

DELEGITIMIZING GENDER EQUALITY IN SELECTED NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This paper presents a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of selected Nigerian newspapers to examine the delegitimization of gender equality within their discursive practices. Situated within the context of Nigeria's complex sociocultural and political landscape, the study employs Wodak's discourse historical approach to CDA to uncover the underlying power dynamics, ideologies, and hegemonic structures embedded in media representations of gender equality. Drawing on theories from critical feminist media studies, the research investigates how Nigerian newspapers construct and potentially delegitimize gender equality through language, imagery, and framing techniques. The study's findings reveal pervasive gender stereotypes, patriarchal ideologies, and marginalization of women's voices and experiences within Nigerian media discourse. By critically analyzing the discursive strategies employed by newspapers, this research contributes to our understanding of the challenges facing gender equality in Nigeria and informs strategies for promoting more equitable and inclusive representations of gender in the media. Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of challenging dominant ideologies and advocating for social change within media representations to advance gender equality and social justice in Nigeria.

Key words: Gender equality, critical discourse analysis, Nigerian newspapers, topoi

Introduction

Gender equality, a fundamental human right, has been a subject of intense debate and advocacy across the globe. It encompasses the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of all individuals, regardless of their gender. While significant progress has been made in advancing gender equality worldwide, persistent disparities and discriminatory practices continue to challenge its realization, particularly in contexts marked by entrenched cultural norms and patriarchal structures.

In the Nigerian context, the pursuit of gender equality confronts multifaceted challenges deeply rooted in cultural, social, and political systems. Despite constitutional provisions and international commitments promoting gender equality, disparities persist in various spheres of Nigerian society, including education, employment, politics, and media representation. The media, as a powerful institution shaping public discourse and perceptions, plays a pivotal role in either reinforcing or challenging existing gender norms and stereotypes.

This paper aims to undertake a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of selected Nigerian newspapers to examine how gender equality is represented, constructed, and potentially delegitimized through discursive practices. Drawing on Wodak's (2001a) discourse historical approach to CDA, which emphasizes textual analysis, discursive practice analysis, and the complex interplay between language, ideology, and social change surrounding gender equality discourses in Nigerian newspapers.

Scholars have highlighted the importance of media representation in shaping societal attitudes and perceptions towards gender roles and identities (McLeod & Shah, 2009). However, existing research suggests that Nigerian media often perpetuate gender stereotypes, reinforce patriarchal ideologies, and marginalize women's voices and experiences (Daniel 2011). By analyzing the language, imagery, and framing techniques employed in newspaper articles, this study aims to elucidate the ways in which gender equality discourse is constructed and negotiated within the Nigerian media landscape.

Furthermore, this research is situated within the broader theoretical framework of critical feminist media studies, which emphasizes the importance of interrogating power dynamics, challenging dominant ideologies, and advocating for social change (McRobbie, 2009). By critically examining how gender equality is discursively constructed and potentially delegitimized in Nigerian newspapers, this study contributes to existing literature on media representation, gender discourse, and social justice in Nigeria.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to shed light on the discursive strategies employed by Nigerian newspapers to either promote or hinder the advancement of gender equality. By uncovering the underlying power dynamics and ideological biases embedded in media discourse, this research seeks to inform strategies for promoting more equitable and inclusive representations of gender in Nigerian media, thereby contributing to broader efforts towards social justice and gender equality in the country.

In the subsequent sections of this paper, we will outline the theoretical underpinnings of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and feminist media studies, provide an overview of the research methodology, present the findings of the textual analysis, and offer critical insights into the discursive construction of gender equality in selected Nigerian newspapers. Through this interdisciplinary approach, we aim to deepen our understanding of the complexities surrounding gender discourse in the Nigerian media landscape and advance critical perspectives on gender equality and social change.

Discourse Historical Approach to CDA

The Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) stands as a methodological and theoretical framework within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), emphasizing the pivotal role of historical dimensions in shaping discursive practices and their influence on social structures and power dynamics. The DHA, as conceptualized by Ruth Wodak and her colleagues, is structured around three primary categories of analysis: contents, discursive strategies, and their specific linguistic means and forms of realization (Wodak et al., 1999). These categories, as articulated by Titscher et al. (2000), are not to be viewed as a linear sequence of operational steps but rather as a cyclic process wherein the three analytical dimensions are systematically and recursively related to the entirety of contextual knowledge. This analytical approach necessitates a continuous movement between theory and data. In this context, the content of discourse encompasses its thematic concerns, production context, and other factors relevant to the analysis of specific texts, as emphasized within the discourse-historical approach.

