

**A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF GENDER IN/EQUALITY,
RESISTANCE AND REPRESENTATION ON NIGERIAN FEMALE
BLOGS**

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by

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ABSTRACT

This study takes a multi-disciplinary approach to examine how Nigerian women use the blogosphere to make meaning and respond to their marginalisation in the aftermath of recent prominent cases of gender discrimination in the country. Using a mixed qualitative method design that consists of a Critical Discourse Analysis of 135 posts and 405 comments on female-run blogs and of in-depth interviews with eight female blog authors in Nigeria, I draw on prominent cases of gender inequality in the country, such as ‘President Muhammadu Buhari’s Position on Women’ and the ‘Rejection of the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill.

The analysis of these cases unpacked patterns in the linkages of the subjects of gender in/equality, the language used to legitimise gender inequality, and the issues of gender discrimination that tend to be prioritised on female-run blogs in the country. The analysis interrogates blog discourses on gender in/equality in consideration of the politics of participation and discursive representation, highlighting ‘who’ gets to speak and ‘who’ does not, as well as ‘what’ is represented or omitted. The findings complicate celebratory approaches that conceptualise digital spaces as places for women to fight against sexism, since they unravel ideological conceptions within female ‘counter-publics’ online that rationalise un-equal gender relations in Nigeria. Thus, I argue that the heterogeneity of online counterpublics is key in identifying contrasting traits and nuances that help one understand and define inequality. In relation to how the subjects of gender inequality are linked in discourse, the analysis showed that blog discussions among females in Nigeria suggest extensive intolerance to cultural change, especially in comparison to the more positive attitude towards socio-economic inequality or educational disparity. However, due to the fact that ‘culture’ and ‘economy’ are intertwined in complex ways, resistance to cultural change appears to have a broader bearing on the attainment of economic and other facets of gender equality in Nigeria.

Owing to the contextual particularities in Nigeria, the study suggests the need for scholars to consider the role of context in how gender equality should be fought or demanded. This challenges Nancy Fraser’s proposal that both forms of economic inequality and cultural change are a matter of justice and need to be tackled as such. The study is also of practical and policy importance, as it draws attention to omissions and misrepresentations in the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill, demonstrating that the articulations of gender in/equality (in Nigeria) are often laced with dominant cultural ideologies. I show that these omissions and misrepresentations have a bearing on the representational logic of Nigerian female blog authors and readers as it relates to the resistance against inequality.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACHR	African Charter on Human Rights
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
APC	All Progressive People's Congress
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BBCOG	Bring Back Our Girls Campaign Group
C	Comments
CAS	Community Activity Score
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
EU	European Union
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEO	Gender and Equal Opportunities
ICT	Information Communications Technology
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NCNC	National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroons
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
P	Posts
R	Researcher
RQ	Research Question
SDK	Stella Dimokokorkus
TV	Television
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
URL	Universal Resource Locator
USA	United States of America
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

1.1 Background to the Study

‘I don’t know which political party my wife belongs to, but she belongs to my kitchen, my living room and the other room’

The President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari made the remark above on 18 October 2016, at an international press conference in Germany while standing next to the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel. The statement was triggered by Aisha Buhari’s (the President’s wife) criticism of the President’s leadership style after an interview she had with the BBC in London was reported on 14 October 2016 (BBC, 2016). The President’s remarks stimulated a wide range of discussion on both national and transnational (new) media platforms (BBC, 2016; CNN, 2016; Premium Times, 2016; Bella Naija blog, 2016). Shortly after, the female blogosphere, which is a key space for popular gender debate and discussion in Nigeria, featured extensive discussions (Bella Naija blog, 2016; Stella Dimokokorkus blog, 2016, Linda Ikeji blog, 2016¹). Aside from the fact that President Buhari’s sentiments reflect the existing domestication of women and the general androcentric behaviour in Nigeria (read Akumu 2015; Ezeikefa and Osakwe 2013, Nagarajan, 2015; Ogundipe, 2016; Salami, 2012, 2016), specifically, it helped to project untackled or undiscussed topics of gender inequality to the Nigerian public domain.

Hence, discourses of in/equality, which were hitherto predominantly focused on socio-political and economic forms of inequality now involve issues that challenge the cultural perceptions of women. In this regard, the public discourse on gender in/equality in Nigeria is currently seen featuring issues that concern women’s political underrepresentation, poor labour force participation, educational disparity, lack of policy

¹ There has been a rise in the numbers of female-authored blogs (hence, blogs written by sole authors as opposed to those written by multiple individuals) in Nigeria within the last five years (Alexa.com 2018; Nigeriablogawards.com, 2018). Female authored blogs have also become an important social media platform for female activism. For instance, while the number of men nearly doubles that of women on other social media such as Facebook (65% vs 35%), the total number of Nigerian female blog authors surpasses that of men (57% of over 8,000 blog authors in Nigeria are women) (Alexa.com, 2018; Nigeria Blog Awards Website, 2018).

implementation, as well as those that concern the domestication, sexualisation and objectification of women. This brings into focus the interplay between ‘culture’, the ‘economy’ and ‘politics’ in contemporary gender discourse. As such, this study examines the connection between ‘pre-discussed’ economic and political forms of inequality in the Nigerian public domain, and the recent cultural politics stimulated by President Buhari’s remarks.

Fraser (1996, 2005, 2008) is a key theorist known for conceptualising the relationship between the subjects of gender inequality. She broadly defines injustices that concern redistribution (economic issues) and recognition (cultural issues) in terms of broader class politics. In this regard, redistribution involves areas of socioeconomic reforms such as labour force participation, equality in education, and so on. Similarly, the politics of recognition involves areas of the unjust devaluation of identities, cultural domination and cultural disrespect exemplified by issues such as the domestication of women, objectification of women, sexualisation of female identities and so on. Fraser subsequently conceptualises the political dimension of gender injustice to specifically define the politics of participation (representation) in gender discourse. This involves the (physical) participation of actors by determining who gets to take part in discourse. The political dimension, therefore, affects the scope of the cultural and economic dimensions of inequality (Fraser, 2008).

From the African perspective, the theory of African feminism outlines the forms of discrimination faced by African women, which intersect between culture, the economy and politics. Hence, the key issues in African feminism encompass socio-political and socio-economic issues, culture and tradition, patriarchy, race, and sexuality. However, while African feminism acknowledges these forms of discrimination as challenging women’s attainment of gender parity, early proponents of African feminism (e.g. Mikell, 1995, 1997; Steady, 1987) make it clear that what distinguishes African feminism from Western feminism is its predominant focus (in terms of practical fight against injustices) on economic and political, rather than cultural politics. Steady (1987, p.4), therefore, argues that African feminism aims to outline the ‘oppressions’ dealt with by African women, where it is ‘women first and foremost as human, rather than sexual beings’. Hence, the portrayal of women as ‘objects’, which dominates Western feminism is considered secondary in African feminism, which places issues that pertain to ‘bread and butter’ (hence, survival and livelihood) before those that concern the cultural devaluation of gender identity (Mikell, 1997, p.4). This is reflective of the injustices that have been

the focus of Nigerian women in post-independence literature, which predominantly reflects such economic, political and sometimes health-related forms of inequalities as opposed to cultural ones (e.g. Ette, 2017; Nwapi, 2016; Oyewunmi, 2013; Raimi and Adeleke, 2008; Singh et al., 2012). This also highlights the significance of the contemporary discursive resistance to cultural hegemony provoked by the President Buhari's remark on his wife belonging to the kitchen.

1.2 Research Aims and Objectives

This study has three broad aims: first, it unpacks patterns in the linkages of the subjects of gender in/equality on Nigerian female blogs. Second, it analyses the language used to legitimise gender inequality, and third, it interrogates the issues of gender discrimination that tend to be prioritised on female-run blogs in the country.

In considering how women conceive and connect 'economic'² and cultural forms of gender discrimination, this research examines the ideological conceptions that define the cultural and 'economic' forms of inequality in order to attain its core aim: to understand how women make sense of their discrimination and how they respond to it. In other words, the project aims to find answers to questions, such as: how do women make meaning and respond to their marginalisation considering the recent cases of gender discrimination in Nigeria³? How does their meaning-making process relate to what gender in/equality means in the Nigerian context? I began to unpack these questions by studying the relationship between the subjects⁴ of gender in/equality, which involve identifying and classifying discourse patterns that relate cultural and 'economic' forms of gender discrimination in blog discourse. This analysis is carried out against a historical backdrop to understand how socio-economic, cultural, and political landscapes have transformed the subject(s) of women's discussions on gender in/equality and how these subjects possibly relate to or deviate from a West-centric perspective.

² It should be noted that the use of inverted commas for 'economic' (reflective of redistribution) in relation to the subjects/topics of gender in/equality suggests the 'economy' as encompassing broader class politics that include areas of political underrepresentation, lack of policy implementation, educational gender disparity and health-related forms of inequality (discussed on blogs) as these issues have a bearing on women's economic well-being and survival. However, the political dimension of gender inequality, which reflects areas of discursive/participatory representation on Nigerian female blogs, is tackled by RQ3a and b.

³ Discussed in Chapter 2.

⁴ Defined by 'economic' and cultural forms of inequality.

Nevertheless, the meaning-making processes of Nigerian female⁵ blog users, which reflect ideological conceptions of cultural and ‘economic’ forms of discrimination, create tensions in the online space. As will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 7, this is because of the position of women who align with dominant patriarchal positions by endorsing cultural (and in some cases, ‘economic’) forms of female subjugation. While digital spaces are often conceptualised as places for women to fight against sexism (Heineken, 2015; Keller, 2012; Mannon, 2018; Mendes, 2015; Wang and Dovidio, 2017), my work seeks to complicate these celebratory approaches by showing how women who wholly or partly align with dominant patriarchal positions can endorse or even reinforce female subjugation. This approach questions the perceived homogeneity of the fight against gender inequality, where the general outlook is a discursive struggle between the male-dominated government or State authority and women (in general) in the country, often portrayed as a struggle over the supremacy of argument or position in online and offline media (Somolu, 2007). In this regard, I aim to complicate the category ‘marginalised women’ by unravelling the tensions inherent in women’s discourse, highlighting the beliefs and conceptions that impact on the gender equality debate in Nigeria.

This is achieved through a sociolinguistic analysis of the forms of argumentation, rhetorical schemes, lexical styles and storytelling adopted by blog users, which illuminate the prominence of certain ideologically and culturally driven patterns of thinking and behaviour among female blog users in the country. In addition, the study draws attention to the cases of gender inequality that tend to be prioritised on Nigerian female blogs. In this regard, I first interrogate the politics of participation by questioning ‘who’ gets to speak as well as ‘who’ does not in discourses of gender in/equality. Secondly, I examine discursive forms of representation in discourse by assessing how specific images and categories of gender in/equality come into the interpretation of Nigerian female bloggers.

It is also important to highlight the key role of the Internet in relation to the gender discrimination discourse, where women capitalise on its ‘openness’ by infiltrating public discourse with issues of gender injustice previously limited by the mainstream media. However, the online discussions of Nigerian women raise crucial questions about participation, considering that only 25% of Nigerian women are online (ITU, 2016). This

⁵ It must be noted that the reference to blog users as ‘women’ or ‘females’ in this study relates to the self-presentation of the actors on blogs as discussed in Section 4.2.

draws attention to the fact that Nigerian women's online discussions occur amidst diverse challenges that affect (online) representation. These challenges include illiteracy, low income/economic dependence, lack of electricity, poor Internet connection, and so on. (Nigeria Demographic Health Survey, 2013)⁶. This brings into focus, another aim of this thesis, which is to draw attention to how the discussions on female marginalisation, held by the online minority population⁷, translates to benefit the absent offline majority.

