

Metaphor in the Construction of Gender in Media Discourse: Analysis of Metaphors Used to Describe Women in Nigerian newspapers

Umar Ahmed¹

Abstract

Scholars in linguistic anthropology and discourse analysis (e.g. Zubair, 2007; Mele, 2008) note how gender can be constructed through metaphor. These researchers further argue that metaphor is not just a mere rhetorical ornament or a literary device but rather, a powerful means by which people constitute their social identities and relations. In this paper I report an analysis of the complex and often subtle ways in which some female authors used metaphors to describe women in Nigerian newspapers. I also discuss the presuppositions and inferences associated with the indexing of feminine gender through metaphor, highlighting the role they play in the process. Drawing upon Lazar's (2005) notion of feminist critical discourse analysis, Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory and the pragmatic notion of presupposition, I analyze a total of 339 metaphors about women identified in the 100 opinion articles on gender in five Nigerian newspapers, namely: *The Guardian*, *Daily Trust*, *New Nigerian*, *The Punch*, and *Vanguard* from 1999 to 2014. The analysis demonstrates that Nigerian women still use metaphorical expressions, which largely kept in place a gender ideology, which upholds male dominance and female subordination. It also reveals that the underlying cognition of (some) Nigerian female authors of opinion articles indicate their consent to patriarchal hegemony. Hence, the study makes the claim that how one may perceive and describe gendered self in relation to others can be influenced or constrained by the dominant gender ideology in society.

Key words: metaphor, gender, femininity, identities.

1. Introduction

The research on the role of language in the construction of social reality has accounted for the importance of metaphor in constituting social identities. For instance, studies (e.g. Zubair, 2007; Mele, 2008) have shown that metaphor is not just a mere rhetorical ornament or a literary device but, a powerful means by which individuals make sense of selves and the world around them. As Zubair (2007:767) observes, metaphors 'are reflective of the modes of thought of the members of the linguistic community that employ them'. In their seminal work, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) claim that metaphor is central to human thought and action. Their argument entails that our thought processes are largely metaphorical in nature; and that the concepts that determine the way we think relate very much to the way we function as individuals, including how we perceive ourselves, how we act, and how we see and relate with other people. Thus, if our thought processes have such a crucial role in defining ourselves and our everyday social realities; and that such a process is metaphorical, then it is reasonable to assume that '...the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor' (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 6).

Metaphor, then, is a rich resource individuals may draw on in the discursive construction of self-image. However, much discourse and pragmatic studies on gender representation and construction in the print news media in Nigeria tended to focus on how women are represented mostly by the male authors. Little attention has been paid to how the female authors of opinion articles in Nigerian newspapers perceive and describe the woman through metaphor in such forum.

¹ BIGSAS (Germany) & UDUS (Nigeria). E-Mail: umar.ahmed@uni-bayreuth.de

In this study² I examine the many complex and often subtle ways in which some female authors used metaphors to construct feminine gender in Nigerian newspapers. I also discuss the presuppositions and inferences associated with the indexing of feminine gender through metaphor, highlighting the role they play in the process.

For example, the metaphorical expression: *A woman is the engine room for the birth and upbringing of children* (*Daily Trust* newspaper of 23 March, 2012) does not only define ‘womanhood’ in terms of child bearing, but also locates child rearing as the sole responsibility of the woman. Examining how gender is constructed through metaphor in discourses on gender in the print news media in Nigeria is particularly important because, as Mills (2003:185) notes, gender ideology in society, or the shared beliefs about who men and women are, ‘are often authorized in some sense through being mediated by the media’, which tend to influence the way individuals may perceive and construct sense of selves in relation to others.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical framework of the study. The data and research methods employed are discussed in section 3. In section 4, I analyze data and present the research findings. Section 5 concludes the study.

2. Conceptual framework

Metaphor and femininity are the two key theoretical concepts in the present study. In this section, I discuss briefly these two concepts.

2.1 Metaphor

A metaphor may be defined as ‘a word or expression that is used to talk about an entity or quality other than that referred to by its core, or more basic meaning’ (Diegnan, 2005: 34). However, in this study, I adopt Charteris-Black’s (2004:21) definition of metaphor as ‘a linguistic representation that results from the shift in the use of a word or phrase from the context or domain in which it is expected to occur to another context or domain where it is not expected to occur’ because, this definition allows us to examine how social identities and relations are constituted through the semantic tension that may arise between metaphorical expression and the concept it refers or relates to.