Discourse strategies, according to Reisigl and Wodak (2001a), denote systematic methods of using language to achieve particular social, political, psychological, or linguistic aims. These strategies play a crucial role in constructing gender identities and ideologies, as highlighted in this study. Furthermore, Wodak (2001b) underscores the importance of considering the wider context of discourse, delineating four levels of context: immediate language use, intertextual and interdiscursive relationships, extra-linguistic social and institutional frames, and socio-political and historical contexts. Her approach aims to identify and describe the operation of power and dominance across these contextual levels.

Within this framework, Reisigl and Wodak (2009) propose five key questions to be asked of the data, tied to five interrelated discursive strategies: referential, predication, argumentation, perspectivation, and intensifying/mitigation strategies. For instance, referential strategies involve constructing and identifying social actors in discourse, while predication strategies attribute certain characteristics to individuals. Argumentation strategies analyze the ways in which nominations, attributions, and arguments are expressed, often through the use of topoi or argumentation strategies.

Additionally, perspectivation strategies allow speakers or writers to express their involvement in discourse, positioning their points of view within the narrative. Intensifying/mitigation strategies involve linguistic processes through which statements and arguments are intensified or mitigated, reflecting societal norms and expectations. These categories of analysis facilitate the examination of linguistic features relevant to questions of gender identity construction, gender roles, and power relations.

Finally, Wodak's DHA is inherently critical, aiming to interrogate dominant ideologies, challenge power asymmetries, and advocate for social change. Emphasizing the importance of reflexivity and critical engagement in discourse analysis, Wodak (2007) encourages researchers to scrutinize their own assumptions, biases, and positionalities. By exposing the discursive mechanisms through which power operates, DHA seeks to empower marginalized voices, contest hegemonic discourses, and foster alternative visions of social justice and equality.

Feminist Media Studies

Feminist media studies represent a vibrant and multifaceted field that applies feminist theory to the analysis of media content, institutions, and practices. As a theoretical and methodological framework, feminist media studies aim to critically examine the representation of gender in media texts, as well as the production processes, distribution mechanisms, and reception contexts that shape these representations. This discussion will explore the key tenets of feminist media studies, drawing on seminal works and contributions to the field.

Central to feminist media studies is the recognition that media representations are not neutral but rather reflect and perpetuate existing power dynamics and inequalities. Feminist theorists argue that mainstream media often reinforce dominant ideologies of gender, which uphold patriarchal norms and marginalize women and other marginalized groups (Daniel 2011). For example, Laura Mulvey's seminal work on the "male gaze" in cinema highlighted how traditional Hollywood narratives position women as passive objects of male desire, reinforcing notions of female subordination and objectification (Mulvey, 1975).

Moreover, feminist media scholars emphasize the importance of intersectionality, recognizing that gender intersects with other axes of identity such as race, class, sexuality, and ability to shape media representations and experiences (Hooks, 1984). Intersectional approaches to feminist media studies seek to understand how multiple forms of oppression and privilege intersect and interact within media texts and contexts, complicating simplistic portrayals of gender and identity (Crenshaw, 1991).

In terms of methodology, feminist media studies employ a range of qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze media content, production practices, and audience reception. Content analysis is a commonly used method for examining the representation of gender in media texts, identifying patterns and trends in the portrayal of women, men, and non-binary individuals (van Zoonen, 1994). Additionally, feminist scholars often engage in textual analysis to deconstruct media narratives and discourses, uncovering underlying ideologies and power dynamics (Hall et al, 1995).

Beyond textual analysis, feminist media studies also interrogate the production and reception contexts of media texts, exploring the role of media industries, policies, and technologies in shaping gendered representations (McRobbie, 1991). Ethnographic methods, such as participant observation and interviews, are frequently used to study media production cultures and the lived experiences of media audiences, offering insights into the complex negotiation of gender identities and meanings in everyday media consumption.

Furthermore, feminist media studies are characterized by a commitment to social justice and activism, seeking not only to critique existing media representations but also to advocate for more inclusive and equitable media practices. Through media advocacy, feminist scholars and activists work to challenge stereotypes, promote diverse voices and perspectives, and create spaces for marginalized groups to produce and distribute their own media content (Dahal, 2013).

Overall, feminist media studies provide a robust theoretical and methodological framework for understanding the role of gender in media production, representation, and reception. By interrogating power dynamics, challenging stereotypes, and advocating for social change, feminist media scholars contribute to broader efforts to create more inclusive and equitable media environments.

