflicting masculinities, and between local and global epistemologies. The language of Kenyan masculinity conversations offers a cipher through which we can decode the hierarchies and asymmetries that underlie male-male and male-female relationships in Kenya. Similarly, the imported language through which Kenyan masculinities are repackaged as part of the manosphere can unearth the risks and impacts of epistemological hegemony and cultural expropriation on African expressions.

CDA involves a three-dimensional framework that calls on researchers to analyze (1) texts, (2) how texts are produced and consumed, and (3) the place of these texts in society and culture. This approach allows us to study the conversations of Kenyan men, the channels through which these conversations are shared, and the impact they have on local and global gender debates. CDA, thus, provides a basis upon which we can study the language of “Kenyan manospheres” within the context of Kenya’s local and transnational social realities and understand how Kenyan men use language to establish, reinforce, and reject masculinity presentations.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND GENDER PERFORMATIVITY

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and social constructionist theory reinforce each other. CDA affirms that language is not neutral; it produces, reproduces, and resists social realities. Social constructionism, meanwhile, posits that gender, and masculinity by extension, are not fixed but are constructed through social interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), discourse, practice, and gesture (Butler: *Concept of Gender Performativity*, 1990).

By viewing the language of Kenyan manospheres through a social constructionist lens, we can interpret the revealed social realities not as fixed representations of the Kenyan man but as dynamic performances situated within a changing reality. We can use CDA to trace the linguistic choices and themes through which Kenyan men negotiate masculinities in online spaces like #MasculinitySaturday and social constructionism to show that Kenyan masculinity is under constant construction in these platforms. This should reveal Kenyan masculinity discourse as a complex negotiation that may overlap with but cannot fit into Western and other foreign framings. Representation is a key concern in studies of African gender and gender expressions. Foreign reports like Al Jazeera’s impose Western framings of misogyny and extremism onto Kenyan phenomena, which may not resonate with Kenyan audiences. CDA centers ideology, allowing us to investigate

how Kenyan men use language to repurpose and localize manosphere ideals and vocabularies into unique masculinity conversations.

Furthermore, the language of Kenyan masculinity is varied and layered. Kenyan men use English, Swahili, Sheng, and local languages to negotiate masculinities online. Conversations often feature code switching and layered cultural references that lose meaning when read outside of context. CDA's framework allows us to explore and expand all these complexities within their social contexts. CDA also allows us to situate Kenyan masculinity discourse within its historical, social, and cultural contexts. A Western reading of the "Kenyan manosphere" ignores the impacts of colonization, globalization, economic stress, shifting gender roles, neoliberal politics, and resurgent traditional values on Kenyan masculinity creation. CDA prevents a reading of Amerix's tweets or Iko Nini podcasts as isolated texts but as additions to a broader conversation.

To reveal the meanings and social identities embedded in the language of Kenyan masculinity discourse, this paper exposes four texts to Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional critical discourse analysis framework. The texts are drawn from four data sources:

1. 20 tweets by Amerix posted on X in 2024. Specifically, those made under the MasculinitySaturday hashtag that mentioned topics of leadership, relationships, provision, and economic and sexual discipline.
2. 2 long-form episodes of the *Man Talk KE* podcast focused on men's mental health and emotional well-being.
3. 2 episodes of the *Iko Nini* podcast, featuring masculinity debates on fatherhood, discipline, provision, co-parenting, and "toxicity" labels.
4. 2 reports on the Kenyan manosphere that use foreign framings, particularly Al Jazeera's Listening Post feature "Kenya's Exploding 'Manosphere'" and Kenyans' reactions to it, as well as CNN's research on the harms of Kenya's growing manosphere.

An analysis of Kenyan masculinity discourse reveals a rich tapestry of linguistic formations and social identities in constant flux. Kenyan men are having lively and often conflicting conversations online, through podcasts and social media, using different styles of expression and language to define what it means to be a man in modern-day Africa. These conversations, which are sometimes grouped under the manosphere, are far from linear or uniform. They reveal unique tensions between the global, the local, the traditional, and the modern.

One of the strongest threads in Kenyan masculinity discourse is the role of men as providers. Economic agency—having money, land, or assets—remains a key marker of manhood among many Kenyan men. For Amerix, this role is non-negotiable. He paints the image of the hegemonic African man as a self-sufficient patriarch who builds wealth, invests, buys land, and provides a comfortable living for his family. Performing this duty, Amerix posits, secures the African man's authority in the home, giving him license to act without apology or consent, including to take up multiple wives. One tweet sums up his sentiments nicely:

Men, at no point should your woman wake up before you. Always be the first to wake up. Even if there is nothing to do, look for something to do. This is important. Allowing her to wake up earlier is losing your frame & ceding your leadership authority.