Metaphor, according to Lakoff and Turner (1989), is created by mapping two unrelated concepts onto each other, thereby conceptualizing one concept (the target) in terms of another (the source). For example, in the expression: *Women are the pillars of the family institution* (*The Punch* newspaper of 11th January, 2013), *women* serves as the target domain (i.e. what is being talked about) whereas, *pillars* is the source domain (i.e. what is used to talk about women). The pillar, as (literarily) a very strong and solid structure, is chosen here to construct women as the chief supporters of the family institution. Semantic mapping of a concept from source to target domain such as the one illustrated above, is usually selective (Koller, 2008), revealing some features and concealing others (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), often for ideological purposes (Ungerer, 2000).

Thus, in language and gender research, metaphor lends itself very nicely to the study of how individuals perceive and describe their gendered selves and others through discursive practices. Reisigl and Wodak (2001: 56) observe that in linguistic (and cognitive) construction of group identity and collective subjects ‘metaphors serve to create difference-levelling sameness and homogeneity, which are the basis on which people are treated uniformly and undifferentiatedly’. This function of metaphor in discourse can be related to what Halliday (1985) calls ‘ideational’ function of language, which according to Semino (2008:31), has to do with the role of ‘language in the understanding and construction of social reality’ since, it can impact on the power relations between people of different genders or social groups. Moreover, as Semino (ibid) further observes, conceptualizing one concept (the target) in terms of another unrelated concept (the source) may result in one developing a particular view about it, often including specific attitudes and evaluations. Writing on the functions of metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) note,

Metaphors...highlight and make coherent certain aspects of our experience [...] metaphors may create realities for us, especially social realities. A metaphor may thus be a guide for future action [...] this will, in turn, reinforces the power of the metaphor to make experience coherent (p. 156).

² The study is part of my PhD research project, which was funded by the Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies, Germany.

2.2 Femininity

A major aim of the present study is to investigate how some female authors construct feminine gender through the metaphors they used to describe the woman in Nigerian newspapers. Femininity is commonly understood as a socially constructed aspect of gender identity that is generally associated with women and/or female characteristics. A number of contemporary researchers (e.g. Connell, 1995, 2014; Halberstam, 1998; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Baker, 2008) have theorized femininity as 'not inherently attached to any particular bodies and instead is constructed and reproduced through individuals' practices and behaviours in their everyday lives' (Johnson & Repta, 2012: 26-27).

This view challenges the conceptualization of femininity as a 'process through which women are gendered and become specific sorts of women' (Skeggs, 2001: 297), with the word 'process' drawing our attention to the ways in which femininity and the values associated with it, can serve as both a resource and a source of subordinating the woman. Mills (2003: 187) for instance, observes that 'femininity has often been associated with the private sphere and the values associated with that sphere', which tends to limit the gender role of the woman.

To MacKinnon (1989: 110), traditionally, 'femaleness means femininity, which means attractiveness to men, which means sexual attractiveness, which means sexual availability on male terms. What defines woman is what turns men on'. In this view, as Talbot (2010: 137) explains, femininity is nothing but a matter of sexualization, a matter of women viewing themselves from men's point of view, a matter of women perceiving their sexuality as an important social identity. As a consequence and as I will show in this paper, many women, who participated in discourses on gender in Nigeria newspapers tend to perceive and construct their gendered selves in ways they assume the society (or men) would want from them.

Although many scholars and researchers have acknowledged the existence of several forms of femininity, none of these forms, to my knowledge, has so far been identified as being hegemonic. Connell (1987, 2014) however, offers the concept of 'emphasized femininity', which he describes as a prioritized version of femininity. He identifies this form as embodying male domination and female subordination. In this way, Connell's emphasized femininity seems to correspond to what I tentatively call 'normative femininity,' which as my analysis of the metaphors used to describe women in the corpus has shown, emphasizes certain constructed female values such as domesticity, subservience, and attractiveness (see Section 4).

Although a key component of gender, femininity has remained an under-researched social phenomenon, Dahl (2012: 59) laments that despite the considerable scholarly attention that gender has received in recent years, the effort has not resulted in developing the concept of femininity as comprehensively as that of masculinity. In this regard, Johnson and Repta (2012: 27) point out that femininity and its various forms still 'require additional theoretical and empirical work'. This research is an attempt in that direction. Hence, it seeks to investigate, among other things, how femininity is perceived and discursively constructed through metaphor in the female-authored articles in Nigerian newspapers.

