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Women's voice, agency and resistance in Nigerian blogs: A feminist critical discourse analysis

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ABSTRACT

This paper contributes to the burgeoning literature on how women construct resistance, project their agency and sculpt a positive identity for themselves. It employs feminist critical discourse analysis as a framework to examine how Nigerian blogs on gender issues constitute a discursive site for sociopolitical action, the interrogation and deconstruction of gendered social structures and the amplification of women's voices(s). The article analyzes discursive strategies used in the blogposts to resist gender inequality, women's exploitation and female subjugation while constructing a positive image for women and emphasizing their empowerment. The results reveal three main strategies: (1) denouncing patriarchy and gender discrimination, (2) countering toxic gender narratives and (3) calling out sexist attitudes and praising women who resist such behaviour. Together, these mechanisms contribute to a sociopolitical critique of systematic gendering of privilege aimed at social transformation and Nigerian/African women's emancipation. Implications of the study for research on marginalized, disenfranchised groups are discussed.

Introduction

Research on the discursive construction of women as a marginalized group continues to receive attention in the communication and gender studies literature. This scholarship, aimed at exposing the inequality in social structures and highlighting the concerns of women, have focused on issues such as sexism (Savigny, 2019; Tipler & Ruscher, 2019), commodification or objectification (McLoughlin 2017; Yu, 2019), oppression, domination and powerlessness (Ladegaard, 2019; Mohammed, 2019) as well as patriarchy and gendered discrimination (Lazar, 2005; Nartey, 2022b). These studies throw light on the framings and portrayals typically associated with women's identity, especially in the media, and the dominant roles and characteristics that emerge from such associations. This body of work has also examined the strategies and processes of (de)legitimation used in the representations and evaluations given to women, bringing to the fore the role of language and discourse in identity construction and the reproduction of various forms of alterity and stereotypes about women.

Generally, the existing work on women as a marginalized group has centred on issues that border on repression, discrimination, prejudice and the perpetuation of dominance (cf. Nartey, 2022b). Consequently, there is a dearth of studies on the voice and agency of women, including their dialogues of resistance, their discourses of empowerment and how they sculpt a positive image for themselves. Such research is important in demonstrating one of the key roles of language and

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communication research less emphasized in the literature: centring the voice and agency of oppressed groups, highlighting emancipatory discourses and reconstructing resistance. While the present study recognizes that gender inequality and constricting social practices against women are still prevalent and hence issues such as objectification/commodification, suppression, sexist attitudes, etc. must continue to receive scholarly attention, it also submits that there is a need for more research that amplifies women's voices and centres women's positive presentation. Another gap in the literature is the disproportion of scholarship focusing on women and feminism in the Global North, which leaves a context like Africa underexplored. To redress the aforementioned gaps, this study adopts Lazar's (2007) feminist critical discourse analysis to analyse blogposts authored by Nigerian women and which have an emancipatory orientation or foreground the voice and empowerment of Nigerian/African women.

Nigeria is a highly pluralized society that has a complex and diversified sociocultural landscape, with over 200 million people from 300 different ethnic groups who speak 520 languages and practice various religions. In Nigeria, although women have equal rights under the constitution, there are still disparities in education, employment, socioeconomic status and moral values for women. Women also have less access to resources compared to men (Anyalebechi, 2016; Makama, 2013). These disparities can be attributed to sociohistorical ideologies of female subordination, cultural expectations of women, religious beliefs/practices and social customs, conventions and regulations considered normative for women. They are rooted in the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society and can be found at the macro, meso and micro levels of the social structure. Despite the progress that has been made for women empowerment and advocacy in recent years (e.g. an increase in girl child education and women in leadership, the formation of more feminist movements, greater awareness about gender issues), the gender imbalance in Nigerian society is noticeable. For example, women are underrepresented in government and their participation in politics is sometimes accompanied by vilification. Also, the association of a woman's value with marriage and childbearing is normative and there are double standards of sexual behaviour, especially with respect to a virgin identity for women. Additionally, women suffer various forms of abuse, including rape, female genital mutilation, domestic violence and early or child marriage (Akpan, 2003; Chika, 2012; Oyekanmi, 2005). To address these problems, various nationalist feminist movements have been founded and the work of feminist organizations and women's rights groups has increased in the last decade. These groups use the Internet, especially social media, for sociopolitical mobilization. Although women's voices transcend their text on the Internet, such text constitutes a key discursive site for resistance, advocacy, solidarity formation and group empowerment (Nartey, 2022a). This paper therefore analyzes Nigerian blogs with a feminist orientation as an instance of discourse of contestation and illustrates how the affordances of digital media help Nigerian women to project their voice, foreground their agency and (re)construct a positive identity for themselves.