Here, he extends the role of provision beyond materiality into a performance in control and discipline.

Not surprisingly, not all men share Amerix's views on provision. The hosts of the *Man Talk KE* podcast take a more grounded approach to the topic. While they agree that providing for one's family is central to African manhood, they acknowledge that it is not always easy to do so in Kenya's economy. They leave room for concession, placing the burden of economic instability on capitalism, not men. One of the hosts, Oscar, recounts the story of a security guard who hurries to get discharged from the hospital after a minor car accident so he can make his next shift. Oscar admires this man and his ability to put his family's needs before his, up to the point of endangering his health. In his view, providing for one's family is an act of sacrifice and resilience in a tough world. Other groups reject this view still. In one comment to the *Man Talk KE* podcast, a female audience member dismisses this approach to provision as old-school and harmful. She laments that when men put everyone else before themselves and their health, they endanger the very people they are trying to provide for, implying a parallel between the provider role and domestic violence.

All these conversations resonate and clash with foreign framings in certain respects. CNN's reporting on the Kenyan manosphere blames unemployment and economic failure for fueling the anger of Kenyan men towards women. This crisis framing depicts Kenyan men as victims of the economy. The said men resist this definition, claiming it obscures the resilience and creativity through which they navigate harsh economic times. The provider role, they argue, is not a burden, but a source of pride and a primary marker of Kenyan masculine identity. What emerges, then, is a layered portrait in which the provider identity is being pulled in three

directions. Locally, provision is either a site of authority, according to Amerix's calculations, or of purpose, according to *Man Talk KE*'s standards. Globally, it is a crisis that creates tension between men who want to but cannot provide and women who are increasingly able to provide for themselves (Schmidt, 2024). The average Kenyan man's provider identity lies at the intersection of these three.

Interestingly, Kenyan men appear as self-improvers. Much of Amerix's masculinity content is packaged as self-improvement advice meant to unlock a man's greatest potential. He says:

A MAN is a status you earn. You will not become a MAN just because you have a penis. You become a MAN when you: - Overcome challenges - Outgrow setbacks - Own responsibility - Organize your life.

Amerix frames many of his tweets as listicles or to-do lists and insinuates that completing them is the path to achieving the status of ultimate masculinity. Many of his "lists" deal with losing weight, building wealth, and gaining "control of the household."

The hosts of *Iko Nini* place equal value on self-improvement, but their framing is more personal. In the episode "Masculinity Coach, *Crime, Kajwang & Diddy False Accusations*," they talk about personal hygiene and responsibility. Their conversations about men taking a bath regularly, changing their underwear, and using deodorant mark a departure from traditional discourse patterns where such topics would have been considered taboo. Their view is also a direct contradiction of the definition of a "real African man" as rugged and unkempt, popularized in the local Kenyan saying "mwanaume ni jasho," "a man is his sweat."

Over at *Man Talk KE*, the hosts frame self-improvement in terms of mental health. They talk about "measuring one's wrath," learning to walk away from dicey situations, and asking for help. This therapeutic and healing approach to masculinity challenges the traditional view of the African man as rigid, violent, and stoic and paints a picture of a more health-aware man.

The framings of Kenyan male conversations reveal two social gender hierarchies. The first, male-to-female, is the most obvious. Amerix regards women with an ambivalence that borders on distaste. In his world, women are not only secondary to men, they are distractions and tokens that thrive "on destruction." Amerix's view of gender relations is so binary that it reads like a reproduction of Western discourse. In one tweet, he says:

Men, A man derives satisfaction when CONSTRUCTING. A woman derives satisfaction when destroying.

Amerix labels men who ask women for their numbers as failures and berates those who celebrate Valentine's Day as "*simps & orbiters*." He seems to draw his ideologies from traditional gender ideals, such as when he says men who apologize are weak. "Does your father apologize to you or your mother?" He asks. This is a complete paradox in his personal life, where he is known to have four wives.

The hosts of Man Talk KE, meanwhile, believe the male-to-female gender hierarchy is a fabrication of capitalist society. They argue that conversations that frame men as superior to women and vice versa take small samples of people thriving under patriarchy or capitalism and pit them against the rest of society. Their representations, they say, do not reflect the life of the average man or woman and are designed to create community conflict.

The second gender hierarchy, that within men's groups and identities, appears in how the men define "real men." Amerix's teachings espouse and promote a hegemonic Kenyan man who is patriarchal and strong, domineering, and wealthy. He places this man high in the social ladder above "orbiters and simps" who pine after women, sleep all day, and fail to accumulate wealth. *Man Talk KE* hosts reveal similar, albeit nuanced, views in their conversations about wealth and family backgrounds. Men who come from wealthy families are considered "soft" and unskilled in the ways of the world because they have never had to work to fulfill the provider role that is so central to Kenyan masculinity.