3. The data and research methods

3.1 The data

The data used in this study was collected from five Nigerian newspapers, namely: *The Guardian*, *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *Daily Trust*, and *New Nigerian*. These newspapers are purposively chosen because they have national coverage and distribution. Although they are published in English, they seem to enjoy wide readership. And, the main criteria used in collecting the articles include saliency to the research topic, and serving as opinion articles on gender in the newspapers within the period (1999 - 2014) covered by the research. The data was collected in 2014 in the archives and online sources of the selected newspapers. Note that for ease of identification of the source of particular data, the newspapers are coded as follows:

- i. TG for *The Guardian*
- ii. TP for *The Punch*
- iii. V for *The Vanguard*
- iv. DT for *Daily Trust*
- v. NN for *New Nigerian*

Pragglejaz³ Group's (2007) Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) was the main method used to identify the relevant expressions that serve as the data base for the present study. Their procedure is outlined as follows:

1. Read the entire text–discourse to establish a general understanding of the meaning.
2. Determine the lexical units in the text–discourse.
- 3a. For each [relevant] lexical unit in the text, establish its meaning in context, that is, how it applies to an entity, relation, or attribute in the situation evoked by the text.
- 3b. For each [relevant] lexical unit, determine if it has a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts than the one in the given context.
- 3c. If the [relevant] lexical unit has a more basic current–contemporary meaning in other contexts than the given context, decide whether the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning but can be understood in comparison with it.
4. If yes, mark the lexical unit as metaphorical. (Group, 2007: 3)

While the Pragglejaz method outlined above provides an important guideline for metaphor identification at the linguistic level, it does not seem to explicitly show how the words or expressions identified as metaphorical can be related to their underlying conceptual structures. To tackle this shortcoming, I employed Steen's (2002) metaphor identification procedure, which I found very useful in identifying and formulating conceptual metaphors. This procedure involves: (i) breaking up the text into its basic idea units or propositions, (ii) drawing an analogy between the meaning of a unit (identified as metaphorical) in the text and any other basic meaning it may denote, (iii) if there are two (or more) meanings that can be said to belong to different conceptual domains, the identified unit would be taken as metaphorical and, (iv) marking the mapping or mappings identified (see Steen 2002, for an elaborate description of this procedure).

Using these two different but complementary approaches, I identified a total of three hundred and thirty-nine (339) metaphorical expressions that were used to describe the woman in a corpus of approximately 183, 047 words. Note that only metaphors that describe or say something about women and/or the feminine gender were considered for analysis. All the linguistic metaphors identified were considered as the surface realizations of underlying conceptual metaphors. Note that the corpus was manually searched for metaphors. Despite ongoing attempts (e.g. Mason, 2004; Birke & Sakar, 2006; Barnden, 2009; Koller, 2011), it seems that there is not yet a fully and reliable automated way of metaphor identification.

The linguistic expressions retrieved and considered metaphorical were grouped thematically, and conceptual metaphors were proposed to account for them. The identified metaphors were further classified into three categories: *entrenched*, *conventional* and *novel* metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Semino (2008) describes novel metaphors as representing possible new ways of thinking or conceptualization, which have not become conventionalized. However, with time and also as Figar (2013:18) observes, with increased use frequency 'a novel metaphor can easily become conventionalized'. Entrenched or dead metaphors on the other hand, as Charteris-Black (2013:180) describes them, are those that 'have become invisible because they have become naturalized.'

Determining whether a given metaphor is entrenched, conventional or novel is not always an easy task because, a well-defined criterion for doing this has not yet been developed, to my knowledge. Most metaphor researchers often make use of dictionaries, corpora and corpus-based approaches in making such decisions. While this study utilizes some or all these resources, it also made use of intuitive judgment where necessary.

3.2 Tools of analysis

Drawing upon Lazar's (2005) notion of feminist critical discourse analysis (hereafter, FCDA), Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory and the pragmatic theory of presupposition, I examine the metaphors used by some female authors (of opinion articles in Nigerian newspapers) to construct feminine gender while talking or writing about women in Nigerian newspapers. FCDA is an approach to discourse studies that focuses on and defines 'its focus mainly as gender' (Wodak, 2008: 195). It is an approach, Lazar (2005:5) explains, that is concerned with critiquing 'discourses which sustain a patriarchal social order: that is, relations of power that systematically privilege men as a social group and disadvantage, exclude and disempower women as a social group.'

³Pragglejaz is an acronym formed from the initials of ten members of a metaphor study group: Peter Crisp, Ray Gibbs, Alan Cienki, Gerard Steen, Graham Low, Lynne Cameron, Elena Semino, Joseph Grady, Alice Deignan and Zoltan Kövecses.

Thus the aim of FCDA, as Lazar (2007:142) further explains, is to show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities

It is this concern with demystifying the relationships between gender, ideology, and power in discourse that makes FCDA suitable for examining the way women construct self-image through metaphors in Nigerian newspapers. In this approach, the interest is not so much on providing a grand theory of gender but, investigating the ways in which gender is constructed in talk and text. Thus, while other feminist approaches 'tend to remain on a theoretical level in their discussions of gender, feminist critical discourse analysis hopes to bring the analysis of gender closer to practice, by looking at the linguistic and discursive construction of gender in specific texts and contexts' (Lehtonen, 2007: 3).

The conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) was employed to examine how the conceptualizations of the woman are achieved in the newspapers. Conceptual metaphor theory or CMT claims that metaphor is a cognitive phenomenon, and as such a means of conceptualizing one concept in terms of another. Metaphor is thus recognized in this paper, as an important tool that can be used to construct gender identity. As Paivio and Walsch (1993:307) observe, a metaphor 'hides the object of study and at the same time reveals some of its most salient and interesting characteristics'. This view re-echoes Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 10-13), who note that metaphor involves highlighting and hiding certain aspects of the phenomenon been talked about. For example, the expression *men are like a leopard* (New Nigerian newspaper of 2nd September, 2002) highlights the fierce and aggressive tendency of (some) men and hides their social and humane aspects. This may affect not just the way some women may for instance, see or think about men but possibly, even the way they may act while interacting with them.

Though CMT provides a useful cognitive framework for analyzing metaphor, it has been criticized for lacking pragmatic application. To tackle this shortcoming, I employed Charteris-Black's (2004: 21) critical metaphor analysis, which seeks to integrate 'the linguistic, cognitive and pragmatic' dimensions that can be involved in metaphor analysis. His approach to metaphor analysis emphasizes focusing on the context of a metaphor and the motivations behind the choice of particular metaphorical expressions in discourse. In addition, the study employs also the pragmatic notion of presupposition, which concerns the existing knowledge of the world as the basis on which an inference is drawn as to the implied meaning or implicature that particular utterances convey. The investigation of the assumptions behind the use of particular metaphorical expressions to talk or write about a particular phenomenon (or women in this case) can, as Yule (2010:128) observes, provide 'some insights into how more is always being communicated than is said' about the (women) in Nigerian newspapers. This eclectic mix of tools of analysis offers the possibility for a rich and complex analysis of the data. After this short description of the relevant tools of analysis, the next section will begin the analysis of the data.

4. Analysis and discussion

This section shows how some female authors (of opinion articles in Nigerian newspapers) describe the woman through metaphor. In the section, I also discuss the presuppositions and inferences associated with the authors' construction of feminine gender through the metaphors they used, highlighting the role the presuppositions and inferences play in the process. A total of nine (9) patterns of conceptualizations of the woman were identified in the corpus, as shown in table 1. Note that here, as throughout the analysis section, the conceptual metaphors proposed for the relevant linguistic expressions identified are written in small caps.⁴

Table 1. Metaphoric conceptualizations of women in the corpus

No.	Conceptual metaphors	Frequency	Percentage
1.	WOMEN ARE COMMODITIES	87	25.66%
2.	WOMEN ARE A FORCE	69	20.35%
3.	WOMEN ARE HOME MANAGERS	60	17.69%
4.	WOMEN ARE THE WEAKER SEX	45	13.27%
5.	WOMEN ARE ANIMALS	32	9.43%
6.	WOMEN ARE PLANTS	17	5.01%
7.	WOMEN ARE MACHINES	13	3.83%
8.	WOMEN ARE BUILDING MATERIALS	10	2.94%
9.	WOMEN ARE FARMLANDS	6	1.76%
		339	100%

⁴ Conventionally, conceptual metaphors are written in small caps.

As can be seen from the table above, women are described in the corpus using expressions drawn from the source domain of commodity (1), strength and power (2 and 3), occupation and administration (4), animals (5), plants (6), machines and tools (7 and 8), and land (9). The prevalence of expressions from the source domain of commodity here shows that, women are understood (by the female authors) in terms of some objects.

Note that here, as throughout the analysis section, the focus is on the way metaphor is used to construct particular gender identities for the woman, and not the constructed identities per se. Note that for easy identification, expressions considered metaphorical are highlighted in bold and also, presented in context (i.e. with the relevant co-text) necessary for their identification as metaphors. It is also important to point out that metonymies, synecdoches, idiomatic expressions and proverbs are also classified and analyzed under metaphor since most of them contain metaphorical expressions. In the coming sub-sections, I present and discuss examples of these metaphors.

4.2.1 WOMEN ARE COMMODITIES

The realization of this conceptual metaphor is reflected through its occurrences in the corpus, which is amounting to 25.66 percent of the expressions identified as metaphors about women in the data (see Table 1). The extensive use of expressions that have their conceptual grounding in this metaphor is not an unusual phenomenon in discourses on gender in Africa (see e.g Hussein, 2005). What is however unusual here is that female authors themselves repeatedly used expressions that conceptualize the woman as a commodity. However, I must state that the fact that the authors have used expressions that objectified the woman does not mean that this is how they actually perceive her (the woman). It could be that they used them in order to show how they assumed the society perceive the woman and/or feminine gender. In 1 - 5 below, I show examples of expressions used consciously (or unconsciously) by some female authors to describe the woman as a commodity.