In this respect, I seek to understand if online activities such as Nigerian women's blogging are driven by the spirit of inclusiveness and in consideration of the majority of women who are unable to be online. This places an emphasis on the 'lack of participation' or 'invisibility' which is far from being a blind spot or insignificant category that has little or no role to play in the fight against women's marginalisation. In this regard, the study shows that the lack of participation has important implications on the subject of focus, style of representation, as well as the possible reach of gender discourses on inequality both online and offline.

However, while I do not directly interrogate the views of women who are offline, I consider important the broadening of the mind-set of women who are online to capture the experiences of women who are offline in their fight for gender equality. Hence, within the context of interviews I conducted with Nigerian female bloggers, I interrogate how Nigerian women who are online perceive 'lack of participation' in relation to 'participation' and how they feel invisibility affects how they represent the absent offline majority in the fight for gender inequality. This approach is influenced by the critique of Western feminism as presupposing that 'women' and 'feminism' can be discussed without considerations of race, class, disability, sexuality, and other forms of oppression or exclusion. Din-Kariuki (2015) argues that without these perspectives, only the sexism experienced by a dominant group, which tends to be white, cisgender, able-bodied and financially-able are combated. This argument raises questions on the nature of the discourse of gender equality on the Nigerian blogosphere, such as: do the blogging activities of Nigerian women really take into account the specific (intersectional) challenges faced by women who are offline? Alternatively, is the fight for gender equality on female blogs mostly dominated by the experiences of the typical 'elite', 'educated'

⁶ The Nigeria Demographic Health Survey is held every 5 years, which makes the 2013 report the latest. The next report is available in November 2018. See: <https://dhsprogram.com/what-we-do/survey/survey-display-528.cfm>

⁷ Alexa.com (2018) profiles Nigerian female bloggers to be mostly between the ages of 18 to 40 and typically possessing a University degree.

and sometimes ‘younger’ women (Din-Kariuki, 2015)? In this regard, by adopting Fraser’s theorization on representation in this regard, this study shows how representation, conceived within global feminist studies as a post-Westphalian⁸ concept, is applied to a /Westphalian (Nigerian) online context.

Therefore, to fully understand the conceptualisations of gender inequality, discursive complexities, and representational dynamics in the Nigerian female blogosphere, the following research questions (RQs) are explored in this study⁹:

RQ1a: Do discourses on Nigerian female blogs reveal patterns in relation to how the subjects of gender inequality are linked?

b. How do Nigerian female blog authors perceive (discussions on) cultural roles in relation to gender inequality?

RQ2a: What discourses exist in the female blogosphere that provide an alternative to discourses in support of gender equality and how are such discourse positions legitimised through language use?

b. How are alternative discourses on gender equality perceived by blog authors?

RQ3a: Which cases of gender inequality tend to be prioritised on Nigerian female blogs?

b. How do Nigerian female blog authors understand their role in relation to the absent female majority offline?

1.3 Methodological and Theoretical Context of the Study

This research uses mixed qualitative methods. As I discuss in Chapter 4, methodologically, the study is based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of 405 blog comments and 135 posts, as well as on thematic analysis of interviews with eight blog authors. Within the context of CDA, I carry out a rhetorical oriented discourse analysis, which involves examining the discursive structures and strategies used by Nigerian

⁸ Fraser’s conceptualisation on representation is as regard the participation of feminists in transnational global discourse - hence, the term, ‘post-Westphalian’. However, by applying representation to the study of blog discussions on gender equality in Nigeria, I showed how the representational dynamics of participation plays out within a national context.

⁹ See explanation of the function of each RQ in Section 4.1.

female blog users to legitimise arguments in discourses of gender in/equality. The adoption of multiple qualitative methods (hence, interviews/thematic analysis and textual analysis/CDA) is designed to yield rich and rigorous insights into how women conceive the various forms of gender discrimination, and the representational dynamics used to discuss them online. While designing this project, my goal was to collect rich data through a combination of methods that involved gaining insight from communicative practices as well as directly from individual subjects. It also made it easier to consider the extent to which discussions on gender in/equality online matched the attitudes, beliefs and knowledge of blog authors interpersonally. Hence, integrated qualitative methods comprise techniques that provide an understanding and complementary approach for the unpacking of women's blog discussions on gender in/equality in the Nigerian context.

Theoretically, I draw ideas from Fraser's (1996, 2005, 2008) and Fraser and Honneth's (2003) work on Redistribution, Recognition and Representation as well as Fraser's (1990) work on the subaltern counter publics. I further explored Moscovici's (1972, 1984, 2000) and Hall's (1984, 1997) work on (social) representation. Fraser's work on redistribution, recognition, and representation helps to understand the economic, cultural, and participatory dimensions of gender discrimination. However, owing to the fact that Fraser's work mostly focuses on the (physical) participation of actors as it relates to representation, I draw on Moscovici and Hall's theorisations to shed light on the discursive dimensions of representation, which highlight the effect of representations on social reality, as well as how such representations are resisted.

Significantly, the study merges methodological and theoretical perspectives by carrying out an interdiscursive analysis (Fairclough, 2003). In this regard, I examine 'genre', 'style' and 'discourse', which reflect the theoretical perspective, as well as the research questions of study which involve a combination of how women 'speak' or communicate online, how they represent the world in which they live in, and their actions, characterised by how they make sense of their social and personal identities (Fairclough, 2003, p.26).

1.4 Why Gender In/Equality in Nigeria?

Despite the diverse roles played by Nigerian women throughout history, (Nigerian) writers have captured little of their achievements. The literature on the social, economic, political and cultural roles played by women in Nigerian history is limited. Falola (2002) blames this deficit on the cultural perception of women as a helpless,

oppressed, and marginalised group, which has undermined their proper study. Sudarkassa (1987) similarly argues that the inferior roles occupied by women, particularly during colonialism, has discouraged their study as a significant group worthy of attention. Nigerian/African writers (Fwangyil, 2011; Ogunyemi, 1985; Stratton, 1994) also argue that Nigerian women have been victims of educational bias because men who failed to represent their stories adequately in history write most of the literature that concerns them. This inadequate representation is entrenched in the cultural view of ‘woman’ from a bio-essential lens as publicised by male authors of Nigerian literature (Oloruntoba-Oju and Oloruntoba-Oju, 2013).

Today, the birth of Information Communication Technology (ICT) provides affordances for gender activism among Nigerian women, yet literature still fails to capture the significant ways through which Nigerian women produce (counter) discourses, if any, in response to their marginalisation. For instance, the only work I identified is Somolu’s (2007), which interrogates the African context on online gender discussions, and concentrates on a few Nigerian blogs as case studies. Somolu’s work is, however, medium-centric, focusing on the affordances of blogging as a technological breakthrough that allows, by default for women to express themselves. Other research on the African continent such as Mpofu and Rabe (2017) studies women’s use of blogs to fight their limited participation in the democratic process in Zimbabwe. However, Mpofu and Rabe’s study, like Somolu’s, is medium-centric, focusing on the emancipatory role of blogging in women’s fight against political discrimination.

Most research on the online content/communicative practices of African women is in relation to the Arab Spring¹⁰ (e.g. Al-rawi, 2014; Mai and Laine, 2016; Skalli, 2014), where countries such as Tunisia and Egypt experienced significant socio-political transformations. While the events that led to the Arab Spring enabled men and women to challenge political dictatorship, the aftermath led to the emergence of conservative Islamic regimes that further marginalised women (Al-rawi, 2014). Women who had already been accustomed to social media protests during the uprisings found it easy to use such platforms to discuss new gender restrictions and forms of marginalisation. Topics featured in North-African women’s online discussions of gender discrimination included sexual harassment, rape, socio-economic and political inequality and cultural change (Al-rawi, 2014; Mai and Laine, 2016; Skalli 2014).

¹⁰ Occurred mostly between 2010-2012.

Such studies mostly outline the forms of gender injustice faced by women because of patriarchal hegemony (Al-rawi, 2014, Skalli, 2014), emphasizing how women resist forms of marginalisation through discursive and other means (e.g. Mai and Laine, 2016; Tschirhart, 2014). However, within the African context, little consideration is made for how women make sense/meaning of their marginalisation through communicative practices. This is mostly captured in Western studies, which highlight not only how patriarchal hegemony sustains certain forms of gender inequality, but also how women resist (discursively and through other means) such forms of discrimination (e.g. Afful and Ricciardelli 2015; Almeida, 2018; Benton-Greig, Gamage, and Gavey, 2017; Callaghan and Lazard, 2012; Heineken, 2015). For instance, Heineken (2015) examines how female athletes use new media technologies to discursively challenge the negative portrayal of their bodies in mainstream media. Similarly, Almeida (2018) shows how Muslim women in France use online platforms to challenge hegemonic French representations of 'Islamic' swimsuits as politicised religiosity by asserting their aim to wear them as an opportunity to claim access to spaces of leisure while still obeying their belief in dressing modestly.

However, while such global studies examine how women make meaning of or resist gender discrimination, they rarely consider the possible tensions and heterogeneity that characterise women's struggle for equality. Benton-Greig, Gamage and Gavey's (2017) study on the construction of gender and feminism online is one of the very few that consider the tensions between discussants on gender issues online. Nevertheless, their analysis of comments is based on all genders, leaving one to possibly imagine that those supporting such sexism are the male discussants.

Therefore, this research addresses significant gaps both within the African and global fields of literature on gender research. As stated, within the African context, it aims at new insights into how women conceive and articulate issues that concern their marginalisation in and resistance to dominant patriarchal cultures. In the Western context, it makes a unique contribution by studying the tensions generated among women, often classed as a homogeneous counterpublic group (e.g. Drücke and Zobl, 2016; Shaw, 2012; Skalli, 2014; Zhang and Kramarae, 2014), on the topic of gender equality. By so doing, I aim to show how such tensions broadly constitute what gender in/equality means in the Nigerian and broader African context.

Overall, this study constitutes an attempt to project the voices of many Nigerian women who might resist diverse forms of discrimination on a regular basis, while being

overlooked by mainstream media and academic research. I try to make sense of their actions within a larger cultural context that is dominated by patriarchal discourses so as to develop a better understanding of how women conceptualise their marginalisation, and how they respond to it. This approach helps to unravel the attitudes, knowledge and beliefs that define gender in/equality in Nigeria. In this regard, I see this project as taking a crucial step in mapping a history of Nigerian women's participation in gender in/equality discourse online.

1.5 Why Blogs?

Although the discourses therein and not the blogs per se are the primary object of study in this research, it is important to note how developments in communication technology have allowed significant opportunities for women and women's content and meaning production. Although the number of Nigerian female blog authors surpasses that of men, it is certainly not the only platform through which Nigerian women engage in discourses concerning gender in/equality. However, for several reasons, Nigerian female blogs have been chosen as the platform via which to explore and address questions about discourses on gender in/equality.

First, as said above, one can observe the concentration of women on the blogosphere in comparison to other forms of social media. Nigerian women make up 57% of the over 8,000 blog authors identified by the Nigerian Blog Awards Website in 2018 making blogs a fruitful space to analyse gendered discourses. There is a huge readership of blogs by Nigerian women too. For example, popular female blogs, such as Linda Ikeji and Bella Naija have over 200,000 unique visitors daily, with blog posts on their sites generating an average of 250 comments from readers daily (Alexa.com, 2018).

Global research (Astrom and Karrison, 2016, Gabriel, 2016) has also indicated the dominance of female blog authors and readers in comparison to men in the blogosphere: 'the blogosphere is said to have created a rare communicative space in which female voices outnumber male voices' (Astrom and Karisson, 2016, p.1639). Based on this, scholars have argued that blogs might offer a more liberating sphere of communication for women in comparison to other male-dominated spheres (Astrom and Karisson, 2016; Harp and Tremayne, 2006).