Framework

This study utilizes Lazar's (2007) feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA), a framework that combines insights from critical discourse analysis (CDA) and feminist studies to unpack the complex workings of power and ideology in language use that contributes to (hierarchically) gendered social arrangements. FCDA is informed by critical feminism and is an approach that examines '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' (Lazar, 2007, p. 142). Shaped by a social justice and transformation perspective, FCDA aims to 'confront' discourses that reinforce gendered social practices and constricting structures that encroach upon opportunities for women and men as human persons. The approach is therefore not just a deconstruction of text and talk as an academic exercise, but is rooted in the understanding that the issues studied hold practical and phenomenological implications for groups of women and men in specific social contexts. While focusing on the

broader feminist political project of empowerment and social justice for women, FCDA takes cognizance of differences among women in various societies and recognizes that sexist attitudes will manifest differently in different contexts (Lazar, 2005). Consequently, it puts forward a comparative perspective (instead of one that is universal) and submits that feminist political action needs to be 'inflected by the specificity of cultural, historical and institutional frameworks, and contextualized in terms of women's complexly constructed social identities' (Lazar, 2007, p. 149).

It is worth stating that even though FCDA uses insights from CDA to achieve its feminist objective, FCDA is not merely the application of CDA frameworks to analyse gender (issues). This dichotomy between employing CDA approaches to examine gender (issues) and a *feminist* critical discourse analysis is hinged on the notion that 'FCDA is fundamentally driven by developments in critical feminist theory' (Lazar, 2014, p. 182) and is shaped by a feminist political imagination (Bell, 1999). There are five key (interrelated) principles of FCDA: (1) feminist analytical activism, (2) gender as ideological structure and practice, (3) complexity of gender and power relations, (4) discourse in the (de)construction of gender and (5) critical reflexivity as praxis. This framework was chosen for the study because it is useful in analysing discursive strategies of resistance, solidarity and social empowerment of disenfranchised women. Such an analysis reifies the concept of intersectionality and thus 'helps to expose historical silences and to understand oppression and privilege as lived experiences and processes situated in and shaped by material, political and social conditions' (May, 2015, p. 6).

Data and methods

The data for this study comprise 75 blogposts that have a women's empowerment orientation written by 15 women. Some of the authors explicitly identified themselves as feminists while others were silent about their feminist identity. Nonetheless, all the blogposts had a feminist orientation in that they critique patriarchy and gender inequality, resist female subordination and centre female empowerment issues. Most of the blogposts were the authors' personal reflections on gender bias in Nigerian society and hence were not triggered by specific sociopolitical topics but few were informed by issues like #EndSARS (a series of online and onsite protests against police brutality in Nigeria), gendered statements by prominent Nigerians, a report by Thomson Reuters Foundation that listed Nigeria as the ninth most dangerous country for women and public remarks by Nigerian celebrities in support of dismantling patriarchal structures.

The data were collected from the following blogs: feminine.com.ng, nigerianwomentrustfund. org, nilowv.org and kind.org. They were chosen because they are notable websites that address gender inequality and women's rights by taking an intersectional approach that exposes various inequitable systems in Nigeria and strongly advocate positive change, social justice and a transformative society. Their aim as stated on the various websites is to 'empower Nigerian women to live their best lives', 'address the growing concern about the gender imbalance in Nigerian society', 'empower politically and economically as well as defend women's right within the context of present-day Nigeria and beyond' and 'to remove barriers to women's public participation and end violence against women'. These websites/movements are led by educated women and their readership or followers are presumably (young and often educated) members of the population who have access to the Internet. This audience, including students, celebrities and middle-class individuals, is not highly diversified and hence limits the feminist efforts of the blogs in terms of reaching out to the most vulnerable rural women and the underprivileged (cf. Chiluwa, 2022). This limitation notwithstanding, the bloggers position themselves as representing the interests of all Nigerian women. I therefore argue that despite their limited audience, the blogs constitute a useful discursive site that amplifies marginalized voices, making them suitable for a critical analysis of the voice and agency of Nigerian women.

The method of analysis followed a three-stage process: (1) identification of resistance strategies and discursive mechanisms used for solidarity formation via close reading, (2) interpretation of the

strategies based on specific context of situation and the broader sociopolitical/historical context and (3) explanation of the (possible) effect of the strategies on readers. The following criteria were adopted in identifying the strategies: (1) expression of discontent with practices that reinforce gendered social arrangements, (2) articulation of social justice (for women) and societal transformation, (3) communication of a feminist political action/imagination, (4) rejection of cultural devaluation and (5) emphasis on access to forms of discourse that can be empowering for women's participation in public domains. The paper contends that the blogposts realize a social justice agenda aimed at advancing the cause of Nigerian/African women in order to give them a voice and an appropriate identity.