1. Men wake up and provide for your family. In Yoruba there is a saying, which says when the wife of a lazy man grows up, the wealthy man **acquires** her(TV, 18.7.2008: 28)
2. In the case of traditional laws the wife herself is often regarded as **property** and she is generally not expected to entertain any expectation. In fact, under some traditional customary law systems, especially in south east Nigeria, she is one of **the chattels** to be "inherited" after the death of her husband. (TG, 19.8.2003: 13)
3. Irrespective of her age 30, 40, 50, 60 etc. a woman could still be **chased** by a man; in fact, a right man if she knows how to always **repackage** and **brand** herself (TV, 2.1.2010: 30)
4. I need to make them understand that a woman should not degrade herself like **an empty sachet of pure water** that can be picked on the street or like **cattle** that can be bought at the cattle market... (TP, 2.1.2010: 32)
5. She said that a man would show interest but a lady would take much time pretending even though she is dying inside of her because they don't want to look **cheap** in the faces of men. (TV, 24.1.2014: 37)

In 1 - 5 above, we can see that the expressions were used to commodify the woman. She is conceptualized and described as a transferable property that can be acquired, dropped and inherited when the need arises or situation changes (1-2). This is also the case with 3, where she is conceptualized as a 'product' that can be repackaged and branded. Similarly, in 4 - 5, she is depicted as a commodity that can be bought or sold. Although these expressions seem to suggest commodification of the woman, an examination of the linguistic context in which most of these conceptualizations occur hints at the authors' attempt to change the way they thought the society or the law recognize the woman, as the expressions in for instance, 2 clearly shows. Note that the metaphor **chased** in 3 used to refer to the woman has depicted her as an animal that can be hunted for personal use.

Conceptually, with the exception of a few conventionalized expressions, most of the linguistic metaphors that describe the woman as a commodity are novel, as the examples in 1 – 5 showed. Furthermore, all the eighty-seven (87) metaphors used to achieve this conceptualization are structurally grounded. In the next sub-section, I will show how the authors have attempted to redefine the woman via some metaphorical expressions.

4.2.2 WOMEN ARE A FORCE

In this pattern of conceptualization, 'new' gender identity is constructed for the woman – an identity that has reflected on the changing role of the woman in a globalized world.

The pattern, as I will show later, is indicated by the use of power and leadership source domains vocabularies (Stefanowitsch & Gries, 2007; Berlin & Fetzer, 2012) such as *trailblazers* as in (6), *shining stars* as in (7), *driving force* as in (8), *backbone* as in (9), and *a force to be reckoned with* as in (10) that create the conceptual metaphor WOMEN ARE A FORCE. This conceptualization is realized by linguistic expressions, ranging from conventional metaphors, such as (7, 8, & 10) to novel or unconventional ones, such as (6). As for their function, the metaphors that form this pattern are used to highlight the achievements, successes of particular women in positions of power. Take (6) for instance, the expression *this trailblazer along with other women trailblazers* refers to a particular Nigerian woman achiever (Prof. Dora Akunyili) and other unsung women, presupposing that (some) Nigerian women are high achievers.

6. One woman whose performance has been widely acknowledged is Prof. Dora Akunyili [...] this **trailblazer** along with other women **trailblazers** has proved that given the chance, women can succeed where men have failed. (TG, 8.3.2006: 15)

This is also the case with the example below.

7. President Obasanjo was on air recently and he was boasting about the women in his cabinet, describing them as **the shining stars** of his administration. (TG, 12.3.2006:18)

Similarly, women are also conceptualized as *a driving force*, portraying them as the power and/or the energy behind the economic growth in the country, as implied in 8 below.

8. The Nigerian woman has, over the years, evolved from one level of accomplishment to another. Through these years of weathering the storm, women have now become **the driving force** of the economy... (TG, 12.3.2006: 18)

In another related instance, women are also repeatedly described as the backbone of the agricultural sector of the economy, suggesting their indispensability to the economic growth and development of the society.

9. ...more and more women are now in firm control of the vast agricultural fields in the villages and small towns in these states. They are in fact, **the backbone** of the rural economy (IP, 5.4.2014:24).

Closely related to the description of women as key actors in public domain, is their portrayal as too important to be ignored in the scheme of things, as shown in 10.