Second, although the Nigerian blogosphere reflects the global trend of having more female bloggers than men, my study¹¹ shows that blogs in Nigeria deviate from the global trend in terms of genre, as female blogs are divided between ‘filter’ and ‘notebook’ styles. This contrasts with ‘personal’ blogs that women globally are more associated with. This divergent trend provides an interesting object of investigation for this research and could possibly provide insight that uniquely relates such blogging techniques (‘filter’ and ‘notebook’) to bloggers’ experience on reporting gender in/equality topics.

Third, most research on blog use around the globe tends to focus on blog authors and rarely on blog readers (Gabriel, 2016; Jackson and Welles, 2015; Kaye and Johnson 2011; Lovheim, 2011; Schuster, 2013; Tremayne, 2006). This research fills in this gap and aims to generate insight into blog readers. It considers the contribution of blog readers important to the blogging phenomenon. In Jessalyn Keller’s (2012) study on girls’ feminist blogs, an interviewee commenting on ‘The Seventeen Magazine’ blog is quoted to emphasise that commenters function as more than readers but contributors to a conversation about media representations from a feminist perspective. The comment section of blogs, is therefore, described as a site for ‘feminist community building and consciousness raising between readers’ (Keller, 2012, p.438).

Similarly, Karpf (2007), in analysing the influence of blogs, talked about the Community Activity Score (CAS), which is a measure of blog engagement. According to him, certain blog readers who leave comments are likely to spend more time on a site and become part of that blog’s community. Hence, CAS adds ‘weight to the blogs where active, vibrant conversations occur’ (Karpf, 2007, p.37). Similarly, as stated above, the Nigerian blogosphere is large in readership. The top 30 female blogs in Nigeria as identified by Alexa.com (2018) have ‘comment’ sections where interaction takes place, while top-rated female blogs like Linda Ikeji’s blog are mostly ranked based on the number of individuals that follow and comment on the stories posted daily. Hence, the contribution of blog readers is invaluable to the blogging experience in Nigeria, especially when a majority of women may lack the skills to create blogs, or may not feel comfortable writing one, but by participating in discussions on someone else’s blog, these women can afford the opportunity to express their views or associate with women who share the same outlook with them.

¹¹ This reflects the selection of Nigerian female blogs for this research, as discussed in Section 4.2. A list of Nigerian (female) blogs can be found at: <http://nigerianblogawards.com/blogs.php>

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study makes empirical, methodological, theoretical and policy/practical contributions in relation to the fields of: media studies, feminist studies, cultural studies, social psychology and linguistics.

In terms of empirical research, as argued above, it addresses the paucity of literature in relation to African women's use of the online space to discuss gender marginalisation, as well as the lack of literature in global gender studies on the tensions that exist among women as regards online activism.

Theoretically, it uniquely connects analytical perspectives on representation from feminist studies (Fraser, 1996, 2005, 2008), social psychology (Moscovici, 1972, 1984, 2000) and cultural studies (Hall, 1984, 1997) to provide a holistic assessment of representation - one that encompasses participatory and discursive dimensions. In addition, by studying the link between cultural, economic and political forms of gender inequality, it tackles a topic-area that is rarely explored by feminist scholars (Fraser and Honneth, 2003).

In more detail, by unravelling rival alternative discourses within female counterpublics that obfuscate or rationalise unequal gender relations, I revisit the omission by scholars, such as Fraser (1990) to pay attention to oppositional groups within the counterpublic structure that oppose the 'dominant' counterpublics. While scholars (Fraser, 1990; Kellner, 2000) identify the plurality of the 'counterpublics', they rarely consider the tensions within the counterpublics, tensions that could birth the counter-counterpublics. The analysis in Chapter 7 show that the heterogeneity of the counterpublic is key in identifying peculiar traits and nuances that help to understand and define resistance to inequality.

As will be discussed in Chapter 4, methodologically, I draw on Chandler's (2007) approach to textual analysis. However, I redefine Chandler's concepts to make them suitable for my research. Hence, in selecting specific comments that make up my research sample, I break down my analysis of text into three categories: 'assessing the identity of the writer', the 'discourse structure', and 'the nature of the argument'. This allows me to ensure that the selected sample for analysis contained the required gender, the topic under study, and the relevant communicative and conflictual elements to be analysed in discourse. Future researchers looking to contextualise their research method in a similar fashion could draw upon this technique of appropriation. In addition, my application of

CDA involves contesting homogenous conceptualisations on gender in/equality¹², analysing discursive strategies used to legitimise arguments in discourse, unravelling missing discourses and questioning why certain discourses are talked about in a particular way rather than others. While my research builds on previous work on CDA, it also represents a significant new insight in terms of focus and depth of analysis in studying the online discourses of gender in/equality in Nigeria. As regards the depth of analysis, I have provided a broad and critical picture of online gender discourse practice than has previously been attempted in Nigeria¹³ by examining how contextual factors¹⁴ contribute to the production of discourses online. By so doing, I have tackled criticisms about CDA's inadequate theorization of context, as presented by scholars such as Chouliaraki and Fairclough (2010) and van Dijk (2006).

Further, as discussed in Chapter 10, by directly investigating the representational dynamics for the case of the Gender and Equal Opportunities (GEO) Bill, this study makes epistemological contributions that have significant implications on the activities of women activists as well as on policy-making. It also proposes practical steps to be considered by women activists and legislators who design gender equality policy, which involves approaching the fight for gender equality from a redistributive position, which is the better-tolerated form of gender discrimination within the Nigerian polity. The basis for this recommendation is elaborated in Chapter 6.

Finally, this study complicates the representation of the GEO Bill on mainstream media and female blogs as a policy document that caters for women's 'equality' with men. My close analysis of the Bill unravels that, as regards the areas of socio-economic equality and political participation, the Bill only provides for women's participation by 35%. This means that Nigerian female blog users have subscribed to a fight that does not give them the required 'justice' but sustains patriarchal dominance and maintains their limited democratic participation. By projecting this inequality, I draw attention to how articulations of gender (exemplified by the so-called GEO Bill) are often laced with

¹² For example, as highlighted earlier in the chapter, my position on Fraser's argument on how gender equality should be confronted.

¹³ As evident from the African literature field on gender research, presented in Sections 1.4, 3.3, 4.1 and 4.4.

¹⁴ By, for instance, drawing on the cultural, political and economic challenges faced by Nigerian women within the context of African feminism, I am able to establish a contextual background that allows a better understanding of how Nigerian women communicate online.

dominant ideology and hegemonic misogyny (Almeida, 2018; Bailey, et al., 2013; Lischinsky, 2017).

1.7 Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into ten chapters. **Chapter 2** deals with the Nigerian context in which I discuss the history of Nigeria, regional distinctions, and the historical position occupied by Nigerian women. This provides the context to understand the socio-economic and political roots of gender inequality in Nigeria. This is followed by a discussion on what gender in/equality means in the African context that draws on the theory of African feminism and its approach to the oppressions experienced by African women. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the case studies chosen for empirical exploration in this research.

In **Chapter 3**, I present the theoretical framework of the study. I discuss Nancy Fraser's (1996, 2005, 2008) theory of redistribution, recognition and representation and how these concepts enable the interrogation of the social, political and economic dimensions of women's discussions on gender in/equality. In addition, because Fraser's (2008) work on representation mostly focuses on the politics of belonging as it concerns the participation of actors in gender discourses, I consider other theoretical contributions within the field of social psychology and cultural studies, such as Moscovici's (1972, 1984, 2000) and Hall's (1984, 1997) theorisations on (social) representation to provide knowledge on the discursive dimensions of gender representations. In order to locate the counterpublics in its rightful context, I open the second part of the chapter with a discussion on the Habermas' (1989) public sphere. I go on to discuss the subaltern counterpublics of Nancy Fraser (1990), which defines women as a counterpublic group whose activities go against the expectations of the dominant counterpublic (e.g. the government and patriarchal structures). Finally, the third part of the chapter opens with an exploration of literature within the field of women's discursive resistance online while highlighting gaps the study seeks to address.

Chapter 4 presents the methodology of the research. This chapter presents the research design and reflects on many key issues relating to the conduct of this study. It also presents sampling and procedures for recruiting participants, data collection and analysis. I also discuss research ethics and my role as the researcher, and the effects this might have on the various elements of the research.

Chapter 5 provides a background of the history, typology and communicative elements of blogs. The chapter sheds light on how the trends and traits of blogging in the global context inform or deviate from the current state of blogs/blogging in Nigeria. It also provides a descriptive analysis of Nigerian blog layout and profiles, considering the structure, topics of discussion and the communicative style adopted by blog authors. This highlights the (contextual) meaning-making processes of Nigerian female blog users and provides a better understanding of blog discourses in general, and particularly, the rhetorical oriented analysis conducted in Chapter 7.

Chapter 6 is the first of the three (online) analysis chapters. This chapter explores the first research question of study (RQ1a) and, thus, examines how the different types of gender inequality experienced by Nigerian women are connected in blog discourse. I relate the analysis to Fraser's works, such as 'social justice in an age of identity politics: redistribution, recognition, and participation' (1996) and Fraser and Honneth's (2003), 'redistribution or recognition – a political philosophical exchange'. This highlights the relationship between the subjects of gender inequality (e.g. redistribution and recognition) which are often treated separately within social movements such as feminism.

Chapter 7 tackles RQ2a and seeks to unravel the knowledge, attitudes and ideological beliefs that limit the fight against gender inequality by unravelling the tensions inherent in women's blog discourses. This approach involves examining the discursive structures and strategies used by Nigerian female blog users to legitimise arguments in the fight against gender inequality.

Chapter 8 tackles RQ 3a and draws on Fraser's (2005, 2008) theorisation of representation, which is centred on the politics of belonging by defining 'who' gets to speak and 'who' does not in discourses of gender in/equality. It also uses the works of Moscovici (1972, 1984, 2000) and Hall (1984, 1997) to interrogate how specific images and categories of gender in/equality come into the interpretations of Nigerian female blog users rather than others by drawing on certain posts and comments made by female bloggers.

Chapter 9 tackles RQs 1b, 2b and 3b and analyses the in-depth interviews conducted with eight blog authors to provide additional insights into the findings obtained in the analysis of blog discourse in Chapters 6 to 8. I examine how Nigerian female blog authors perceive feminist discourses on gender in/equality. I also scrutinise the possible role of transnational mobility on topics of gender in/equality that are selected and

published by blog authors. Finally, I discuss the role played by blog readers in generating blog content on gender discrimination and what the collaboration between blog authors and readers means for the fight against gender marginalisation in Nigeria.

Finally, **Chapter 10** concludes the thesis by pointing out the empirical, theoretical, methodological and policy and practical contributions of the research. I recapitulate the answers to the research questions presented in the analysis Chapters (6, 7, 8 and 9) and highlight significant issues emerging from the research. I close the thesis by reflecting on some of the limitations of the research as well as discussing possible considerations for research to be undertaken in the future.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTS, CONCEPTS AND AREAS OF STUDY

This chapter is divided into two broad parts. The first part deals with the Nigerian context in which I discuss the history of Nigeria, regional distinctions, and the historical position occupied by Nigerian women. This provides the context to understand the socio-economic and political roots of gender inequality in Nigeria. This is followed by a discussion on what gender inequality means in the African context, by drawing on the theory of African feminism and its approach to the oppressions experienced by African women. The first part concludes with a discussion of the case studies chosen for empirical exploration in this research. The second part discusses blogs and blogging in general and in the Nigerian context. In this regard, I discuss the history of blogging both globally and in Nigeria. I also discuss the typology of blogs, which is relevant for identifying the peculiarity of Nigerian blogs within a global context. Finally, I discuss the blog profile and layout of Nigerian female blogs, as well as the language structure, which help to contextualise the unique communicative practices employed by Nigerian female bloggers.