Methodology

The data for this study comprises linguistic expressions used to delegitimize gender equality, sourced from five prominent Nigerian newspapers: *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *The Punch*, *New Nigerian*, and *Vanguard*. These newspapers were purposively selected due to their national coverage and widespread readership across Nigeria and beyond. Despite being published in English, these newspapers attract readership from diverse regions of the country. They were also chosen because they have consistently covered gender-related issues from 1999 to 2014, a period marked by a significant increase in gender discourse within the Nigerian print media landscape.

To ensure a comprehensive examination of linguistic representations of gender, the chosen period spans from 1999 to 2014. This extensive timeframe allows for the identification of overarching trends in the portrayal of gender in newspapers. The data utilized for analysis was primarily sourced from the archives of the selected newspapers. For clarity and ease of reference, each newspaper is assigned a unique code: DT for *Daily Trust*, NN for *New Nigerian*, TG for *The Guardian*, TP for *The Punch*, and TV for *Vanguard*.

Given the abundance of opinion articles on gender published in these newspapers and the practical limitations imposed by time constraints, articles were selected based on their relevance to the research topic. To ensure representativeness and analyzability, a "Quota sampling" method was employed. This method, as explained by Saunders et al. (2009: 235-236), enables the selection of salient articles without necessitating complex probability calculations. By employing this sampling technique, the study aims to ensure that the selected sample accurately reflects key characteristics of the overall study population, thereby facilitating a rigorous and insightful analysis of linguistic representations of men in Nigerian newspapers.

The data was qualitatively analyzed using Argumentation Strategies, one of the five discursive strategies delineated in Wodak's Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Argumentation Strategies, a pivotal component of the analytical framework employed in this study, were examined using topoi, which are essential tools for dissecting argumentative discourse. Reisigl and Wodak (2001: 44) define argumentation strategies as systematic linguistic approaches utilized to achieve specific communicative objectives. Similarly, van Dijk (2000: 97) characterizes topoi as elements of argumentation that embody common sense reasoning relevant to particular issues. Wodak (2009: 42) describes topoi as integral parts of argumentation, functioning as content-related warrants or "conclusion rules" that link arguments with their respective claims.

Topoi are further conceptualized as conclusions or thematic propositions referencing specific groups or events, constituting lines of argumentation (de Luna, 2013: 80). In this study, the identification of topoi proved crucial for legitimizing particular stances on gender attributions of identity. Their significance lies in their capacity, as observed by Zampetti (2006: 26), to unveil deeper meanings within arguments. Zampetti contends that examining topoi facilitates a systematic and organized process for acquiring, interpreting, managing, and critically utilizing information conveyed through arguments (2006: 23). Thus, the analysis of topoi emerges as a fundamental aspect of this research, shedding light on the nuanced dimensions of gender discourse.

Argumentation strategies used to legitimize gender in the corpus

Analysis of discursive argumentation strategies used by the male and the female authors to legitimize particular relations between men and women, as well as justify the construction of particular gender identities and roles can be done by categorizing the *topoi* used in the process in the following way. Note that the list presented below is derived from the discourses of legitimization of gender identified in the data, and does not in any way presume to be exhaustive:

1. The topos of religion;

2. The topos of usefulness;
3. The topos of gender differentiation;
4. The topos of foreign culture;
5. The topos of male discrimination;

In the sections and sub-sections that follow, the paper discusses each of these topoi in some detail. Note that in the course of analyzing each topos particular attention will be paid to the linguistic means of its realization. The analysis will also examine how the discourses in the topoi can perpetuate, sustain and challenge systems of gender relations in society. I shall begin with the topoi used by the male and the female authors to support gender inequality.

Legitimizing gender inequality

In this section, the study examines the argumentation strategies used by the authors to justify and legitimize social inequality between men and women in society. I show how both the male and the female authors articulated similar ideas of gender, encoded in different argumentation strategies to argue for the maintenance of the traditional systems of gender relations in society. The arguments used by both the male and the female authors to legitimize gender inequality can be grouped into two patterns of argumentation, as shown in Table 1. Note that here, as throughout the paper, the patterns identified are presented in the form of topoi. Note also that the focus of the analysis is on linguistic means of realization of the topoi, and not the topoi per se.