Analysis and discussion

To resist gender inequality and empower Nigerian women particularly and African women in general, the blogposts employed three main mechanisms, which have been discussed below. I argue that the issues explored in the blogposts do not only prepare the ground for action, but also constitute action since Lazar (2014) notes that critical awareness is a form of activism.

Denouncing patriarchy and gender discrimination

The patriarchal nature of Nigerian society sustains gender discrimination and traditional gender norms. Consequently, the blogposts condemn systematic gendering of privilege and male domination while making calls for major social reforms as demonstrated in the extracts below.

(1) If you still believe that men are superior to women and women must always endure bad behaviour from irresponsible men, you are on a long thing. Wake up, it's 2020. Who has time to be enduring crap from a grown baby? Men and women are equal. Men were not created to lord it over women. Women are not inferior to men. This nonsense thing is what society taught you. It's a learned behaviour. You can unlearn it.

(2) It is important for Nigerian women not to conform to societal expectations and live life on their own terms. Getting to the point where they don't live to please society may not be easy for some women but it will be the best decision they will ever take in their lives. When people tell me I don't talk like a woman, I laugh. I laugh at this people because they are ignorant . . . Here are three reasons why Nigerian women shouldn't conform to societal expectations:

(3) Nigerian society messed up many women. From childhood, girls are taught to ignore themselves and take care of others. As teenagers, girls are taught how to wash, cook, clean, behave and talk so that they can attract good men to marry them. It is always about pleasing men. It's as if women don't matter. As adults, women are expected to dumb down themselves so that men can accept them and reward them with marriage. Women are expected to tolerate abuse.

(4) The earlier Nigerian women learn that they don't have to get married to prove their worth to this society, the less sob stories they will tell about their marriages years later. You don't have to displease yourself to please this hypocritical society. No matter what you do as a woman in Nigeria, people will still judge you. No matter how much you try to fit into this society's expectations of you, it won't be enough. Nigerian women need to stop seeing marriage as a way of proving their worth.

The extracts above were taken from personal reflections of a blogger who used her lived experience as a single mother and her observation of Nigerian society to denounce patriarchal ideology and gender discrimination. She submits that because of her writing, she has been labelled by some Nigerian men as 'a bitter single woman', 'an evil woman', 'an agent of the devil' and 'a negative influence on women'. Her strong position against male chauvinism and

women's subjugation is echoed in another blogpost: 'women don't exist to please men. Women don't exist to fix men. Women don't exist to mother men. Women don't exist to clean up after men. Women don't exist to abandon their dreams for men. Women don't exist to obey men … Women exist for themselves' (feminine.com.ng 09/09/2020). Apart from serving the purpose of reiteration and reinforcement of ideas, parallel structures here contribute to the conveyance of emotion (possibly, anger and frustration) and thus strengthen the blogger's criticism against patriarchy and gender inequality. In Nigeria, gender oppression rooted in patriarchy can be observed in nearly all aspects of the society, including education, politics, religion, culture, health and the economy (Makama, 2013; Sibani, 2017). This has led to the violation of women's rights, problems with women's reproductive health and women's exploitation. It is therefore unsurprising that the extracts above condemn patriarchy and gender inequality with vehemence.

Given that gendered social arrangements are created and sustained via social customs, conventions and regulations (Maluleke, 2012), the extracts explicitly identify 'society' (1), 'social expectations' (2) and 'Nigerian society' (3) as the cause of the prevailing problem. The blogger then asks men to unlearn what society has taught them and encourage women not to conform to suppressive societal expectations. The personification of society is instructive because it concretizes the problems caused by patriarchy, thereby strengthening the criticism against patriarchy. The openness of conviction (Bell, 1999) in articulating critique against discourses and practices that work to maintain hierarchical gender relations is evident in the choice of phraseology such as 'ignorant', 'crap', 'nonsense', 'irresponsible men', 'grown baby' and in clauses such as 'I laugh' and 'you are on a long thing'. These expressions can be analysed as the use of caustic remarks by 'ordinary' people to challenge an undesirable system. Hence, although such expressions are considered face-threatening acts, the present study agrees with Ofori (2017) that they enable everyday people to make their voices heard as part of sociopolitical activism. When the figurative use of 'crap', 'grown baby' and 'you are on a long thing' is interpreted in conjunction with metaphorical expressions found in other blogs (e.g. 'you don't marry a woman and cage her', 'marriage is not a prison yard', 'Nigerian society will still drag you like small generator', 'Nigerian society messed up women'), there is evidence of how the linguistic choices made by the bloggers are informed by sociocultural context. I contend that this can enhance the bloggers' critique and the community of resistance they seek to create as their language capitalizes on local sentiments that will make their message more relatable to their audience.