10. Despite these serious handicaps or impediments which are actively exploited by the men folk, Nigerian women have been seen to break even, such that today have become **a force** to reckon with in the development process of the nation. (NN, 18.12.2014: 31)

The use of these expressions to describe women as playing important roles in areas or jobs traditionally thought to be masculine shows that, masculinity traits such as courage, hard work, dominance, and assertiveness are not qualities restricted to men only but rather, they are features that can be identified also with women, as the examples above demonstrated. Hence, the findings in this sub-section show that masculinity is perceived by the authors as something that can be performed also by women, challenging the view that associates masculinity with men only.

4.2.3 WOMEN ARE THE WEAKER SEX AND INFERIOR GENDER

Another pattern of feminine gender identity construction through metaphor involves the use of expressions or statements about the perceived biological and psychological inferiority of women. Most of the expressions grouped under this conceptual metaphor have expressed women's perceived weakness and unfitness to take up leadership role in public domain, discursively emphasizing the necessity for their dependence on men for leadership and social protection.

Conceptually, most of the expressions used here are entrenched metaphors, which serve as a naturalized way (Charteris-Black, 2013: 180-181) of describing the perceived biological and psychological inferiority of women. The examples in 11- 15 point this out.

11. They [women] are **the weaker sex**. In fact, they are weak in all aspects and this is not because of any defects in their mind or body but, that is just their nature. (NN, 3.8.2009: 32)

12. Sometimes when she needs some cuddling from you, you see it as a waste of your precious time.... Don't you know that she is a **weaker vessel** and she depends so much on your encouragements and love to carry on? (TG, 12.9.2015: 30)
13. "...women are very **fragile** and I don't think they should be toyed with. I have seen many women get heart broken by the same men they love," she says, in an interview with our correspondent. (NN, 4.2.2009: 17)
14. Women have never forgotten that they are **the neck** and they take cognizance of that in whatever they do. (TP, 23.9.2006: 17)
15. Men should understand that prostrating to **a dwarf** is not a sign of weakness. Being kind to your wife does not mean that you are weak. (DT, 3.9.2001: 32)

In (11), it is suggested that women are by nature the weaker sex, implying that weakness is an inherent attribute of women. This is also the case with 12 and 13, where women are also described as weaker vessel and fragile respectively. The use of this (*weaker vessel*) expression, a Biblical metaphor to refer to the woman is interesting, as it implies that the woman is an object that needs to be handled gently, and with love and care. In 14, the woman is described as *the neck*, presupposing that the man is naturally placed above the woman. Particularly interesting in this pattern is the description of the woman as *a dwarf* (15), which portrays her as a diminutive creature, emphasizing her perceived inferiority.

Furthermore, the authors (of the expressions in 11 and 12) have advocated women's empowerment. Apparently, the purpose of making the advocacy is not to demean women. However, in the process of making the advocacy, the authors ended up reproducing metaphors that described women as weak and inferior, perhaps unconsciously. This has demonstrated that the dominant gender ideology in society can influence or constrain how one may perceive and represent her (or his) gendered self in relation to others in discourse. The construction of the woman as the weaker sex here is an example of what feminist theorist (e.g. Lakoff, 1975, 2004) would call 'biological determinism', which ascribes superiority to the males only.

4.2.4 WOMEN ARE HOME MANAGERS AND CARE-GIVERS

This conceptualization is reflected in the way some expressions are used to locate the gender role of women within and around the activities at home, as 16 – 20 illustrate. Over 70 percent of the expressions that formed this pattern have their conceptual grounding in novel metaphors.

16. Women everywhere should remember that they're meant to be **rearers or [sic] human beings** and they need to be of exemplary behaviour. (TV, 3.2.2013: 33)
17. Women everywhere should know that they are **home builders** and **the hands that rock the cradle**. (NN, 1.3.2009: 19)
18. She declared that [...] women must "**manage** their husbands, children, be submissive, forgiving, hardworking, prayerful, satisfy their husbands sexually, communicate and commend their husbands and children accordingly." (TG, 2.8.2014: 27)
19. As future **chief executive office of the kitchen** and **custodian** of her home, she should be properly trained in house chores so that she can manage her home well in future. (TG, 12.3.2006: 19)
20. The role of woman in a relationship; whether dating or married...She is the one who has been equipped by Mother Nature to play the role of **managing** the home. Apart from being the woman, wife and mother of relationship...**she is the minister of home affairs, the teacher, the moral barometer** of her family, **the trouble shooter** between all parties that make up her family, **the prayer warrior** and **intercessor** between God and her family, she is also **the shocker absorber** of the family. So the role of the woman goes beyond cooking and housekeeping. (TP, 8.3.2001: 20)

It would seem that the multiple metaphorical conceptualizations of women in relation to activities within and around the home in the examples above can be interpreted as a pointer to the gender ideology, which locates more gender roles for the woman in and within the home environment. Of interest here is the intertextual reference to the title of William Rose Wallace's⁵ poem in (17). Although Wallace's poem is generally viewed as emphasizing mothers' or women's role in favourable ways, I argued here that the expression in this context seems to not only describe the woman as the nurturer of children but also, defines womanhood itself in terms of childcare responsibility.