As can be seen from Table 1, two patterns of argumentation strategies are used by both the male and the female authors to de-legitimize the notion of equality of the genders. The table also indicates that two-thirds of the arguments articulated against gender equality comes from the male-authored texts. This shows that the male authors tend to seek maintenance of the status quo (which perpetuates social inequalities between men and women) more than their female counterparts. While this is not surprising, it is amazing to see some female authors also articulating discourses that support patriarchal social order in society.

Table 1. The topoi used by the male and the female authors to de-legitimize gender equality

S/ N	Argumenta-tion schemes	Frequency		Total	Percentage
		Male- authored	Female- Authored		
1	The topos of religion	76	38	114	63%
2	The topos of gender differentiation	41	26	67	37%
		117	64	181	100%

Furthermore, the table also shows that most of the arguments against gender equality can be located within the topos of religion, which accounts for a large portion of the arguments articulated. I argue, therefore, that the topos of religion, as found in the corpus, is not only used as a tool of exclusion and inclusion of other people, as much of the literature on the subject claims (see e.g. Reisigl and Wodak, 2001; see also Atanga, 2010), but can serve also as a powerful means of justifying social inequality between men and women.

The topos of religion

As just noted, this is the most predominant topos used by both the male and the female authors to justify de-legitimization of the notion of equality of the genders. This topos is an appeal to religious authority, often through reverence for divine authority. It is, in the words of Reisigl and Wodak, a form of *argumentum ad verecundiam* (2001:79), by which particular position is constructed as true because, particular divine authority (or God in this case) or certain religious scripture agrees with it. Using this topos, the authors (who seem to hold conservative gender ideology), use the authority of God to de-legitimize gender equality. In example 1 for instance, the author, a male, used a quote from the Bible to invoke authorization of unequal gender relations.

Excerpt 1:

[...] in the book of Ephesians, God says and I quote “man is the head of woman just as Jesus Christ is the head of the church.” We have an obligation to obey the words of our creator [...] When you begin to distort or challenge God’s ordained orders for the male and the female genders you [will] begin to see abnormalities such as homosexuality. (TG, 12.11.2013: 22)

According example 1, unequal gender relation is something that God has already authorized. And because it has divine authorization, humans should not attempt to change it, as doing so amounts to challenging God’s authority, as insinuated in the example. The excerpt builds on religious authorization (based on appeal to divine authority), and as Vaara (2014:511) would argue, it involves “consequentialist argumentation”. By claiming that tampering or challenging the supposedly “God’s ordained orders” could have consequences or even negative effects, the author is, in a way, warning the reader about the dangers of attempting to change what was seemingly designed and sanctified by the divine authority. What is even more interesting is the way the author, through the use of this topos, appeals to the reader’s presumptive homophobic sensibilities by citing homosexuality as an aberration or an “abnormality” that can arise if the society go against divine laws. Through this, he hopes to not only appropriate religion to control the behaviour of the reader to think and act in desired ways but more importantly, de-legitimize the notion of social equality between men and women through the topos of religion.

Furthermore, the claim that *we have an obligation to obey the words of our creator* (Excerpt 1, lines 3-4), can be seen as a manipulative strategy. This is because many people in Nigeria appear to be too dogmatic on religious matters. Thus, they tend to accept almost anything constructed as emanating from God, without any serious scrutiny or contestation. Moreover, the use of the inclusive “we” and “our” pronouns in the example has enabled the author to construct a common religious identity with the reader. This can make the reader to easily align with the author, as often the more commonality we discursively

established with other people; the more likely it is that they accept our views or opinions. Note the choice of the word “creator” to refer to God. The purpose of using this “power-laden” word is to further persuade the reader into believing that they have a moral obligation to obey and live by the laws of the Creator. It would thus seem that, the logic of the argument in the excerpt is to represent traditional gender relations as sacred, as a way of legitimizing it through the topos (of religion). In example 2, the author, a female, appeals to the reader to think of the implication of rejecting the gender roles that God has (supposedly) chosen for men and women in favour of what the author describes as “an alien way of life” (Excerpt 2, line 4), which as she claims, is not in harmony with (the dominant) religious teachings in society. And, on this basis, therefore, through the argument encoded in the topos of religion, the author de-legitimizes the notion of equality of sexes on the ground of religion.