Extracts (3) and (4) oppose the patriarchal ideology that correlates a woman's worth with marriage and childbirth. Although marital pressure exists for both women and men in Nigeria, this pressure manifests differently. As the extracts suggest, Nigerian women are raised to view marriage as an essential benchmark for a successful and fulfilled life (rather than a choice) to the extent that staying in an abusive marriage is considered more 'honourable' than being divorced. Conversely, men are socialized to see marriage as a normal step in their life that will bring their boyhood freedoms and playfulness to an end. Given this discrepancy, early marriage for adolescent girls is rife (cf. Callaghan et al., 2015; James, 2010) and there is a social expectation that women should get married in their twenties and have children by a certain age. Additionally, the idea of 'leftover women', referring to the view that highly educated and/or successful women will have difficulty to 'find' a husband (cf. Yu, 2019), is believed by many people. In sum, irrespective of their accomplishments, Nigerian women run the risk of not being respected unless they are married and/or have children. This practice has been normalized using culture, religion and the 'biological clock ticking' narrative. The blogposts oppose this ideology and, more importantly, proffer a transformative perspective of valuing women intrinsically rather than basing their value on marriage or motherhood.

The patriarchal ideology that legitimizes men's sexual freedom and women's sexual confinement is also tackled in the blogposts as shown in the following extracts.

(5) You talk about sex as a woman, people start calling you names. They insist you don't have home training. You say the sexual position you love, that makes you see tiny stars, Nigerians start binding and casting your sexual urges. You tell your fellow women how much you love sex, they look at you as if you are mad and then start avoiding you because they are holy.

(6) The ones I can't stand are the religious people who judge women for having sex but make excuses for men who do the same thing. These confused humans claim that women should be morally upright. I wonder why men should be morally bankrupt . . . Dear Nigerian women, have safe sex. It is your right to enjoy sex with your spouses and partners. Don't be ashamed to talk about sex . . . Depriving yourself of sex because you want to be seen and hailed a good girl is a waste of time. There's no sex in the afterlife.

Extract (5) was culled from an opinion piece titled 'Why are Nigerians so concerned about a woman's vagina?' while Extract (6) was taken from a blogpost motivated by a statement made by Nigerian actress, Ebun Hodo, during an interview. She stated that she loves sex so much and cannot stay long without it. Based on her observation of Nigerian society, the blogger predicts that Ebun Hodo will receive public backlash 'knowing how hypocritical Nigerians are about women being expressive about their sex lives' (feminine.com.ng 27/09/2020). The extracts suggest that women's sexual liberation will eliminate sexist insults and women's devaluation, thereby enabling women to make sexual choices without shame, disrespect and interference from society (especially, men). In most African societies, including Nigeria, there is a correlation of chastity and virtuousness with a virgin identity for women but not for men (Frost & Dodoo, 2010; Nartey, 2021). Men are therefore able to explore their sexuality without worrying about being labelled while women often live sexually repressed lives characterized by shame and guilt, especially if they depart from the societal expectation of being virgins. In instances where they deviate from the 'purity' or virgin bracket, they can be labelled with derogatory terms such as 'ashawo' (a pejorative slang for 'prostitute') and 'born 1, 2 or 3' (depending on the number of children a woman has had out of wedlock). The maintenance of a virgin identity (even if this is a facade) is thus necessary for Nigerian woman to keep their moral worth and avoid social ridicule. The extracts resist this social worldview that sustains male supremacy in society via normalized sexist norms and underscore the point that sexual double standards for women and men bode ill for society and human socialization since this creates a toxic climate conducive to women's exploitation.

Again, the communicative choices in the blogs from which the extracts above were selected are conditioned by local context, demonstrating how feminist discourse, even on digital platforms, can be persuasively narrativized when it takes on the (linguistic) features of the specific spatiotemporal contexts within which it is conceived and enacted. For instance, in calling out what she describes as the hypocritical attitude of Nigerians who shame women who are vocal about their sexuality, the blog writer of Extract (6) coins the term the 'Association of Nigerian Virtuous Women' and asserts that their members will 'tear Ebun Hodo to shreds' and 'will insult even her shadow for daring to say she enjoys sex'. While the implied meaning of this coinage can be deciphered by diverse audiences, it is likely to resonate more with Nigerians/Africans given the cultural and religious correlation made in Nigerian/African society between virtuousness, chastity, shamefacedness and talking about sex. Similarly, in the blogpost from which Extract (5) was chosen, the blogger uses colloquial expressions like 'vagina police', 'shagging' (a slang for sexual intercourse) and 'pounding' (a metaphorical expression for sexual intercourse) and localized constructions such as 'having a vagina blast', 'Nigerians start binding and casting your sexual urges' and 'You are doing yourself not me' to reinforce the importance of women's sexual freedom. I contend that the situatedness and localization of the feminist-cum-resistance posture of the bloggers can offer them argumentative advantage in promoting their objectives.