2.1 The Context of Nigeria

2.1.1 A Brief History of Nigeria

Nigeria was formed by merging the North and South protectorates by Lord Lugard in 1914 who was the Governor of both protectorates at the time. The reason for amalgamation is said to be economic and political, where the northern protectorate would benefit from the vast resources of southern Nigeria, which included cocoa, palm oil, cotton, hides and skin, and so on (Oyebade, 2003). Nigeria is the most populated country in West Africa and the seventh most populous nation in the world. It has a population of over 198 million people, which has tripled since the 1970s (National Population Commission, 2018). Nigeria got its independence from the British colonial forces in 1960 and was governed by civilian rule until 1966 when the first military coup was executed (Olayiwola, 2003). The country went through three decades of military rule marked by five notable military coups (Abdul et al., 2012). However, from 1999 to present day, the democratic system of governance has been in effect in the country.

The major source of economic revenue in Nigeria since the 1960s has been oil extraction (Olayiwola, 2003). Nigeria is culturally diverse, with over 250 different ethnic groups and more than 500 recorded languages, even though three large ethnic groups account for more than two-thirds of the country's population; the Muslim Hausa-Fulani, occupying the Northern region (29%), and two Christian dominated ethnic groups in the South: the Yoruba of the South-West (21%) and the Igbo of the South-East (18%) (National Population Commission, 2018).

2.1.2 The North-South Division of Nigeria

As stated, with a population of more than a 198 million people and at least 250 different ethnic groups, Nigeria is undeniably diverse. However, irrespective of its diversity, the various ethnic groups in the country are often categorised into a monolithic distinction between the North and South (Ogunlesi, 2015). These wide distinctions are mostly a product of economic, political and religious factors. Economically, the South is significantly richer than the North, boasting of better socio-economic indicators with numerous oil reserves located in the Niger Delta as well as having Lagos, the commercial and media capital of the country and one of the biggest metropolitan cities of the world (Akoh and Jagun, 2012). Although the South consists of diverse ethnic groups, the two largest are the 'Yoruba' and 'Igbo' (Campbell, 2011). In addition, although the North has a larger population, it is generally perceived as backward by the South, since its population is significantly poorer and has some of the world's worst health and economic statistics¹⁵ (Nigeria Demographic Health Survey, 2013; Campbell, 2011). The state of its economy is blamed mostly on religious conflicts and Islamic teachings; most areas in Northern Nigeria were conquered and converted to Islam in the 1800s (Akoh and Jagun, 2012). In recent times, the instability in the North persists owing to ethnic conflicts and Boko Haram terrorist activities. Hence, the North continues to experience deindustrialisation and lack of investment in agriculture and infrastructure (Abdul et al., 2012).

Politically, the North and South distinction has made power sharing a sensitive issue (Campbell, 2011; Ogunlesi, 2015). Owing to the country's diversity, handling the

¹⁵ For instance, in northern Nigeria, maternal deaths per every 100,000 births is estimated at 1,600. This is significant when compared to the South where 150 maternal deaths (approximately) are recorded per every 100,000 births (Nigeria Demographic Health Survey, 2013).

various interests and identities of the populace has been a major challenge in governance since after colonialism. The control of the state is mainly achieved through an informal system known as ‘zoning’ (Campbell, 2011). This provides for the rotation of the presidential seat between the North and South. The Northern region is dominated by Muslims and the Southern region by Christians. Hence, where the president is a Northern Muslim, the Vice-president is a Southern Christian, and vice versa. This system of power-rotation is aimed at appeasing citizens in terms of religious expectations and geographical location (Campbell, 2011).

2.2 The History of Nigerian Women

2.2.1 Women in Pre-Colonial Nigeria (1500s -1901)

Notable figure Queen Amina of Zazzau¹⁶ had a societal impact in the sixteenth century, namely 200 years before the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate (in 1809)¹⁷ and the jihad wars¹⁸ (of 1804 -1808) that conquered and Islamised most of the territories that were under her rule (Abdul et al., 2011). Being a notable warrior and empire builder, she became the ruler of Zazzau in 1576 and subdued many areas between ‘Zazzau and the Niger and Benue rivers absorbing the Nupe and Kwararafa states’¹⁹ (Abdul et al., 2011, p. 6). In the southern part of Nigeria, women played significant roles in long-distance trade, with immense opportunities for acquiring titles and wealth. They were also involved in the palace administration of the King known as the ‘Oba’²⁰. The position of the ‘Iyalode’²¹ (women leader) was of great privilege and power. Other influential positions were the ‘Iyalajes’ (market women leader) and ‘Iyalosas’ (goddess priests) (Abdul et al., 2011 p.7). Women as a collective group such as the ‘Iyalodes’ in the 1800s possessed political strength through their organisations and were able to influence political opinion by publicly discussing their interests before the ‘Oba’ (Ojuolope 2000).

¹⁶ Queen Amina was a Hausa Muslim warrior and Queen of Zazzau (now Zaria and the North-West region of Nigeria)

¹⁷ The Sokoto Caliphate is an independent Islamic seat of power established in West Africa and founded during the Jihad war in 1809 by Usman Dan Fodio, a prominent Islamic scholar and warrior. The Sokoto Caliphate was abolished when the British defeated the Caliph and put the area under the northern Nigerian Protectorate.

¹⁸ The Fulani War began when Usman Dan Fodio was exiled from Gobir and assembled an army that attacked numerous Hausa kingdoms in northern Nigeria. The forces of Usman Dan Fodio gradually captured and ruled over many northern states.

¹⁹ Niger, Benue, Nupe and Kwararafa were all northern territories.

²⁰ The King in Yoruba culture is known as the ‘Oba’.

²¹ The first Iyalode can be traced to the mid-1800s and the system still exists. However, the Iyalode’s of pre-colonial times were involved in political affairs and served as the voice of women in the traditional council. However, such political roles no longer exist.

2.2.2 Women in Colonial Nigeria (1901 -1960)

The British colonial administration has been accused by African writers for re-enforcing gender stereotypes in Nigeria's political and economic structures (Ajayi, 2007, Abdul et al., 2011, Falola, 2002). Falola (2002) argues that the biggest threat to the influence and privileges of women happened during the twentieth century when patriarchy combined with colonial reformations and destabilised gender relations. According to Falola, the partnership between British colonial administration, especially about governance and the collection of taxes, led to the disappearance of prominent female chiefs that existed before colonial rule. Women at the forefront of trade were forced into subsistence farming because Nigerian men and European firms controlled the distribution of groundnuts, rubber, cocoa, and palm oil. In addition, the Western system of education was in favour of boys, therefore excluding women from the new occupations introduced by colonialism (Falola, 2002; Rojas, 1994).

Sudarkasa (1986, p.94) adds that in the colonial era, gender marginalisation in terms of literacy and the economy enabled the conceptualisation of the public domain as the world of men, rather than one occupied by both men and women. She also maintains that although men and women had separate roles in the pre-colonial era, such roles were not valued differently, but were meant to meet different goals. For instance, where men engaged in long distance international trade and women in local trade, it was because women needed to care/breastfeed their babies but such roles did not mean that women were perceived differently or as inferior. In like manner, Abdul et al. (2011, 2012) add, that the colonial political institutions denied women the right to vote or take up public jobs. A part of the Southern female population was said to have voted only a year before the country became independent in 1959, while the women in the Northern region were disenfranchised until 1976 (54 years after the electoral principle was introduced in the country) (Nwabueze, 1982; Ajayi, 2007). This could partly be because the northern women were living under a culture of seclusion²², therefore, while the southern women came out to vote shortly before the British Colonial forces left the country in 1959, it took the northern women more time (hence, by 1979) to adjust to coming into the public domain to carry out civic duties.

With the obstacles faced by women in the colonial era, notable resistant

²² As recounted earlier, northern Nigeria is dominated by Muslims, where the practice of purdah is prevalent.

movements sprang up, which challenged the policies of the colonial administration. Women organisations of South-East Nigerian such as the 'Aba Women', in what is identified as a riot (popularly known as the Aba Women's Riots of 1929), protested against the tax policies of the British Colonial Government (Ajayi, 2007). In 1948, two decades after the Aba Women Riot, the Abeokuta Market women of South-West Nigeria also organized protest movements against the colonial administration (Okeke and Franscshet, 2002). Some educated women, such as Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Margaret Ekpo, Gamboare Sawaba, and others liaised with market women (hence, business oriented union women) to challenge the colonial authorities on increased tax levies on women's market trade (Abdul et al., 2011). The Abeokuta Women's Union later grew and became a National Union in 1949 that challenged the authoritarian, arbitrary system of decision-making by the sole native authority and the colonial government (Okeke and Franscshet, 2002). This union was also involved in advocating a better life and status for women and took part in the anti-colonial struggle to negotiate for the country's independence (Sokefun, 2010).

Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti became the leader of the women's wing of the political party 'National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons' (NCNC) in the Western region of the country in 1950. Based on this position, she toured the country alongside other women, mobilizing them to be politically conscious and participate in emerging political affiliations to encourage women's equality with men in the country (Abdul et al., 2011).

2.2.3 Women in Post-Colonial Nigeria (1961 to present day)

Despite women's contribution to the colonial struggle, they were marginalized by post-independent politics and governance. In the first indigenous administration of Tafawa Balewa (1960-1966), no woman was appointed to the Federal Cabinet (Ajayi, 2007). Out of 348 members of the national parliament, only two were women, there were also no women in the regional executives and legislatures (Ajayi, 2007). The military regimes that followed were no different; the regimes of General Yakubu Gowon (1966-1975), Murtala/Obasanjo (1975-1979) and Buhari/Idiagbon (1983-1985) exhibited the same gendered politics. In the three regimes, no woman was a member of their Armed Forces Ruling Council, which is the highest policy-making body, and none was appointed as a minister, only one or two women were appointed commissioners at the regional state level (Ajayi, 2007). Ajayi (2007) recounts how the Babangida (1985-1993) and General Sani Abacha (1998-1999) military regime were slightly better than previous regimes in

terms of female representation. The Constituent Assembly set up by the Babangida regime had five women out of a total of 150 members, the transitional Senate had only one female out of 91 members while the House of Representatives produced twelve women out of 638 members. The General Sani Abacha regime likewise had only four women ministers out of 40. In both regimes, the president and speakers of the house were men, and there were no female governors (Ajayi, 2007).

The President Olusegun Obasanjo administration (1999-2007) brought high hopes to Nigerian women being the first democratic government of the country (Ajayi, 2007; Nwabueze, 1982). The expectation of significant improvement in the equal rights of all genders was not met, however. Out of 109 Senate members, only five were women (Ajayi, 2007). The House of Representatives produced thirteen women out of 360 members, with men heading both chambers. The Executive Cabinet also comprised of six women out of 43 male ministers while all 36 governors were men (Ajayi, 2007). The death of President Musa Yar'Adua (2007-2010) led to the taking over of Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2015). Jonathan's administration has been rated highly in terms of women empowerment (Iheuwa, 2013; Ajah, 2014). His administration was the first in the history of Nigeria to appoint a woman as a Petroleum Minister and Chief Justice of the Federation. In addition, the administration took off in 2011 with the appointment of

13 female Cabinet Ministers, 5 female Special Advisers, 10 female Ambassadors, 16 female Judges of the Court of Appeal; 11 female Permanent Secretaries, 16 female Judges of the Federal High Court, 3 female Judges of the Supreme Court and 6 female Judges of the National Industrial Court (Iheuwa, 2013, pp. 9-10).

This slight statistical increase in the participation of women was, however, short-lived with the taking over of President Muhammadu Buhari in 2015. While the political participation of women in previous regimes since independence has been generally poor, the involvement of women in the present political dispensation of President Muhammadu Buhari (2015 to present) has further dwindled. Out of the 21 ministers appointed, only three are women, while out of the 109 members elected to the National Assembly, only seven are women (Premium times, 2016). Overall, the poor political representation of women is reflective of the lack of implementation of gender policy in the country.