Excerpt 2:

What is being planned for the Nigerian woman is dangerous to her life and faith. Western life style on women, especially, I dare say, is completely at variance with the teachings of our religion. We are Africans and a people who believe in God. We cannot reject laws of God and choose an alien way of life. We have to be careful because all that glitters is not gold. (NN, 16.9.2005: 9)

What is however interesting in the excerpt is the way the author represents the western way of life (that maybe seen as promoting gender equality), as a threat to the social and religious life of the Nigerian woman. Note how the author ascribes religious identity to all African and Nigerian women in particular through the genericisation strategy encoded in the inclusive “we” pronoun, as found in the following declarative clauses: *We are Africans and a people who believe in God*”, *“We cannot reject laws of God”*, and *“We have to be careful because all that glitters is not gold* (Excerpt 2, lines 3-6). The assumption here is that all women in Nigeria subscribe to the teachings in for instance, the Bible about gender relations. Thus, through the use of this topos the author appeals to the reader, and by extension women to seek to obey and live by the teachings of their religion. In order to convince the reader to accept this view, the author uses the idiom *all that glitters is not gold*¹ to further warn against choosing particular systems of gender relation that presumably run contrary to what the author constructed as *the laws of God*. Using this idiomatic expression, the author warns the reader and by extension the woman to be careful because, as the last sentence of the excerpt suggests, not everything that looks attractive is genuine or good.

Turning back to the pronominal usage in the excerpt. The author’s repeated use of inclusive “we” pronoun three times in three consecutive sentences is aimed at satisfying “positive face”, as Brown & Levinson (1987) would argue. It also appears to be a strategy of showing her affiliation to the “in-group” (or in this case, Nigerian women), who appear to be the target readers. Thus, the author’s repeated use of this pronominal item (i.e. we) can be seen as a discursive strategy that can be used to persuade the reader, and by extension the woman into accepting the author’s point of view. This is because, as was explained earlier, often the more commonality we discursively established with certain other people, the more likely it is that they accept our views or opinions.

The topos of gender differentiation

¹ This expression is believed to have first been used by William Shakespeare in his famous play: *The Merchant of Venice*, 1596.

This topos is based on the belief that men and women belong to two separate dimensions of existence, or what gender as socially learned theorists (e.g. Tannen, 1990) would call separate gender. As extract 3 and 4 showed, the logic of this topos is that if a person is for instance, named as a man or a woman, then he or she is expected to carry the qualities and roles that persons who belong to that gender group traditionally carry or play in society. Authors, who used this topos, have drawn on social order arguments that emphasize division of roles and duties along gender lines in order to de-legitimize gender equality.

Excerpt 3:

In all societies, men and women play different roles, have different needs and face different constraints. These roles demarcate responsibilities between men and women in social and economic activities, access to resources and decision-making. In many traditional African societies for example, the man farms and brings grains home. The woman will complement this 'gesture' by engaging in petty trading to earn more money to enable her purchase ingredients necessary to cook the meal. (DT, 15.1.2011: 40)

Similar discourse can be observed in 4.

Excerpt 4:

The nature and indeed the society has distinguished roles for the man and the woman in union or matrimony [...] It is a dictate of nature for the man to take up the task of struggle to provide food for the family and other necessities while the woman takes the role of taking care of the home and family. And it has been like that since time immemorial. (V, 21.3.2009: 31)

The examples above exemplify how the topos of gender differentiation is used to justify social inequality between men and women. As will be shown shortly, it also provides a basis for legitimizing gender inequality. The portrayal of the man as in charge of farming and providing the material needs of the family, and the woman as complementing his efforts by cooking the meal serves as a way of constructing and legitimizing unequal power relations between men and women in society. Particularly interesting is 4, where the author, a female, constructs traditional gender roles and power relations as natural. And because they are as natural (as the author wants the reader to believe), they should be accepted as normal practices, as implied in the excerpt. This is further amplified by the author's claim that the practices existed "since time immemorial", which serves to not only portray the traditional systems of gender relation as becoming ossified over time to become parts of the culture but also, as providing the basis for legitimizing the systems. Within the larger Nigerian society, challenging a system or systems constructed as part and parcel of the culture (or, ways of life of the people) could be deflected. This is because, any attempt to challenge the status quo may be seen as going against the values of society rather than, the view expressed by the author (or the legitimator). In the section that follows, I examine the argumentation patterns used exclusively by the male authors to de-legitimize social equality between men and women.