Countering toxic gender narratives

Another means by which a critical reflexive praxis manifests in the blogposts is in the countering of toxic gender narratives (or rewriting them) followed by a positive (re)constructing of women's identity. The extracts below illustrate this view.

(7) Nigerian women should stop feeling guilty for putting themselves first in relationships. It is okay for women to look out for their interests and take care of themselves. This narrative of telling women that they must take care of men even if these men are treating them badly should be discouraged.

(8) I laugh in DNA test. This society keeps pushing this narrative that it is okay for men to cheat while clutching the Bible. It's funny and hypocritical that the same people who justify cheating with the mistakes of some men in the Bible refuse to talk about the repercussions of cheating. The Bible admonished men and women alike not to commit adultery. The same Bible stated that adultery is a ground for divorce so what are these deluded humans talking about?

(9) When will women stand united and fight against this system that teaches us that men will always be men but women can avoid rape by dressing well and refusing their advances? When are we going to stop pushing this narrative that men don't have self-control? Are they animals? Who will hold Nigerian men accountable for their predatory actions against women? When will women stop blaming victims of sexual harassment because they want the men to see them as wife materials?

(10) I hope parents would stop teaching their sons how to bottle things up because boys don't cry. These boys now grow up thinking crying is a sign of weakness. I wish this society would stop telling little boys that showing emotion is the same thing as being a girl and being a girl is the same as being weak . . . It's time to raise expressive boys in tune with their emotions. Let boys cry. If they feel hurt, allow them to express the pain. Don't shut them up!

Extract (7) was culled from a reflective piece titled 'Ten things Nigerian women shouldn't feel guilty about'. In the extract, an argumentation strategy is used to reject the view that women must always put men's needs above theirs or when in a relationship/marriage, they must suspend or abandon their aspirations to support their partners to build their dreams. Hence, deontic modality (the use of 'must' and 'should') and an expression of normalization ('It is okay for women to look out for their interests and take care of themselves') are used to invalidate the existing societal expectation and to prepare the ground to offer an alternative perspective. To this end, several reasons are argued in the blogpost to explain why Nigerian women must not feel guilty about prioritizing their needs and why they should not put the needs of their partners above their own needs just to please society. Some of the reasons given include: (1) you will start to resent your partner, (2) you will start feeling like your partner owes you something, (3) you are not being fair to yourself and (4) you are acting desperately (feminine.com.ng 27/04/2019).

The context for the reasons given by the blogger is that Nigerian society makes women believe that 'building a man' comes with a great reward and is therefore a noble objective to be pursued even if one's partner is irresponsible/abusive and/or does not reciprocate the gesture in the short- to mid-term. This idea of women sacrificing their lives (i.e. careers, dreams, aspirations, interests) for their partners feeds into the narrative that blames Nigerian women when a marriage fails. For instance, they are told to endure bad relationships and pray for their men to change. Hence, the reasons argued in the blogposts to explain why women must not feel guilty to stand for themselves in relationships serve to counter gender stereotypes that normalize women's exploitation. The blogposts thus address a social misconception in a manner that is emancipatory for women and, hopefully, alter attitudes that sustain gender stereotypes.

In Extracts (8) and (9), the 'it is normal for men to cheat' narrative used to justify men's infidelity is debunked. The blogpost of Extract (8) was triggered by a Facebook post by a lady who submitted

that 'it is okay for men to cheat because God didn't create them to be with one woman'. She referenced King Solomon and King David in the Bible who had several wives and concubines to validate her proposition. The blogpost of Extract (9) was written in response to a comment by Nigerian actress, Dayo Amusa, who said during an interview that actresses make themselves vulnerable to sexual harassment by movie producers and directors. The Facebook post and Dayo Amusa's comment echo the commonly-held view in Nigerian society that judges and labels women for simply having sex (let alone having sex with different men). Yet, men can have multiple sexual partners without being shamed; hence the refrain 'men will always be men' (9). This narrative is debunked in the extracts and a more nuanced counterview is advanced. Using lexicalization in the form of adjectives such as 'funny' and 'hypocritical' and intertextuality by referencing the Bible, the blogger espouses the idea that men's infidelity can be attributed to indiscipline and a lack of self-control and – for those who make the biblical argument – is a ground for divorce since the Bible advises both women and men to refrain from fornication and adultery. Again, the use of phrases such as 'deluded humans', 'predatory actions' and 'animals' to refer to men who justify cheating or sexual coercion and associate it with virility can be analysed as the use of caustic remarks to air grievances as part of confronting oppressive systems (Ofori, 2017). Further, expressions like 'I laugh in DNA test' and 'wife materials' in Extract (9) illustrate how language features characteristic of local communities and audiences can be tactfully exploited in articulating a feminist discourse praxis and a socially progressive worldview aimed at amplifying women's empowerment and self-determination.