2.3 Nigerian Women Today: Politics, Society and Culture

2.3.1 Gender Policy in Post-Independence Nigeria

From the time Nigeria gained independence (1960) until the 2000s, most policies²³ signed into law by the government (e.g. the World Bank's Poverty Reduction Strategies in 1980²⁴, the African Charter on Human Rights (ACHR) in 1981²⁵, and the Millenium Development Goals (MDG) in 2000²⁶) focused on the general Nigerian population as opposed to women as a marginalised category. Other international policies (e.g. the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action²⁷ and the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1985²⁸) that were solely focused on women's rights and signed by the Nigerian government were never implemented into law (Sokefun, 2010). By the 2000s, the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development drafted the first National Policy on Women, which was signed into law by President Obasanjo in the year 2000 (Fatile and Ejalonibu, 2016). The policy was changed to the National Gender Policy in 2006.

The National Gender Policy tackles three major areas of gender discrimination. First, 'education', where it sought to improve the ratio of boy-to-girl enrolment in primary and secondary schools across the country²⁹. Second, 'employment', where The National Gender Policy aimed to tackle the wide employment gap between women and men in both the private and public sectors of the Nigerian society³⁰. Third, 'political decision-making' which sought to ensure that women participate in governance, policy-formation

²³ For example, on development and human rights.

²⁴ The scheme was meant to assist poor households with land improvement, increase cash crop, tree crop and livestock production, provide most townships with road access and electricity, improve access to drinking water for most poor villages, accomplish universal primary education and provide basic preventive and curative health care.

²⁵ The ACHR (also known as the Banjul Charter) is an international human rights instrument intended to promote and protect human rights and basic freedoms in the African continent.

²⁶ The MDG's set targets were to eradicate poverty, achieve universal primary education, reduce child mortality, ensure gender equality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability and provide finance for development.

²⁷ A conference convened by the United Nations during 4–15 September 1995 in Beijing, China, was centred on ensuring equality between men and women.

²⁸ An international Bill of rights for women. It defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for National action to end such discrimination.

²⁹ Fatile and Ejanilobu (2016) show that in the early 2000s, boys were ahead of girls with a 10% gap in relation to Nigerian primary and secondary school enrolment.

³⁰ For instance, Fatile and Ejanilobu (2016) show how in the early 2000s women's involvement in the industrial sector was estimated at 11% compared to 30% for men, while women's participation in income generating activities that were predominantly characterized by intense manual labour like mining and quarrying were virtually non-existent.

and decision-making (National Gender Policy, 2008). The Bill proposed for 30% of political positions for women, which has not been attained. However, despite poor implementation, the National Gender Policy is still the only national legal document in place to tackle women's discrimination in contemporary Nigerian society. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the GEO Bill was later drafted in 2016 as an 'improvement' to the National Gender Policy but the Nigerian National Assembly denied its implementation.

2.3.2 The Cultural and Economic Positioning of Nigerian Women

Very little has been written about the cultural and economic position of Nigerian women in history. Scholars such as Sudarkasa (1986) show that women in the pre-colonial era (particularly, before the 1800s) that is, before the influence of Westernisation through colonialism and non-ethnic religion (e.g. Islam and Christianity), held roles preconceived as belonging to men. Hence, women were farmers, long-distance traders, formidable warriors, hunters, and so on. Sudarkasa (1986) also argues that women's identity was valued culturally and in both patrilineal and matrilineal settings, as such, interpersonal relationships were often regulated by seniority, as determined by the order of birth, rather than by gender. Therefore, 'where males prostrate before their elders as a sign of respect, they do so for females as well as males' (Sudarkasa, 1986, pp.95-96).

However, scholars (e.g. Bakwali, 2001; Egboh, 1972) are critical of the position occupied by women in the pre-colonial era, citing polygamy and widow inheritance³¹ as significant practices that encouraged women's subordination. Nevertheless, Sudarkasa (1987) maintains that the tendency to interpret polygamy as a form of control and dominance is a result of the Western notions of monogamy and the nuclear family. She argues that polygamy did not necessarily reflect a system of dominance and control, but a marriage system where both men and women came together for procreation as well as other economic purposes. This is because 'the marriage institution is normally the idiom through which procreation is legitimated in Africa' (Sudarkasa, 1986, p.97). As such, other societies, such as the Lele people of Congo engaged in polyandry, which also had little to do with domination and control but socio-economic necessity (Sudarkasa, 1987). Hence, women married multiple men to handle all the duties around the home, such as farming, cattle rearing, shepherding, and so on (Njoh, 2006). Rojas (1994) also recounts

³¹ This happens when a man's relative dies and according to the tradition, he inherits the widow/widows of his demised relative.

how the religion of many Nigerian societies recognised the social importance of women by emphasising the place of the Gods of fertility and peace³². In this regard, the belief that women played more prominent roles in the pre-colonial era than any other is reflected in the works of many African female writers (e.g. Mikell, 1997; Nwapa, 1981; Sofola, 1998; Sudarkasa, 1986).

However, as discussed earlier in the chapter, by the early 1800s, Usman Dan Fodio led a Jihad war that conquered most of the Northern states in Nigeria, which led to the Islamisation of those territories. This led to the introduction of Islamic religious practices that confined Northern women to the domestic realm. A century later, by the early 1900s, colonialism came to Africa, and with it, Christian religion. Similarly, as discussed, colonialism is believed to have encouraged gender segregation, where the men sphere headed economic activities in the public domain. Despite these transformations, Nigerian women still managed to make contributions to the economic realm of society. However, most of the contributions made by women in the times of colonialism and post-colonialism largely rest on the activities of women from the southern region owing to factors that relate to the North-South division of Nigeria.

Although twentieth century Northern female writers made attempts to refute the notion that women from the North are pawns in a patriarchal Muslim society, there has not been substantial evidence to prove their socio-economic strength in comparison to the women of the South (Coles 1991; Coles and Mack, 1991). Without undermining their input, most of the economic strength of the Northern women during colonialism has been depicted from the home front; mainly as wives and mothers, but less in terms of influencing the wider society in the political, social or economic spheres (Callaway, 1987). The seclusion of females in the North as a cultural norm has been blamed for this, as cultural and religious teachings of Islam that require female modesty, makes jobs, which involve frequent interaction with male persons who are not family members unsuitable for women (Zakaria, 2001).

Unlike the Northern women, the Abeokuta women, mostly from southern Nigeria were believed to have contributed to local trade despite colonial gender policy, which

³² For instance, 'Yemoja' is a 'Yoruba' (a southern tribe in Nigeria) female goddess, often depicted as a mermaid, and is associated with the moon, water, and feminine mysteries. She is believed to be the protector of women and governs everything pertaining to women; childbirth, conception, parenting, child safety, love, and healing.

lingered on after colonialism. Hence, while men were still engaged in international trade and carried out administrative duties in the post-colonial government, a study conducted by Peel (1983) of the Yoruba Kingdom from 1890s to 1970s revealed that many women began to take on occupations other than housewives; ‘they were involved in petty trade, and practiced crafts like dyeing cloth and basket weaving’ (Hodder 1969, p.15).

Today, petty trade is still dominated by women in Nigeria. Women are said to account for up to 80 % of the labour force in both rural and urban markets (Heather 1978). Diverse reasons have been proposed to justify the dominance of women in the petty trade in contemporary West Africa. These include, ‘lack of adequate male support, limited access to formal sector employment, suitability of trade to child care responsibilities and illiteracy’ (Adegboye, 1998, pp. 5-6). Boserup (1970, pp.85-93) similarly argues that ‘the marketplace became women’s territory’ because, as fostered by the colonial ideology, men learned to ‘despise and avoid occupations dominated by women’. Therefore, Nigeria was transformed into a patriarchal society where women were (and still are) considered inferior to men, hence, a man practicing an occupation tagged as ‘belonging to women’ might be a subject for ridicule.

Moving on, although post-independence (1960 to present) has encouraged the education of women and has re-defined their occupational status from being solely housewives or market women to entrepreneurs, lawyers, teachers, doctors, bankers, engineers, and so on, forms of gender discrimination that are rooted in colonial influence and non-ethnic forms of religion are still evident in Nigeria today (Falola, 2002). Nigerian women in contemporary society still grapple with gender stereotypes that limit their participation in the public domain. While some offline women organisations created to fight forms of gender inequality do exist³³, African scholars such as Ajayi (2007) argue that their impact is (and has been) rarely seen in the Nigerian society. Mueller and Germain (1994) attribute the failure of such organisations to the lack of coherence and poor response to government policies that infringe on women’s rights. While for Leach (2007), the lack of a national or local policy on gender equality has made an institutionalised masculine culture easy to sustain, and hence, difficult to challenge. However, educational empowerment, coupled with the growth of ICT in Africa has encouraged the visibility of gender discrimination debates in the public domain (Falola,

³³ Such as: Women’s Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative, Baobab for Women’s Rights, Women’s Consortium of Nigeria, Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre, and so on.

2002).

2.4 The African Context of Nigeria and African Feminism

2.4.1 Gender Inequality in the African Context

Gender inequality on a broad scale refers to the discrimination of persons based on their gender. It is often rooted in biological, socially constructed, or empirically grounded differences (Bwakali, 2001). However, the specific form gender inequality takes is culturally viable. Hence, the anthropological approach to the understanding of gender inequality is defining the concept in relation to context; hence, location and time, where the context of gender equality is almost as important as the content of gender equality itself (Bwakali, 2001).

Scholars (e.g. Bwakali, 2001; Egboh, 1972) argue that gender inequality can be traced in traditional African cultural practices before the colonial era (pre-1900s) where women were subjected to traditional cultural practices, such as polygamy, female genital mutilation, and forced marriage (Boserup, 1970). However, other scholars (e.g. Mikell, 1997; Sudarkasa, 1987) argue that gender inequality in Africa is a product of colonialism and non-ethnic religious influences, which designate different roles for men and women in society. Hence, as said above, Sudarkasa (1987) points out, that pre-colonial practices such as polygamy, genital mutilation and forced marriage were often applicable to both male and female genders, and mostly served economic, rather than patriarchal goals. Nevertheless, although Nigerian women began to resist forms of gender discrimination (e.g. the Aba women's riot) during colonialism, after colonial rule (post 1960s), the forms of inequality experienced by women in many African countries persisted (Sudarkasa, 1987). This formed the basis for developing the theory of African feminism discussed in the next section, which draws on the inequalities experienced by African women having been colonised (Mikell, 1997). These inequalities have been argued to make the experience of feminism in Africa significantly different from the West (Goredema, 2010).

2.4.2 The Theory of African Feminism

The theory of African feminism is useful in understanding where gender inequality is located in contemporary Africa as it defines the 'oppressions dealt with by African women' (Mikell, 1997). Although coined by African feminist scholars (e.g. Mikell, 1997; Steady, 1987), African feminism is a contested concept as many African women tend to disassociate themselves from being called 'feminists' because of the

negative connotation of the word, often interpreted in radical terms as ‘hating men’ and therefore going against African cultural practices (Somolu, 2007). The factors that influenced the creation of African feminism are said to deviate from that of Western feminism, which mostly grew out of bourgeois individualism and the patriarchal control over women within capitalist industrialising societies (Engels 1972).

Goredema (2010, p.34) describes African feminism as a ‘feminist epistemology and discourse that provides arguments which consolidate the experience of African women against mainstream feminist discourse’. This implies that African feminism is a social movement that creates global awareness of ‘African women’s histories, present realities and future expectations’ (Goredema, 2010, p.34). Mikell (1997) recounts the history of African feminism as starting from women’s direct responses to political leaders who exploited them through policies such as high taxation³⁴. Hence, it started in the early twentieth century with the activities of women like Adelaide Cassely Hayford, Charlotte Maxeke, and Huda Sharaawi who were women’s rights activists. Salami (2012) also adds that African feminism developed from the liberation struggles of countries like Algeria, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Guinea, and Angola, where women fought alongside men for state autonomy and women’s rights. African feminist heroines from that period were the Mau-Mau rebel, Wambui Otieno, Margaret Ekpo, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Albertina Sisulu, among many others who fought against colonialism as well as patriarchy³⁵ (Salami, 2012).