6.2 The topoi exclusively used by the male authors to legitimize inequality

In this section, the analysis shows how the male authors have exclusively employed some topoi to discursively legitimize social inequality between men and women in society. Here again, two patterns of argumentation can be identified, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The topoi used by the male authors to de-legitimate equality

S/N	Topoi	Frequency	percentage
1.	The topos of foreign cultures	47	54.65%
2.	The topos of male disempowerment	39	45.35%
		86	100%

Table 2 shows that large percentage of arguments articulated by the male authors against the notion of gender equality can be grouped under the topos of foreign cultures. In other words, the authors have used arguments that emphasize the need for the preservation of the local culture to justify their call for the maintenance of status quo. Another argumentation scheme found to be peculiar to the male-authored texts, is the topos of male disempowerment, as shown in the table. Through these argumentation schemes, some male authors who seem to hold conservative gender ideology, made a case for skewed gender relations in society. One thing common to these patterns of argumentation is that they both use topoi (or, argumentation strategies) that enable the authors to articulate arguments that emphasize the need to maintain cultural practices that perpetuate social inequality between men and women in society. In what follows, we present and discuss examples of these patterns of argumentations and their linguistic means of realizations.

The topos of foreign cultures

The male authors, who argue against social equality between men and women, use the topos of foreign cultures to warn against imbibing gendered practices that do not originate in Nigerian society because, as they argue, such practices could be counter-productive. This topos (of foreign cultures) draws from the premise that if a particular practice “bears specific dangerous, threatening consequences, one should not perform or do it” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001a: 77). In example 5, the author insinuates that foreign practices on gender could erode the local culture and, as consequence, the society could lose its value system.

Excerpt 5:

If we are not careful with foreign practices infiltrating our society, we will soon lose our value system. The kind of equality between man and woman in marriage, which the oyinbos want us to imbibe is not something that can work here. The number of marital divorces in those so-called gender-equal societies is alarming, and is something we much less desired here because of its destructive effect. We don’t want the fabric of the family structure to be destroyed in the process. (DT, 4.11.2006: 27)

This excerpt makes two powerful claims. First, it argues that the western or foreign practices on gender are capable of eroding the local culture as well as destroying the fabric of the family institution. Second, it contends that the practices cannot work in Nigerian society simply because, they are not part of the local

culture. Particularly interesting is the assertion made by the author that the practice of equality of spouses was a failure because, as he argues, it has led to high rise in marital divorce in the West, where it seemingly originates, as he suggests. On this basis and through the use of this topos (of foreign cultures), the author de-legitimizes it. Note how the author uses the adverbial clause of reason (*because of its destructive effect*), to construct the notion of equality of the spouses as having negative effects. Labelling or constructing particular practices negatively can serve as an argumentation strategy. This strategy is used here, to emphasize the assumed or even feigned anticipated effects of the notion of equality and de-emphasize what the society may stand to benefit by giving men and women equal opportunities and rights. Even more interesting is the way the author uses the intensifier “much” and the diminutive marker “less” to pre-modify the adjective “desired” as an evaluative strategy, which he deploys to portray the notion of spousal equality as unworkable and therefore undesirable since, according to him, it has “destructive effect.” He insinuates that it could destroy the fabric of the family institution. This is however a fallacy because, the author fails to show any correlation between spousal equality and high marital divorce rates. This is more so, considering the fact that divorce rate is also very high in some cultures that practice little or no spousal equality. For example, it is a common knowledge that the Hausa community in northern Nigeria has high marital divorce rate yet, many Hausas do not seem to subscribe to western notion of equality of spouses. In the excerpt below, the author through the use of the topos (of foreign cultures) argues that copying western gender practices could well lead to the destruction of the marriage institution, which as he tries to point out, could pave the way for the practice of same-sex relationships in society.

Excerpt 6:

We shouldn't copy those habits from America and Europe [...]. We shouldn't think that the freedom they claim to have, to do whatever they like in marriage has helped them. Their marriages are breaking at an unimaginable rate. Marriage in those societies is no more sacred, it is a mere social contract, which even people of same gender could enter into. (NN, 14.5.2002: 20)

Apparently, the intention of the author here is to construct a link between spousal equality and same-sex relationships. This comes out clearly in the proposition that marriage is “no more sacred” because, according to the author, even “people of same gender” (Excerpt 6) can marry one another in cultures that practice gender equality. By invoking homosexuality, the author is, in a way, subtly appealing to the reader's religious beliefs that presumably prohibits same-sex marriage or relationship. He knows that by constructing homosexuality as part of gender equality agenda, he could easily persuade some readers to reject the idea. This is an example of what Ellece (2012:66) describes as “scare tactics”, by which a practice the reader may see as evil, ungodly or immoral is constructed as being part of a contested issue (or, in this case gender equality). Note how the author claims that the equality of the spouses has not helped the West, implying that since it does not benefit the people who presumably “invent” it (as alleged by the author), it may not as well, be useful to other cultures, who may want to copy it. Thus, through the use of what I refer to as “foreignisation” strategy, as encoded in the topos, the authors (who oppose social equality between men and women) articulated arguments that de-legitimize gender equality.