There is a belief within Nigerian sociocultural system that boys/men must be tough while girls/women must be soft (Olawoye et al., 2004). This social narrative is refuted in Extract (10) and the point that boys/men – like all healthy human beings – can express a variety of emotions is made. By arguing that boys/men can be emotional without fear of losing their masculinity or being stigmatized, the blogpost suggests that the dismantling of gendered social practices and relations does not only benefit women, but also allows men to escape repressive gender norms for their own betterment. In addition to countering toxic gender narratives, the blogs carve a positive image for Nigerian women by reconceptualizing various issues that marginalize them. The extracts below exemplify this point.

(11) Stop teaching your daughters that they have to audition for male attention so that they can be rewarded with marriage. Stop teaching your daughters that the best thing that can happen to them is being noticed by men who will find them worthy of marriage . . . Teach them to be leaders and CEOs. Teach them the importance of being themselves instead of living to fight for male attention.

(12) An empowered woman knows that to live authentically and with integrity, she must challenge rules and norms that keep women stuck, playing small, or quiet. She questions traditions that don't allow women the opportunity to speak their minds, own their ideas, and create their own rules. How do you empower yourself as a woman?

(13) There is no limit to what we women can become or accomplish, absolutely no limit. What is the meaning of an awakened woman? Here are 20 qualities of an awakened woman Nigerian men don't like.

The blogposts from which the extracts above were selected were written as feminist epistles of a sort, beginning with address terms such as 'Dear young ladies' and 'Dear Nigerian parents'. They were based on the bloggers' introspection and were aimed at rejecting the stereotypes associated with women's role in society and sculpting a positive identity for women by foregrounding their qualities. Supporting the feminist goal of social transformation, the extracts reclaim the existing narrative on Nigerian women and promote the view that Nigerian women have leadership qualities and hence can become CEOs (11), they are awakened women who shine their unique light in the world (13) and their empowerment enables them to resist repressive social practices (12). This centring of Nigerian women's voices via a reconstruction of their social identity can be interpreted

as a form of sociopolitical activism aimed at facilitating learning, unlearning and relearning of the narratives typically associated with Nigerian women. As is correctly noted in Extract (11), the correlation of a woman's worth with marriage serves to maintain hierarchically gendered relations that reiterate the view that a woman's goals and aspirations are invalid. The blogpost proposes a paradigm shift that says women do not need male attention to validate them since they are complete in themselves. This new paradigm can be liberating to women who may be carrying the burden of wanting to please the 'social bystanders' who keep reminding them to get married.

It is also instructive that Extract (11) exhorts parents to teach their daughters that there are more important things in life than male attention. Given the role of African parents in shaping nearly every aspect of their children's life, including who and when to marry (Nganase & Basson, 2017), this exhortation brings to the fore the parenting effect on gender (in)equality (cf. Alemann et al., 2020). It is important to state that the emancipatory discourse promoted in the blogposts and the positive image carved for Nigerian women are not merely presented as theoretical views, but are also expressed in practical terms while paying attention to Nigeria's peculiar context. For instance, the blogposts explain that in Nigeria, one of the main hindrances to women's empowerment is the sociocultural idea that women are expected to depend on men because an empowered woman is hard to control and the notion that women are not complete without marriage, so girls are raised to be 'wife material'. Thus, the bloggers, first, demonstrate an understanding of the Nigerian context after which they point out why they consider gendered relations to be inimical and then underscore the need for a different socialization. As Extracts (12) and (13) show, rhetorical questions like 'How do you empower yourself as a woman?' and 'What is the meaning of an awakened woman?' are used to draw readers' attention before advancing concrete ways by which Nigerian women can extricate themselves from oppressive gender norms and project a positive self-presentation. By offering context-specific suggestions, the blogposts highlight Lazar's (2007) submission on the need for feminist political action to be contextualized in terms of specific cultural, historical and institutional frameworks.

Calling out sexist attitudes and praising women who resist such behaviour

The social emancipation idea promoted by the blogs is also evident in their calling out sexist attitudes, especially on social media, and applauding women whose actions oppose such behaviour. Importantly, the blogs expose the discriminatory discourses of public figures and thus constitute an advocacy platform that confronts the system by naming and shaming powerful members of the society whose actions or utterances reinforce gender discrimination. The extracts below explain this point.

(14) When will Nigerian women in different sectors be bold enough to tell Nigerian men to their faces to stop taking advantage of young girls? When will these women be bold enough to call out sexual predators in their chosen fields? When will women stop blaming victims of sexual harassment because they want the men to see them as wife materials? When? . . . When will Dayo Amusa tell Nigerian men to stop disgracing themselves because of sex?