African feminism further gained prominence during the UN decade for women (1975-1985)³⁶ which led to the rise of feminist activism and scholarship across the African continent and diaspora (Goredema, 2010). Since then, the African feminist movement has expanded to affect policy, legislation, scholarship, and culture. However, there are rising conflicting approaches among African writers about the adoption of the term ‘African feminism’. These approaches can be summarised into two arguments. One side of the argument calls for the rejection of the term African feminism, which is considered ‘unAfrican’, being an imported term that is alien to African culture and history (Allen, 1972, Ifeka-Moller, 1975). Another side of the argument validates its (African feminism) use by arguing that while the term ‘feminism’ is an import to Africa, the concept of opposing patriarchy is not foreign in Africa, which has some of the oldest

³⁴ Such as the Aba women’s riot discussed earlier.

³⁵ Most times through protest movements.

³⁶ See: <http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/women/>

civilisations in the world. These civilisations had heroines that might have been called feminists (in a different language) because they exemplified this term through their actions of challenging patriarchy (e.g. Queen Amina of Zazzau, among others) (Ahikire, 2014; Salami, 2012)

Further, a popular belief held by African-based scholars is that ‘African feminism aims to create a discernible difference between women who were colonised and those who were deemed the colonisers’ (Goredema, 2010, p.34). This sheds light on the dominant perception held by African scholars about the role of colonisation in reinforcing gender inequality (Ajayi, 2007; Crutufelli, 1983; Falola, 2002; Goredema, 2010). Mikell (1997) argues that four activities of British colonial forces encouraged gender bias:

First, ‘Christianity’, with its notions of monogamy, and female domesticity and subordination. Second, ‘western education’ which gave men advantages over women; very few women went to school in comparison to men. Third, ‘differential marriage systems’ with western marriage guaranteeing women access to property rights than those married under traditional rites. Fourth, ‘alternative legal systems’ that supposedly acknowledged African women’s independent rights, although colonial magistrates are reported to have treated women as jural minors needing male guardians (p. 17).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, these inequalities faced by women during colonialism influenced the first street protests by women against gender inequality, the Aba Women’s Riot in 1929 and the Abeokuta women’s protest in 1945. Further, Chandra Mohanty (2003) also criticises Western feminism for the tendency to define African feminism by a ‘single’ movement rather than multiple discernible stages of discrimination and resistance, such as the waves of Western feminism. Goredema (2010) specifically argues that ‘African feminism should depend on a temporal scale shaped by political eras, identified as pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras’ (p.35). However, she maintains that even such political eras cannot be addressed in homogenous terms, as such temporality is evident in the fight against gender inequality within political eras. For instance, the post-colonial era in Nigeria has shown that the nature of the fight against gender discrimination is influenced by the type of policies implemented by the president

of the day³⁷. Hence, Nigerian women today find themselves going back and forth in terms of their participation in governance, which also affects other areas of their livelihood.

In addition, where the practice of African feminism is defined as temporal in relation to pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras, it is important to note that these eras have different time scales across Africa because the histories of liberation struggles are different for each country. Hence, ‘the definitions and experiences of feminism are different from region to region within Africa’ (Goredema, 2010, p. 35). As such, Goredema’s analysis problematises the application of African feminism by portraying the concept as a mere construct that can hardly do justice to feminism’s heterogeneity in Africa.

However, despite the socio-political and cultural heterogeneity of the African continent, the various forms/subjects of gender inequality captured by African feminism are reflective of the oppressions dealt with by African women across the continent. This means that African feminism provides the framework for understanding the inequalities suffered by African women, as well as the historical attitudes and meaning-making practices of African women in relation to the various topics of gender discrimination they encounter. In addition, in recent times, scholars, such as Salami (2017) argue that African feminism should be conceived in the plural, hence, ‘African feminisms’ to capture the topics of inequality tackled by post-colonial African feminists (1960s onwards)³⁸, as well as contemporary African women/feminists who mostly choose to focus on identity politics, domestication and sexual rights.

2.4.3 Key Issues in African Feminism

African feminism embodies the key issues in African feminism, which outlines the ‘specific’ inequalities faced by African women. These issues enable the identification of areas where gender inequality is located in the contemporary Nigerian society. The first issue is ‘culture and tradition’, which points out how African history is marked by male dominance and how women have cultivated a history of resistance³⁹. African

³⁷ The ‘President of the day’ implies the head of state in power, who is bound by law to be re-elected every four years. As seen in the analysis of the historical position occupied by Nigerian women, the enactment of policies that favour women, as well as their participation in governance largely rest on the decisions of the President in power owing to the lack of sufficient constitutional laws that protect the rights of women or the conviction to abide by them.

³⁸ Postcolonial African feminism largely emerged in the 1980s and 1990s especially after the landmark UN decade for women in 1975-1985. The feminism of that era largely tackled so called ‘bread and butter’ issues such as poverty reduction, economic, and health related forms of gender inequality.

³⁹ Exemplified by the Aba Women’s Riot and Abeokuta Women’s Movement, among others.

patriarchal traditions have been institutionalised to create gender distinctions that put women at a disadvantage. This disadvantage is prominent in areas such as polygamy, domestic violence, widow abuse and women's lack of access to property and power in society, among others. The second issue is 'socio-economic and socio-political' matters which show factors that affect women, such as low income, low representation in offline politics, literacy, infrastructural development, maternal health, and so on. The third is 'patriarchy' which portrays how political and social systems value men higher than women, and how this affects their confidence to be visible in the public domain, which is seen as a masculine sphere of influence, not a female one (Salami, 2012). The fifth issue is 'race, which deals with racial hierarchies and the politics that accompany them. In this regard, African feminist writing tries to 'undo' the roles that made Africans dependent on their colonisers and propose a new language with which African women can progress from the racialized trauma that affects women in diverse ways (Salami, 2012). Finally, the sixth issue is 'sexuality', which questions the control and suppression of female sexuality, it considers how women can challenge states that establish rigid heterosexist idea as normative, and seeks to query/dismantle the mind-set that encourages the fundamental human right of ownership over one's body (Salami, 2012). Although the key issues in African feminism account for various forms of gender discrimination that cut across economic, cultural and political issues, as stated in the introduction of the thesis, African feminist scholarship has mainly highlighted economic and political forms of inequalities than cultural ones. In addition, early proponents of African feminism (e.g. Mikell, 1997; Steady 1987) have prioritised economic and political-type inequalities over cultural ones on the basis that they pertain to women's survival and livelihood. Against this backdrop, the next section explores contemporary gender discrimination topics on Nigerian female blogs.

2.5 Nigerian Context and Gender Discourses on Female-Run Blogs

My study of Nigerian female blogs revealed that a variety of topics are discussed about gender inequality, reflecting some of the key issues outlined in African feminism⁴⁰. Prominent topics discussed include forced marriage, rape, and domestic violence often attributed to the cultural devaluation of the female gender identity, girl kidnapping and

⁴⁰This study constituted part of the methodology of sampling topics of gender discrimination discussed on blogs (see Section 4.1) while selecting the specific case studies for empirical research (namely the case studies discussed in Section 2.6).

forced marriage, socio-economic inequality, and recently, the domestication of womanhood. These challenges faced by women in attaining gender equality can be argued to have climaxed in the year 2016 and beyond owing to some significant occurrences.

First, the participation of women in governance was rated less than 10% both in electable (National Assembly) and in recommended (Ministerial) positions (Nagarajan, 2015). This means that the participation of women has decreased in comparison to the immediate past regime (that ended in 2015), where the participation of women in governance rose to approximately 33% (Idike, 2014). Second, in February 2016, the Nigerian female blogosphere was buzzing with the case of Ese Oruru, a seventeen-year-old girl who was kidnapped from the southern part of the country and taken to the North where she was forcefully married off and converted to Islam. When the news was reported online, it spread very fast through blog posts and Twitter hashtags labelled, #freeEse (Bella Naija blog, 2016). The pressure mounted ‘collectively’ from online forums was believed to have led the government to investigate the occurrence and the girl was freed (Kayode, 2016). Femi Fani-Kayode, a legislator of the Nigerian government, published an article specifically congratulating the effort by female blogs, such as the Linda Ikeji blog for putting pressure on the government to act (Kayode, 2016). Whether such correlation between blog communication and offline democratic practice is true or not, it was clear that the freedom of Ese Oruru led other parents whose daughters had been kidnapped to speak up using blogs (Linda Ikeji blog, 2016). Other similar stories were reported and exposed the occurrence of girl kidnapping as a trend in Nigeria (Linda Ikeji blog, 2016).

These cases of girl kidnapping are also reminiscent of the Boko Haram kidnapping and forced marriage of over 200 girls from their secondary school in Chibok in April 2014 (and 110 girls from Dapchi⁴¹ in February 2018) (BBC, 2018).

Since 2009, the Boko Haram terrorist group in the North-East region of Nigeria has carried out several violent attacks. Children have been conscious targets and victims of extreme violence, from sexual abuse and forced marriage to kidnappings and brutal killings (UNICEF, 2014). The kidnap of over 270 girls from their dormitory in the Government Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State in Nigeria, in April 2014, by Boko Haram is the most prominent out of other cases in Nigeria (Tomchak, 2014). Shortly after

⁴¹ Chibok and Dapchi are villages in North-East Nigeria.

the kidnap, some of the girls managed to escape while the militants took over 100 girls away. This occurrence is believed to have united female activists around the world, including former First Lady of the United States Michelle Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (Sief, 2014). The kidnap of the girls was also significant in the history of Nigerian online campaigns because it proved how fast a local discourse on the Internet could travel around the world (Sief, 2014). It is also interesting to observe that once the campaign transcended the Nigerian online space, the number of tweets from around the world doubled those from Nigeria in a month. About 22 % of the tweets came from Nigeria, while 44 % came from the United States alone (Tomchak, 2014). Most of the protest movements carried out on the streets of Abuja, the Capital of Nigeria, were organised from Twitter and blogs, such as Linda Ikeji, Bella Naija, Laila, and others. (Collins, 2014). Amidst the hype, BBC released an article titled 'How Millions Called to Bring Back Our Girls' to reflect the (discursive) impact of the campaign on the globe (Tomchak, 2014).

In addition, domestic violence, often attributed to the cultural perception of women as the weaker sex, is a popular topic on Nigerian female blogs owing to its statistical growth in recent times⁴². For instance, one-quarter of ever-married Nigerian women are reported to have been victims of domestic violence (whether emotional, physical or sexual) at a certain point in their lives (Nigeria Demographic Health Survey, 2013⁴³). However, on the 7th of May 2016, the Nigerian female blogosphere was buzzing with an extreme case of domestic violence⁴⁴. This is the story of Ronke Bewaji Shonde, a banker and mother of two children who was strangled to death by her husband, Lekan Shonde, in a domestic squabble (Makinde, 2016). Pictures of her lifeless body on the floor went viral online and these inspired dozens of women who were going through similar challenges to speak up through female blogs in a bid to raise awareness and seek justice.

The amplification of these stories led to the questioning of the rejection of the GEO Bill in March 2016 by the Nigerian Senate, which has been a constant reference

⁴² This can partly be explained by the report of the Nigeria Demographic Health Survey (2013). According to this survey, educated women experience more cases of domestic violence owing to disputes relating to gender equality or gender roles, where rural women are more inclined to accepting gender inequality or taking a submissive position in marriage. Hence, the growing number of educated women in Nigeria might relate to the rise in domestic violence.