⁵William Ross Wallace (1819 – 1881) was an American poet, with Scottish roots, is best known for his poem titled: 'The Hand That Rocks, the Cradle Is the Hand That Rules the World.' Wallace's poem is believed to be the origin of the expression in (17).

Furthermore, this constructed identity of women as the home managers confirms Mill's (2003:187) notion that being a woman has often been associated with activities within and around the home, and the values associated with it. It also seems that the gender identities constructed for the woman in 16 – 20, corresponds to what Connell (2005) describes as 'emphasized femininity', or what I refer to as 'normative femininity', which as the examples have shown, emphasizes particular values and roles for the woman (see sub-section 2.2, for a discussion on femininity).

4.2.5 WOMEN ARE DOMESTIC ANIMALS

An examination of the data reveals that women are repeatedly conceptualized as animals, as illustrated in 21 – 25

21. ...you beating her like **a donkey** cannot make you a "real man" because real men don't batter their wives. (NN, 20.11.2005: 27)
22. I need to make them understand that a woman should not degrade herself like an empty sachet of pure water that can be picked on the street or like **cattle** that can be bought at the cattle market. (NN, 5.3.2014: 27)
23. It is worth being asked though, did the Creator, by His decree that the wife should bend to her husband's demand, desires woman to be **a sacrificial lamb**? (DT, 2.4.2011: 44)
24. ...the era of a woman sitting at home like **a hen incubating eggs** to depend solely on a man believing that he is send to this world to save you is gone, maybe he himself needs to be saved (TG, 7.3.2009: 24)
25. ... the way women are usually given roles in nollywood [sic] films which show them as **screaming out-of-control creatures**, but my question is, do they have to accept these roles if they feel that they demean female-hood? (TV, 3.2.2013: 33)

The conceptualization of the woman as an animal is clearly visible in 21 through 25, in which they are described as a donkey (21), cattle (22), and a lamb (23). Note that the description of the woman as cattle in 22 for instance, has also commodified and domesticated her, as it implies that they are object that can be bought or sold. This is also the case with 21, 23 and 24. Note that in some parts of Nigeria, these animals that serve as the source domain for this pattern are considered as domestic animals (as opposed to wild animals).

Interestingly, the WOMEN ARE ANIMALS metaphor is also used to deconstruct the dominant gender ideology, which perceives the woman as needing protection from men. In (24) for instance, the expression ...*the era of a woman sitting at home like a hen incubating eggs to depend solely on a man...is gone, maybe he himself needs to be saved* deconstructs the traditional identity of the man as the protector and the provider of the woman and have reconstructed another identity for him, which depicts him as been dependent (on the woman) too, as the proposition 'maybe he himself needs to be saved' in the example implies.

4.2.6 WOMEN ARE PLANTS

Another metaphorical conceptualization of women common in the corpus is that of plant metaphor, infused with various types of plant, its attributes as well as the uses or benefits that could be derived from it. This can be seen in 26 – 30.

26. Every woman is like **a flower bed**, if you give her attention and affection and daily nurturing she deserves, she will **blossom**, But if you neglect her, she will **wither** (NN, 15.3.2008: 25)
27. A woman is like young **plants** in a garden, she needs to be attended to regularly (TG, 8.3.2011: 13)
28. Just as a fruit bearing tree is usually taken care of, a woman should also be allowed to **grow** and **blossom**, so that the society can **reap** the benefits coming from her. (DT, 23.9.2004: 44)
29. Some women are truly **climber plants**, they always like exceeding limits. (TP, 8.3.2001: 20)
30. A woman should also see herself as **a coconut**, which only those who have strong teeth can eat (TP, 2.1.2010: 30)

We can see from the examples above that women are conceptualized as a 'flower' (26), and a 'tree or plant' (27 – 29). What is emerging from 26, 27, & 28 is the construction of the woman as someone who needs support, as alluded to in the conceptual metaphor WOMEN ARE WEAK AND INFERIOR (see sub-section 4.2.3). Interestingly, the woman is also described as tough (30) – a description that has countered her depiction as weak and inferior.