(15) Grace Makun, wife of popular Lagos fashion designer Yomi Makun, is trending because of her controversial statement that 80% of broken homes are caused by women. According to her, a lot of women are too toxic, don't know how to use their power and that is the major reason their marriages are packing up . . . How did she arrive at that number? Does she expect women to die in toxic and abusive marriages so that this society won't call them names?

(16) Actress and singer, Bukunmi Oluwasina, is of the opinion that it is very hard to find a man who is 100% faithful. Speaking about the qualities she looks out for in a man, she said . . . Women like these make me want to puke. I don't understand how someone can justify cheating with the silly excuse of not knowing whether the next man will be faithful . . . If you want to be with a cheat, it's your choice, just don't make it a standard for other women.

The extracts above identify influential individuals in Nigerian society, including an actress-cum-singer (14), a brand influencer (15) and an entertainer-cum-producer (16), whose pronouncements or actions display sexist attitudes and prejudiced behaviour. The explicit identification of these individuals and the mentioning of their names demonstrate boldness and an openness of conviction in criticizing discourses that promote male domination and women's subjugation. In Extract (14), the sexist posture of an actress (Dayo Amusa) is condemned for alleging that up-and-coming actresses make themselves vulnerable to sexual harassment by making advances at male producers and directors to get roles. She made this allegation during an interview with a newspaper and explained that 'it takes two to tango'. Her comment normalizes the sexism that Nigerian women face and echoes the issue of victim-blaming that often characterizes rape, sexual harassment and domestic abuse in Nigeria (Aborisade & Vaughan, 2014). That is, her comment, as the blogpost argues, cannot be taken as an isolated case since many Nigerian women who suffer sexual violence are often accused of seducing men by wearing skimpy dresses, being alone with a man in a room/solitary place or not being virtuous enough in their conduct to ward off the men that violated them. It is also common knowledge that 'sex for jobs' or in exchange of other opportunities is prevalent in Nigeria. Hence, by openly calling out Dayo Amusa's sexist attitude, the blogpost condemns the social structure that creates and sustains gender discrimination, more so when the blogpost criticizes other individuals apart from Dayo Amusa and calls on 'Nigerian women in different sectors to be bold enough to tell Nigerian men to their faces to stop taking advantage of young girls'.

The focus of Extract (15) is a brand influencer (Grace Makun) whose remarks, packaged as advice, reinforces sexism and gendered stereotypes that place the responsibility of healthy/failed marriages solely on women. In a Facebook post, she stated that '80% of broken homes are caused by women [because] a lot of women are too toxic'. In an attempt to exonerate men, she asserted that 'It's high time people stop blaming men anytime they hear "marriage don scatter" [because] a lot of men are going through pains that they can't talk about' (feminine.com.ng 31/07/2020). Even though Grace Makun neither provided evidence to substantiate her views nor explained how she arrived at her 80% statistic, she conveyed her message in her manner that suggested that she was factually correct. Hence, it is important that the blogger calls her out for peddling falsehood that seeks to shame women for failed marriages. Using a series of rhetorical questions, the blogger points out the baselessness of Grace Makun's comment and puts forward a more rational opinion: it is not only a woman's fault, if at all, when her marriage fails. The enormous responsibility placed on Nigerian women to keep their marriages is one of the reasons why many tolerate bad relationships. Hence, the social activism performed by the blogpost does not only raise critical awareness about Grace Makun's prejudiced worldview, but can also be empowering to Nigerian women who may be carrying the burden of staying in abusive marriages to avoid being ridiculed and shamed for not being able to 'save' their marriage. To this end, the blogpost ends with a sound advice that dismisses Grace Makun's assertions: 'when a marriage fails, allow the parties involved to sort things out themselves. Blaming one party and exonerating the other is wrong' (feminine.com.ng 31/07/2020).

As already discussed, the normalization of men's infidelity stems from patriarchal ideology that encourages male supremacy. Extract (16) therefore calls out the sexist language of an entertainer/producer (Bukunmi Oluwasina) for positing that men cheat because they are neither angels nor saints. Given the sexual double standards in Nigerian society, this 'human nature' excuse made for men is hardly made for women. Indeed, women are expected to 'save themselves' for marriage (cf. Anyalebechi, 2016; Aries, 2015). Hence, when an influential person like Bukunmi Oluwasina justifies men's infidelity during a radio interview, she further isolates women who bear the brunt of men's irresponsibility. By pointing out the irrationality of the reason given by Bukunmi Oluwasina to justify men's infidelity, the blogpost sets the record straight, so to speak, on the issue of men's sexual freedom and women's sexual confinement. To this end, the blogpost resists Bukunmi Oluwasina's patriarchal perspective and sends a strong warning to her and others who share in her opinion: 'If you want to be with a cheat, it's your choice, just don't make it a standard for other women'. The

strong conviction with which the statement is expressed lends credibility to the intensity used to address Nigerian women's exploitation and empowerment.