⁴³ The Nigeria Demographic Health Survey is conducted in Nigeria every five years, making the 2013 version the latest. The next survey data is expected to be published in November 2018. See: <https://dhsprogram.com/what-we-do/survey/survey-display-528.cfm>

⁴⁴ The buzz was especially because the victim died.

point in the discussion of women's rights in Nigeria. The Bill seeks to tackle gender discrimination in political and public life, it also seeks to establish women's freedom of movement and economic activity, girls' access to education and so on (Unuigbo, 2016). The major argument of the Senate members who voted against the Bill was hinged on traditional and religious factors, with Senate members seen quoting the Bible and Sharia law when they voted against the Bill⁴⁵.

Finally, in September 2016, Nigerian female blog authors published the trending topic of President Muhammadu Buhari's remarks about his wife 'belonging to the kitchen' at a press conference in Germany. This led to debates in the female blogosphere on traditional cultural roles and the domestication of womanhood. Again, this occurrence is one of the case studies of this research, presented in the next section.

2.6 Case Studies

For this research, I focus on two case studies of gender discrimination widely discussed on female blogs in Nigeria. These are, the rejection of the GEO Bill by the Nigerian Senate in March 2016 and President Muhammadu Buhari's position on women. It is important to note that while I present this case studies here, the justification for their selection is discussed in Section 4.1

2.6.1 The Rejection of the GEO Bill

As discussed earlier in the chapter, the GEO Bill⁴⁶ was drafted in 2016 as an improvement on the National Gender Policy. The Bill is structured into three major parts. The first part addresses the diverse forms of gender inequalities faced by Nigerian women. The second part focuses on the duties of the Equal Opportunities Commission, which is expected to monitor and supervise the implementation of the Bill, while the third part seeks to enforce the National Gender Policy by outlining penalties for defaulters of the gender policy.

The first part of the Bill deals with diverse forms of gender inequalities, which include the modification of socio-cultural practices, the elimination of discrimination in political and public life, in the field of education, in the field of employment, on grounds

⁴⁵ Their argument was on male dominance and control as advocated by African traditional culture and the possibility of women becoming 'free to do as they wish' if the Bill is passed. Hence, the presupposition or interpretation that Nigerian women would become prostitutes or lesbians.

⁴⁶ See: http://www.aacoalition.org/images/Gender_and_Equal_Opportunities_Bill_National.pdf

of marital status, in the field of health, on socio-economic grounds, on the right to choose indigeneship and identity, on the rights of persons in rural communities, on the rights of women in matters relating to marriage and family relations, on the prohibition of violence against women, and on provisions relating to marriage and matrimonial causes. Hence, the Bill transcended the focus of the National Gender Policy⁴⁷, which solely focused on education, economic and political inequalities by incorporating forms of discrimination faced by women in the private domain, as well as issues concerning the cultural perception of women.

However, the Bill, which was presented by Senator Biodun Olujimi in the Nigerian National Assembly on behalf of the Ministry of Women Affairs, was denied. The Bill, tagged as tackling issues such as equality in marriage, divorce and widowhood inheritance, was met with stiff resistance as Senate members interpreted the Bill as an infringement on traditional African cultural practices. The rejection of the Bill stimulated a wide range of Internet discourse by women who used diverse online platforms to air their views (Unuigbo, 2016). Popular blogs authored by women were at the forefront of publishing posts and articles to put pressure on the government to revisit the Bill (Unuigbo, 2016). The Senate President released a statement in July 2016, promising to re-visit the Bill after it had been amended. On the 29th of September 2016, the Bill was reported to have been amended and scaled the first reading⁴⁸ in the legislative process. However, the ‘amendment’ made on the Bill has not been clarified, neither has the Bill been passed to date⁴⁹. Nevertheless, the length of time it takes to implement the Bill shows how issues that pertain to women’s discrimination are prioritized in the country.

2.6.2 President Muhammadu Buhari’s Position on Women

Mohammadu Buhari was elected as the President of Nigeria in April 2015 under the All Progressive Congress (APC) political party championed by an anti-corruption slogan. His victory was welcomed with anticipation and hope to fight corruption, which has bedevilled the Nigerian economy for decades (Sahara Reporters, 2016). However, pressures began mounting on Buhari’s government since the beginning of the second quarter of 2016 when the National Bureau of Statistics in Nigeria confirmed the country

⁴⁷ Discussed in Section 2.3.

⁴⁸ Technically, a Bill passes through four legislative processes in the Nigerian National Assembly. Three stages of Bill reading and adoption on the Senate floor, and the fourth stage where the President of Nigeria passes the Bill by signing it into law.

⁴⁹ As at the time of thesis submission in July 2018

to be officially in recession. According to the statistics, the GDP contracted by 2.06 % in the second quarter of 2016, following a contraction of 0.36 % in the first quarter (Sahara Reporters, 2016). This implies two consecutive quarters of negative growth (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). This has led to complaints from the Nigerian public about the President's slow performance and incompetence (Sahara Reporters, 2016).

On the 12th of November 2016, there were reports on the Nigerian offline and social media stating that the BBC received a letter from the Nigerian Presidency asking to stop the airing of an interview (deemed inappropriate) conducted with the Nigerian First Lady, Aisha Buhari, while on a visit to London. However, the BBC was said to have ignored the pressure and went ahead to air the interview conducted with the first lady on the slated date of the 14th of October 2016 (Hassan, 2016). In the interview, Aisha Buhari suggested that a few people, who were behind certain presidential appointments, hijacked her husband's government. Precisely, she said, 'The President does not know 45 out of 50 of the people he appointed in office and I don't know them either, despite being his wife of 27 years' (BBC, 2016). She further declared that she might not back him at the next election unless he shakes up his government. The decision of the President's wife to go public with her concerns came as a shock to Nigerians being the first of its kind in Nigerian history and going against the expectations of the patriarchal system that governs behaviour in the country.

Shortly after this interview with the BBC, President Buhari visited Germany on the 18th of October 2016. While standing next to the German Chancellor Angela Merkel at a press conference, he responded to the criticism of his wife about his leadership style by telling reporters: 'I don't know which party my wife belongs to, but she belongs to my kitchen, and my living room and the other room' (BBC 2016). As stated in the introduction of the thesis, this led to a lot of blog discussions on the cultural position occupied by women in Nigeria, as many women were seen resisting their portrayal as domestic slaves and sexual objects.

Having outlined the history of Nigeria, African feminism and the two case studies, I will now turn to the second part of the chapter, which examines blogs and blogging in the Nigerian context. I discuss the typology of blogs, the blog profile/ layout and language structure of Nigerian female blogs. As stated at the beginning of the chapter, this helps to contextualise the unique communicative practices peculiar to Nigerian women.

2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided a background on the Nigerian context, which involved a discussion on the history of Nigeria, as well as regional distinctions. This helps to understand how geographical positioning affects the economic status, cultural perception and political participation/engagement of Nigerians, and indeed women as a marginalised gender category. I examined, historically, the political, economic and cultural position occupied by Nigerian women, which highlights how despite playing significant roles in the public domain in the pre-colonial era, Nigerian women were not only significantly marginalised in the colonial era, but also in the present post-colonial era. In addition, to understand the concept of gender inequality in the post-colonial era, I drew on the theory of African feminism, which outlines the inequalities faced by African women in contemporary society, such as culture and tradition, race, socio-political and economic factors and sexuality. This relates to the contemporary forms of inequality faced by Nigerian women, such as forced marriage, rape, and domestic violence often attributed to the cultural devaluation of the female gender identity, as well as girl kidnapping and forced marriage, socio-economic inequality, and so on. The case studies⁵⁰ selected for empirical research involve most of these issues. Finally, having provided a background of gender discourses on the Nigerian female blogosphere, I will now turn to the next chapter, which discusses the theoretical framework of the study.

⁵⁰ 'The Rejection of the GEO Bill', and 'President Muhammadu Buhari's Position on Women.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research adopts a poststructuralist philosophical approach by drawing on work by scholars such as Foucault (1980). Foucault's perspective in the 'power and knowledge' understands 'subjectives' as discursively and historically produced, situating the individual as the point of conflicting and contradictory forms of subjectivity (Weeden, 1997). Hence, power is not static but is exhibited through discourses that are disseminated across diverse social institutions. The discursive attribute of subjectivity relates to the study of gender, where Judith Butler (1990, p.191) popularly argued from a poststructuralist position that 'gender is performative', implying that it is not a fixed or stable identity but 'an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts...and other discursive means'. This relates to this study, which not only examines how the identity of women as a 'marginalised group' is constructed through discursive practices, but also shows how online female discourses on gender in/equality are dynamic and continuously produced, reproduced and circulated through forms of representation. The diffusion of power is also evident, where the conception that state actors or men exclusively occupy power positions is being challenged⁵¹. This also concerns 'marginalised Nigerian women' who use online platforms to challenge such state actors by populating the public domain with discourses usually neglected or considered less of a priority in a patriarchal society.

While this research takes a poststructuralist position, it adopts the theories of redistribution, recognition, representation, and counterpublics (Fraser, 1990, 1996, 2005, 2008; Hall, 1984, 1997; Moscovici, 1972, 1984, 2000) by arguing that to understand gender in/equality in Nigeria, one should not only study the object (hence, gender in/equality), but also the forms and processes of knowledge production that generated the object (Foucault 1980). In the context of this study, these forms and processes of knowledge production are exemplified by a scrutiny of the socio-economic, cultural and political roots of gender inequality, as well as the key issues in African feminism discussed in Chapter 2.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first focuses on Fraser's (1996; 2005; 2008) conceptualisations of redistribution, recognition and representation, which shed

⁵¹ 'State actors and men' in this regard can be exemplified by the rejection of the GEO Bill being the handiwork of a male-dominated Nigerian legislature.

light on the position of redistribution of economic resources, fight for cultural change, and politics of representation in discourses of gender in/equality. In addition, because Fraser's (2005, 2008) work on representation mostly focuses on the politics of belonging as it concerns the participation of actors in gender discourses, I consider theoretical contributions within the field of social psychology and cultural studies, such as Moscovici's (1972, 1984, 2000) and Hall's (1984, 1997) theorisations on (social) representation. While Moscovici's work highlights the consequences of representations on the social order, Hall digs further, into the tensions created by social representations exemplified by forms of individual and collective resistance.

I open the second part of this chapter with a discussion of the Habermasian public sphere in order to position the discussion of the 'counterpublics' within a suitable context. I go on to discuss the subaltern counterpublics of Nancy Fraser (1990), which defines women as a counterpublic group whose activities goes against the expectations of the dominant counterpublic (e.g. the government and patriarchal structures). Finally, the third part opens with a broad exploration of the literature within the field of women's discursive resistance online. This is followed by a more specific scrutiny of the literature field in relation to economic, cultural and political forms of inequality, which forms a critical focus of this study. The chapter ends by reviewing the literature on discursive and participatory representations of gender in/equality (online), highlighting gaps that this study seeks to address.

3.1 Redistribution, Recognition and Representation

As opposed to the concept of representation, which was elaborated by Nancy Fraser (2005; 2008) to explain the transformations in feminist movements that commenced in the late twentieth century, redistribution and recognition have a more extensive history, reflective of philosophical interpretations. Redistribution can be traced to an egalitarian liberal framework, particularly of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s in Europe and America. Philosophers like John Rawls (1985) and Ronald Dworkin (1981) argued that the attainment of global justice was dependent on the essential redistribution of material resources. They developed sophisticated approaches like the theory of 'justice and fairness' and the 'envy-test' as criteria for a just distribution of economic resources. However, these approaches have been criticised for focusing on only one aspect of inequality (i.e., the misdistribution of economic resources) while ignoring the misrecognition of identities (Fraser and Honneth, 2003; Taylor, 1992).