4.2.7 WOMEN ARE MACHINES

This metaphor has enabled the authors to describe the woman in terms of a machine and the activities related to it, as illustrated in 31-33:

31. Many men have taken for granted the financial support given to them by turning their so-called wives into their **ATM**⁶... (TG, 20.8.2015: 40)
32. Even when she never wanted to become a nurse, you forced her into it simply because you want a **machine** to be vomiting money for the lazy you. (TG, 20.8.2015: 40)
33. Your woman needs that **oil** of praise to keep **running effectively**. (TG, 20.8.2015: 40)

We can see from the examples above that some female authors use expressions that conceptualize the woman in terms of machine related concepts such as inputs as in (31), outputs as in (32) and efficiency as in (33). Particularly interesting here is the representation of the woman as needing *oil* (33) in order to function well, implying that she is a machine that needs input in order to produce output. Implicit in the examples above, is a discourse that portrays women as been exploited by men.

4.2.8 WOMEN ARE BUILDING MATERIALS

In this pattern, women are described as playing important roles both within and outside the home environment. Here are some examples of the expressions used to achieve this pattern of conceptualization:

34. The woman is **the cement** needed for building a new Nigeria... (TP, 8.3.2001: 20)
35. Women who have hitherto been seen as having little or nothing to contribute to national development have now turn out to be that **headstone** needed for building a new Nigeria. (NN, 22.3.2000: 25)
36. Women are **the iron rods** needed for building a solid foundation of any society that seeks to make progress. No society can develop without active participation of half of its population in economic and democratic governance processes. (NN, 18.12.2014: 30)

In the examples above, women are conceptualized as essential building materials such as the cement (34), the headstone (35) and the iron rods (36). This portrays them as indispensable to the task of nation building, especially as it relates to the role they can play in political and economic governance processes. One interesting thing observed in the expressions in 31-33 is that although the woman is positively evaluated but, her objectification still remains. This shows that objectification of the woman has occurred in the data, even when it does not seem to be the intention of the author, which again serves to demonstrate that the dominant gender ideology in society can influence or constrain how one may perceive and represent their gendered selves in relation to others.

4.2.9 WOMEN ARE FARMLANDS

One other pattern of conceptualization in the corpus is the conceptual metaphor: WOMEN ARE FARMLANDS. Here women are described as farmlands that can be owned, cultivated or left empty. Each of these activities or attributes (of farmland) as they relate to the woman can be exemplified in 37 – 39:

37. Women in most parts of Africa are not supposed to own anything. You are owned just like a **farmland**. (TG, 12.3.2006: 22)
38. Some men take a **woman to be a farmland**, which is to be tilled. (V, 16.3.2013: 44)
39. ...if you have not married your wife to the point that she becomes your treasured **garden or farmland**, the envy of her fellow women and the admiration of your fellow men you have failed. (The Guardian, 8.3.2011: 13)

From 37 – 39, we can see that women are metaphorically described as farmlands. This conceptualization did not only commodify the woman but also, presupposes owner-property relationship, reinforcing asymmetrical gender relations (between men and women) in society. Virtually, in almost all these patterns of women selves-conceptualization, the underlying ideology of female subordination and domesticity are evident.

Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to examine the different ways in which some Nigerian female authors used metaphors to describe women and index feminine gender. The analysis has revealed that the cognitive base informing the conceptualization of the woman and feminine gender through metaphor in the newspapers is still largely been controlled by the dominant gender ideology in Nigerian society, which tends to uphold male dominance and female subordination.

⁶ATM is an acronym for Automated Teller Machine

This can be seen as manifesting in and across almost all the different categories of metaphors analyzed. The analysis has shown that, in several instances, even when it was obvious that the aim of a female author was to negate or challenge or even deny particular stereotypes or perceptions of the woman or feminine gender, the stereotypes are still evoked, perhaps unconsciously. A case that easily comes to mind is the expression 'I need to make them understand that a woman should not degrade herself **like an empty sachet of pure water** that can be picked on the street or **like cattle** that can be bought at the cattle market' (emphasis mine) (NN, 5.3.2014: 27). The research has also shown that most of the female authors tend to (discursively) do their gender in the newspapers based on what they assume or experience as socially acceptable for persons of their sex category.

Finally, the study has demonstrated that the metaphors examined have incorporated tacit background assumptions about normative femininities in Nigerian society. In that, the analysis has shown that the metaphors have in different ways shape the authors understanding of the category 'woman' through the 'cross-domain mappings' (Kövecses, 2002) they created, which has enabled them to think and talk about women in terms of commodities, animals, machines, building materials, and farmlands. Thus, the metaphors may not only aid our cognitive and conceptual process of thinking and talking about the concept of 'woman', but they also facilitate our understanding of feminine gender, since they describe the concept in ways that present it in concrete rather than abstract terms.

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