The topos of male disempowerment

Using this topos, some male authors represent men as the victims of gender discrimination. They claim that the notion of equality of the sexes was designed to favour women only, and on this basis, they delegitimize it because, according to them, it discriminates against men. This topos (of male disempowerment) is based on the premise of victim-victimizer relationships reversal, or what Reisigl and Wodak refer to as *trajectio in alium* (2001: 72), by which as Ellece (2012:59) explains, “a group that is favoured by a social system claims discrimination when there is reversal of roles”. Below we analyze and discuss how the topos is realized linguistically in the male-authored texts.

Excerpt 7:

[...] the men are endangered species. Their jurisdiction has been encroached upon and they need some assistance to recover [...]. The men have become the weaker sex in the New World Order (NWO) and they deserve the understanding of the woman. They [men] are put on the smoky side of this new order (TG, 16.2.2000: 38)

As this example shows, men are represented as disempowered by the systems that promote social equality between men and women in society. Using the animal and/or plant metaphor *endangered species* (Excerpt 7, line 1), the author portrays men as being at the risk of extinction. He identifies the *New World Order* (Excerpt 7, line 3) that presumably supports the equality of the genders as posing a threat to men. Particularly interesting is the fire metaphor used by the author to depict men as the victims of what the author constructs an unjust or a biased system, as the expression: They [men] are put on the smoky side of this new order (Excerpt 7, lines 1-2) implicitly communicates. This metaphorical expression, which seems to build on the image of two groups of people sitting on different sides of a warming fire. One group (the men) are seated on the side to which the smoke flows, inhaling all the toxic gasses emitting from the fire and taking the piercing pain of the smokes into their eyes. And the other group (the women) are placed on the non-smoky side, enjoying the warmth of the fire (or in this case, the systems that promote equality). Thus, through this metaphor, the author suggests that the new system discriminates against men, as it puts them *on the smoky side*, (Excerpt 7, line 4) that is, it treats them unfairly. It would therefore seem that the author, through the arguments he articulates in this topos (of male disempowerment), is suggesting that since the system, as he claims, was designed to favour one group over the other, it should be rejected because it is one-sided, and hence, biased and unjust.

In 8, the author blames feminism for all the difficulties and sufferings (some) men are facing or undergoing in society.

Excerpt 8:

Mathyila says one thing he has learnt about feminism is that it is not about equality between the sexes, but female supremacy. He complains that feminism has got men so twisted in the head that they're afraid to be a little aggressive and sexually playful lest they are charged with date rape. Love has become a mystery. Many men are suffering identity crises on a daily basis. Men simply don't know what being a man actually means anymore. (TG, 22.2.2014: 42)

In 8, men are portrayed as the victims of feminism (or, movement for the protection of women's rights). The author represents men as undergoing suffering caused by feminism, which, as he claims, has turned

the table on men, as also alluded by 8. His intention, it would seem, is to depict men as being at the receiving end of the movement (for equality of the genders). This is an example of what Reisigl and Wodak refer to, as *argumentum ad misericordium* fallacy, by which one unjustifiably appeals for compassion and empathy “in order to win an antagonist over to one’s side” (2001: 72). Thus, rather than presenting a strong argument to support his position, the author chooses to represent men as being unfairly treated as a way of portraying feminism as unfair to men. By this strategy, the author, it would seem, wants the reader to support the view that gender equality was not about correcting the power imbalance between men and women but rather, a plot to ensure women supremacy over men, as explicitly stated in the first sentence of the excerpt. Thus, through this topos, some male authors who oppose gender equality articulated arguments that aimed at shaping social reality in ways that tend to serve their own interest.

The topos exclusively used by the female authors to legitimize inequality

In this section, I identify and discuss one topos used exclusively by the female authors to legitimize social inequality between men and women in society. In the sub-section below, the study presents and analyzes examples of this pattern of argumentation. Particular attention is paid to the linguistic features used to achieve it.

The topos of natural social order

This topos is closely related, and indeed, an extension of “the topos of gender differentiation” discussed earlier. It is used here by the female authors to argue that in any relationship, one party (or, gender group in this case) must be dominant. And since, as they argue, the nature and culture have conferred superiority on men, they should be allowed to continue playing the leadership role. This topos is used to point out to the reader that any attempt to change this natural order of things could lead to chaos – caused by the leadership vacuum – in the household, as suggested in 9.