Apart from calling out sexist attitudes and prejudiced comments of influential members of the society, the blogposts applaud women whose actions publicly and actively resist such behaviour as shown in the following extracts.

(17) A Nigerian designer, Fisayo Longe, aptly captures my thoughts on women abandoning their lives and making sacrifices for men to live their dreams because they expect to be rewarded in the future. Read her post below: . . . This is the gospel and every woman should read it. This has been my message for years to Nigerian women.

(18) Nollywood actress, Tonto Dikeh, has advised Nigerians to stop giving young Nigerian girls relationship advice all the time because chasing after rich men is not an achievement. According to her, . . . Tonto Dikeh killed it. I agree with her a hundred percent.

Extracts (17) and (18) applaud two Nigerian female personalities for advocating women's empowerment, financial independence and self-determination. Using their social media platforms, the two personalities (Tonto Dikeh and Fisayo Longe), encouraged women to challenge social expectations that limit women's progress and development, resist patriarchal practices such as male domination and the bullying of women and aspire to live life on their own terms. The extracts positively evaluate the views expressed by the two personalities and commend them for using their platforms and influence for a worthy cause. This is evident in constructions such as 'Fisayo Longe aptly captures my thoughts', 'Tonto Dikeh killed it', 'I agree with her a hundred percent'', 'This has been my message for years' and 'This is the gospel and every woman should read it'. Realizing an intensification strategy, these lexico-syntactic structures are employed to boost the force of the comments made by Tonto Dikeh and Fisayo Longe as well as accentuate the need for gendered social arrangements deriving from patriarchy to be dismantled. I submit that the blogs' projection of the voice and agency of Tonto Dikeh and Fisayo Longe contributes to sociopolitical activism, which is necessary to cause a change in sexist attitudes against women, especially in Nigeria where issues of gender equality and feminism have begun to gain more attention in recent years.

Conclusion

Using feminist critical discourse analysis as an analytic framework, this paper has examined women's voice, agency and resistance in Nigerian blogs. It analysed the discursive strategies utilized in the blogposts to oppose gender discrimination, women's exploitation and female subjugation while promoting a positive self-presentation for women and their solidarity formation for group empowerment. Three discursive strategies were identified: (1) deconstructing patriarchy and condemning gender discrimination, (2) countering toxic gender narratives and (3) calling out sexist attitudes and praising women who resist such behaviour. These mechanisms were realized by choice in lexis, structures of argument and interactions among discourses. Together, they contribute to a sociopolitical deconstruction of systematic gendering of privilege intended at social transformation. Given that positive social change is a process rather than an event, this paper maintains that the emancipatory discourse promoted by the blogs must be combined with practical offline actions such as campaigns, public education, outreach programmes and engagement with relevant institutions or policymakers. That is, there is a need for a continuous striving for social justice in order to 'constantly imagine and open up ways for "doing and becoming" that are more socially inclusive and respectful of all persons' (Lazar, 2014, p. 148). The need for practical offline actions cannot be overemphasized since the use of digital media to promote feminist efforts in Africa excludes vulnerable rural women, illiterates and underprivileged people who do not have access to the Internet.

This study sheds light on as aspect of the discursive positioning of marginalized groups, in general, and women, in particular, that has received little attention in the literature: how they

counter prejudiced discourses, sculpt a positive image for themselves and project their voice and agency. It also highlights the role of social movements in dismantling oppressive gender practices in Nigeria/Africa. Hence, the insights provided by the study are useful in advocating the concerns of and addressing the gender issues affecting Nigerian/African women. Furthermore, by concentrating on the African context, which is underexplored in the literature, this study redresses the disproportion of scholarship focusing on women and feminism in the Global North, provides knowledge that can form a basis of comparison with work in the canonical European/North American sphere and extends the scope of work in feminist critical discourse analysis. As demonstrated in the analysis, even though the blogposts mirror feminist discourses elsewhere in terms of resistance strategies and ideologies, there is evidence of how the communicative choices of the bloggers is informed by sociocultural context. I contend that this can enhance the bloggers' critique and the community of resistance they seek to create as their language capitalizes on local sentiments that will make their message more relatable to their audience. That is, feminist discourse, even on digital platforms, can be persuasively narrativized when it takes on the (linguistic) features of the specific spatiotemporal contexts within which it is conceptualized and performed.

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Disclosure statement

Notes on contributor

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