Men are also presented as sexual beings, as evidenced by the frequency with which they mention sex and female attraction in their conversations. Amerix teeters between demanding sexual purity of his followers and asking them to assert their masculinity in bed. The hosts of *Iko Nini* prescribe sexual purity for women but not men. They constantly discuss desire, attraction, women's bodies, masturbation, and arousal while calling out women who talk about their sex lives on social media. *Iko Nini's* host, Mwaf, finds it degrading and disrespectful when a woman shares her "body count" (how many men she has slept with) with the public and even considers this indiscretion grounds for divorce or breakup. He says that a woman who becomes a wife gains some level of respect, revealing traditional views on marriage. In one podcast, he and his guest paint a picture of "the man" as jealous and aggressive, needing the assurance of no competition, to feel secure in a relationship. Mwaf also relates sexual experience to his masculinity, declaring himself "more experienced than his dad" because of his easy access to sex and women.

KENYAN VERSUS GLOBAL MANOSPHERE(S)

The conversations of Kenyan men reveal more than themes of masculinity, however. They showcase the place of language in identity creation. The hosts

of *Man Talk KE* communicate primarily in English, throwing in a few English words here and there. English is a Kenyan slang that combines English grammar structures with lexicon borrowed from Swahili and other local languages (Abdulazziz & Osinde, 1997). Its origins in the wealthy Westland suburbs of Nairobi suggest that *Man Talk KE* targets a more urban and upscale Kenyan man. Of course, the language choice could be due to one of the host's overseas upbringings. Nonetheless, it opens the discourse to Western influence and inspiration more easily. The hosts refer repeatedly to Western anthropological studies and masculinity literature, often situating their discussions in the broader global context. The comments under their episodes are also in English, confirming a posher target audience.

In contrast, *Iko Nini* is run almost entirely in Sheng, a slang more popular with Kenyan youth (Githiora, 2002). The hosts exhibit a lot of code-switching, moving effortlessly between English, Swahili, and Sheng to create unique language combinations and meanings that may escape those unfamiliar with either language. This linguistic agency sees the host use a mix of global and local manosphere terms like "simp" and "kafukuswi" with equal frequency. It also allows them to better ground their conversations in Kenyan social trends.

Kimeu, in her manosphere article for *The Guardian*, suggests that this code switching and Sheng use allow Kenyan manosphere members to avoid foreign detection and circumvent the cybercrime policies of online platforms. No evidence of this is adduced. There is, however, a widespread use of metaphors and euphemisms, which may conceal meanings. An example of this is when a commenter says "*Amerix ni mbwa*" (Amerix is a dog) to imply that Amerix is unscrupulous and stupid.

Amerix himself uses imperatives in many of his tweets. This linguistic choice establishes him as a person of authority and creates a mentor-mentee relationship between him and his followers. You see this in how they call him "Daktari" (Doctor) and say things like "*Ni Amerix amesema, usiulize maswali*" (Do not question Amerix's words).

The unique themes and linguistic acts of the "Kenyan manosphere" prove that Kenyan masculinity discourse comprises many nuanced and conflicting conversations that escape the definitions of the global manosphere. Several performative masculinities emerge from the assessment of the language of Kenyan male-oriented online spaces: Men as providers, men as self-improvers, men as equal to or better than women and other men, and men as sexual beings. Very few men fit into any of these masculinities perfectly. As linguistic acts and shifting ideologies reveal, Kenyan masculinities are in a state of constant flux, drawing influence from many global and local realities.

Nevertheless, there are unmistakable points of convergence between Kenyan masculinity discourse and the ideologies of the global manosphere. The most evident of these is the jargon overlap that sees Kenyan men refer to each other by manosphere terms like "simp" and "soy boy," where masculinity differences arise. There is also a similarity in how masculinity messaging is dispersed, which is primarily through social media and online platforms. Lastly, and perhaps more importantly, is the shared anti-feminist and gender hierarchical ideologies that underlie many definitions of masculinity.

These similarities explain why Western framings may be quick to categorize Kenyan masculinity conversations as masculinity discourse. However, as this paper has proven, this classification risks obscuring how Kenyan men actually negotiate masculinities online.

CONCLUSION

This study has subjected selected texts to critical discourse analysis to reveal the social realities and meanings embedded in Kenyan masculinity discourse. It has demonstrated, through the examination of themes and speech acts, that Kenyan men use language and social interaction to negotiate masculinities on online platforms and that these masculinities are dynamic and subject to local and global influences. It has also compared the language of Kenyan masculinity discourse to global manosphere conversations and revealed points of convergence and divergence in ideology and language that prove that Kenyan masculinity conversations are too nuanced and complex to be subsumed under the global manosphere.

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