Excerpt 9:

It is not by chance that nature conferred superiority to the man, it is to ensure a balance and lay a fundamental rule for natural equilibrium. Where there is no apparent leader, there will be chaos [...] Even in Western countries where women fly high, in the deep recess of their society they unwillingly succumb to this natural order of things. It is about having a leader all the time for the sake of civilization to thrive. (DT, 2.4.2011: 44)

Similar discourse can be observed in 10.

Excerpt 10:

Since the man is the head of the family, there must be a way of subjecting a woman under him so that there won’t be clash of two captains in the same boat [...] what most women clamouring for this gender thing don’t know is that it will create leadership vacuum in the family, marital conflicts and anarchy as a result of undefined roles for the man and the woman. (TG, 7.3.2006: 32)

Analyzing the excerpts above, one notices how the authors attempt to point out to the reader the implications of changing what they claim to be a natural social order, which places men over and above women. For these authors, who are surprisingly females (or at least identify themselves as such), chaos would result in the absence of the male authority in the family. Thus, they represent spousal inequality as being the dictate of nature, constructing it as a natural phenomenon that exist in almost all cultures. This can be seen in the following declarative sentence: *Even in Western countries where women fly high, in the deep recess of their society, they unwillingly succumb to this natural order of things* (Excerpt 10, lines 3 - 4). Particularly significant is the use of the adjunct *even* to begin the statement. This can make the author's claim pervasive, making it difficult for an average reader to intuit that such practices justified as part of the natural social order may not be so at all (see Macleod, 1992: 139, for a discussion on functions of the adjunct *even* in discourse).

Furthermore, as van Leeuwen points out, "the only criterion for distinguishing between a true natural order and a moral and cultural order disguising itself as a natural order is the question of whether we are dealing with something that can, in principle, be changed by human intervention" (2008:111). It would seem then that, it is this human intervention the authors are trying to prevent from occurring, and hence their use of the topos of natural social order to amplify the anticipated dangers or consequences of such actions or practices. Thus, the argument they articulated in this topos involves, as Vaara (2014:511) would argue, consequential argumentation strategy, by which the possible side effects of particular actions or decisions are emphasized, as a way of discouraging the reader from supporting it.

So far the analysis has been concerned with the different ways in which arguments against gender equality are articulated in the corpus. The analysis reveals that most of the arguments articulated have centred on the preservation of the local cultural and religious practices and the social order in society. In the coming section and sub-sections, the analysis will focus on the argumentation strategies used by both the male and the female authors to articulate arguments in support of the notion of equality of the genders. Here again, particular attention will be paid to the linguistic means of realization of the arguments articulated rather than, the arguments per se. Note that here again the arguments are presented in the form of topoi.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this critical discourse analysis of selected Nigerian newspapers illuminates the pervasive delegitimization of gender equality within the country's media landscape. Through the lens of Wodak's discourse historical approach to CDA and critical feminist media studies, this study has revealed how language, imagery, and framing techniques are employed to perpetuate gender stereotypes, reinforce patriarchal ideologies, and marginalize women's voices and experiences.

The findings underscore the urgent need for transformative action to challenge and dismantle the discursive barriers hindering the advancement of gender equality in Nigeria. Efforts to promote more equitable and inclusive representations of gender in the media must be rooted in a deep understanding of the power dynamics and ideological biases shaping media discourse. This necessitates collaborative initiatives involving media practitioners, policymakers, civil society organizations, and grassroots activists to promote gender-sensitive reporting, foster diverse representations, and amplify marginalized voices.

Moreover, addressing the delegitimization of gender equality in Nigerian newspapers requires broader structural reforms aimed at tackling systemic inequalities, promoting women's empowerment, and fostering a culture of gender equity and social justice. This includes implementing policies to promote gender diversity in media ownership and leadership, enhancing media literacy programs to challenge harmful stereotypes, and fostering partnerships between media organizations and women's rights advocates to promote gender-responsive reporting.

While this study has provided valuable insights into the discursive construction of gender equality in Nigerian newspapers, further research is needed to explore the intersections of gender with other axes of social inequality, such as class, ethnicity, and sexuality, within the media landscape. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking changes in media representations over time and comparative analyses across different media platforms could offer deeper insights into the evolving dynamics of gender discourse in Nigeria.

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