Recognition theory, on the other hand, is mostly defined by scholars from a Hegelian perspective who argue that in order to develop a practical identity, people must depend on the feedback of other subjects or society as a whole (Fanon, 1952; Taylor, 1992). In this regard, the relationship between subjects is such that ‘each sees the other as its equal and also separate from it’ (Fraser and Honneth, 2003, p.10). This relation defines subjectivity, where a person becomes an individual subject only by the virtue of recognising and being recognised by another subject (Fraser and Honneth, 2003). Recognition, therefore, reflects both normative and psychological dimensions (Iser, 2013). It implies that one bears the obligation to treat others in a certain way based on how a person (normatively) acknowledges their identity. On the other hand, people treated by other individuals or the society negatively will likely suffer from a poor self-esteem or consider themselves not valuable.⁵² Accordingly, if misrecognition damages the identity of individuals, those affected are expected to be enthusiastic to fight back, in essence, to engage in a struggle for recognition (Iser, 2013). This struggle in the Hegelian tradition encompasses a fight for the equal recognition of all persons in their common humanity, as well as the recognition of difference in individual identity (Iser, 2013). However, apart from fighting for a group’s specific identity, the recognition of status reflects the fight for the recognition of individuals as equal partners in social interaction (Young, 1990).

3.1.1 Redistribution and Recognition as a ‘Two-Dimensional Politics’

While redistribution and recognition have been portrayed as mutually exclusive by previous scholars (e.g. Rorty, 1999; Young, 1990; Taylor, 1992), Fraser and Honneth (2003, p.3) argue about the possibility of a ‘two-dimensional conception of justice’⁵³; involving socio-economic, as well as identity politics. They posited that adequate justice, identified as the ideal of ‘participatory parity’ that allows the equal participation of individuals in the public domain, can only be achieved when redistribution and recognition are tackled together. In explaining the relationship between the two concepts, Fraser (1996) provides two examples: while homosexuals suffer primarily from discriminating cultural practices of humiliation, workers mostly suffer economic

⁵² For instance, Frantz Fanon (1952) vividly describes how victims of racism and colonisation have suffered severe psychological harm by being portrayed as inferior humans.

⁵³ Fraser (2015) later argues for a three-dimensional politics discussed in section 3.1.3.

exploitation. Although homosexuals still suffer economic issues and the achievements of workers are ideologically regarded less valuable, the primary cause of injustice in the case of the homosexual humiliation lies within the cultural sphere, while in the workers' case it can be found in the economic sphere (Fraser, 1996, pp. 13-15, Fraser and Honneth, 2003, pp.50-51).

By categorising forms of injustice by their socio-economic roots, Fraser reveals how most cases of injustice deal with a combination of cultural disrespect and economic exploitation. Another example within the context of this research could be Nigerian women who not only suffer from a discriminating status (e.g. misrecognition as equal partners in social interaction) but also find themselves in an economy, which does not prioritise their employment. A two-dimensional politics, therefore, in Fraser's opinion, allows the practical conflicts between policies of redistribution and recognition to be tackled more efficiently.

Hence, Kantian philosophers or liberals who advocate for redistribution without consideration for the relations of recognition have been criticised for re-enforcing the stigmatisation of some minority groups often regarded as social parasites, and thus, disrespected (Iser, 2013). In addition, implementing policies of recognition in isolation is believed to lead to normatively undesirable issues that exacerbate the economic situation of the people affected (Fraser and Honneth, 2003). Therefore, proponents of recognition have been criticised of fostering a normative attitude that requires individuals to be the subject of normative statuses, arguing that the quest for recognition has made it merely a prize to be won, where the result might just be to put in silence resistant movements as having attained a certain recognised status while misdistribution of resources among such deprived groups persists (McNay, 2008).

3.1.2 Feminist Perspectives on Redistribution, Recognition and Representation

Nancy Fraser deploys the concepts of 'redistribution', 'recognition', and 'representation' to recount the history of the feminist 'imaginary' in America and Europe by critically examining the discourses that informed the feminist movement that commenced in the 1960s (Fraser, 2005). Within this context, redistribution, recognition, and representation capture the change in feminist discourse grammar starting from the post-World War II era. Fraser correlates the change in the subject of feminist discourses to the socio-economic climate of the day. For instance, she argues that the fight for the redistribution of resources by feminists was pre-dominant in a Keynesian economic

system, which was characterised by male dominance prominent in areas such as employment. Thus, redistribution, being a product of the second wave feminism, started in the 1990s and was aimed at challenging gender-related exclusion from social democracy by ‘problematizing welfare paternalism, the bourgeois family, and the androcentrism of capitalist society’ (Fraser, 2005, p.298). The focus of the feminist discourse struggle during that period was on ‘social inequality’, while political and economic transformation was championed by the fight for some sought of ‘distributive justice’ (Fraser, 2005, p.298). This struggle deviated from earlier feminist movements of the first wave, whose primary objective was achieving women’s suffrage through legal battles.

The recognition of gendered identities was born alongside a free-market economy and the neo-liberal society. In Fraser’s argument, the free-market ideologies of the late 1980s accompanied by neo-liberalism weakened the fight for egalitarian redistribution, which was sustained by social democracy. Feminism moved on to use newer ‘grammars of political-claim making, more attuned to the post-socialist’ climate⁵⁴ (Fraser, 2005, p. 298). For instance, Fraser argued that by politicising ‘the personal’, feminists expanded the boundaries of contestation beyond socio-economic distribution to involve issues that questioned cultural behaviours such as ‘housework, sexuality, and reproduction’ (Fraser, 2005, p.298). This shift in the tactics of struggle is what Fraser calls ‘recognition’ which reflects a focus on ‘identity politics, aimed at celebrating difference’ rather than fighting for equality (Fraser, 2005, p.298). Recognition in her argument involves challenging androcentric patterns of cultural value or status hierarchies in the capitalist society. In summary, it is a struggle aimed at effecting cultural change. This is because ‘subordination was perceived as more of a cultural problem than of the political economy’ (Fraser, 2005, p. 299).

While the fight for redistribution in the 1960s and the fight for recognition in the 1980s pertain to feminist movements in the context of national borders⁵⁵, representation in the twenty-first century is fuelled by the growth of globalisation and ICT. Fraser (2008) argued that globalization is changing the way feminists argue about gender inequality. In a Keynesian era, discourses of gender inequality pertained to the sovereign national State,

⁵⁴ As opposed to feminists’ use of grammars of redistributive politics characterised in socialist regimes.

⁵⁵ The struggles for justice within these eras were primarily within the nation-state, challenging national forms of patriarchy. However, Fraser (2008) argues that today such national framing of political claim making is being replaced by a more global struggle for justice and decision-making.

where the fights against gender inequality concerned ‘relations among fellow citizens, to be subject to debate within national publics, and to contemplate redress by national states’ (Fraser, 2005, p.304). However, in the twenty-first century, feminist discourses are increasingly shaped by cases of gender inequality that overflow territorial borders.

Fraser (2005) defined representation as the contemporary phase of feminist movement in most parts of the world. She has argued that owing to declining security, the curtailing of welfare protections, unstable labour markets, and so on, society becomes faced with class inequalities of distribution overlaid with status inequalities of recognition. As a result, many feminists in America and Europe are combining the fights for redistribution and recognition on a transnational scale. This is because such feminists are realising that decisions taken in one territorial state frequently affect the lives of women outside it (Fraser, 2005). Hence, feminists are increasingly realising the relevance of transnational opinion which, facilitated by global mass media and technology, is transcending national borders. Similarly, about issues, such as global warming, AIDS, international terrorism, and so on, feminists now acknowledge that women’s ability to survive is as dependent on the occurrences that overflow the borders of nation states, as ‘on those contained within them’ (Fraser, 2008, p.83). As a result of these issues, Fraser argued that feminists are challenging the national framing of political claims-making because they see the frame as reinforcing injustice due to demarcating ‘the political landscape in such a way that prevents women from fighting the institutions that oppress them’ (Fraser, 2008, p.83).

Hence, twenty-first-century feminist claims for redistribution and recognition are increasingly focused on changing the frame. This can be seen, for instance, where feminists join critics of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in fighting transborder injustice and challenging the governance structures of the global economy⁵⁶, as well as where feminists within the European Union (EU) question economic structures and policies⁵⁷. These transformations take for granted the ‘Keynesian-Westphalian frame’ and make visible the third dimension of justice called ‘representation’. Representation, therefore, brings together discourses of redistribution and recognition by drawing on injustices of distributive inequalities and misrecognition of gendered identities faced by

⁵⁶ Sameh (2000) reported the visibility of female protesters at WTO meetings in Seattle, USA, whose goal was to bridge the economic gap between men and women. This is because of economic trade policies that led to the laying off many women in the late 1990s.

⁵⁷ Elman (1996) narrated how feminists actively challenged the EU's powerful patriarchal institutions that resisted feminist demands for action on sexual politics.

women around the world. Global occurrences that relate to women, such as international terrorism, human rights violation, or issues relating to sexuality, are increasingly being tackled within a global decision-making frame. The grammar of feminist discourse also incorporates ‘ideals of a global struggle considering trans-border sources of gender injustices that structure trans-national social relations’ (Fraser, 2005, p.299). The slogan, ‘women’s rights are human rights’ connotes a link to global feminist struggles against national patriarchal institutions and calls for the amendment of international law (Fraser, 2005, p. 299). Thus, ‘representation’, which I discuss in the next section, provides a framework for incorporating a ‘three-dimensional politics (theory)’, which encompasses redistribution, recognition and representation (Fraser 2008, p.16). This approach, according to Fraser, interrogates feminist discourses of misdistribution, misrecognition and misrepresentation within a ‘post-Westphalian frame’ to ensure an adequate understanding of contemporary feminist discourses (2008, p.283).

3.1.3 The Politics of Representation through Participation

Today globalisation has made prominent (and subject to contestation) the political mechanisms that determine the inclusion of participants in the fight against gender inequality. While economic and cultural injustices have dominated the grammar of feminist movements historically, the politics of representation is said to have been neglected (Fraser, 2008). Fraser argued that ‘it is now apparent that no claim for justice can avoid presupposing some notion of representation’ (Fraser, 2008, p.84). Hence, as noted, she called for a three-dimensional theoretical approach to the study of injustice, one that incorporates the economic, cultural and political dimensions to allow adequate identification of the injustices of misframing and to assess possible solutions (Fraser, 2008, p.22).

Centred on reframing injustices (by focusing on issues of membership and procedure), representation is also called the ‘political’ dimension of justice because it provides the platform ‘for the dimensions of redistribution and recognition to be played out by establishing the guidelines for belonging’ (Fraser, 2008, p. 18). Fraser posited that while redistribution and recognition are focused on the ‘what’ of gender in/equality, in terms of the subject of focus, representation is focused on the ‘who’ of gender in/equality (Fraser, 2008, p.18). ‘It is the political field that specifies the reach of the other two dimensions’ (Fraser, 2008, p.18). ‘It determines who participates and who is excluded from the circle of those entitled to a just distribution and reciprocal recognition’ (Fraser,

2008, p.19). In summary, it is the political determinant of inclusion. Therefore, Fraser argued that the questions that determine whether the relations of representation are 'just' include: 'do the boundaries of the political community wrongly exclude some who are actually entitled to representation? Do the community's decision rules accord equal voice in public deliberations and fair representation in public decision-making to all members?' (Fraser, 2008, p.18).

Fraser (2008) argued that although these political questions differ from economic or cultural ones, they are inter-related. She maintained that certain challenges in attaining (gender) equality can arise from 'the political constitution of society as opposed to issues concerning class structure' (redistribution) or 'status order' (recognition) (Fraser, 2008, p.18). Hence, this political challenge can affect how issues of economic or cultural relevance are addressed or fought for. Misrepresentation can occur, therefore, at 'two levels of political injustice': 'ordinary political misrepresentation' and misframing (Fraser, 2008, p.22). 'Ordinary political misrepresentation deals with issues of parity of the political participation of women, and questions if apportioned gender quotas are an appropriate remedy' (Fraser, 2008, p.22). Misframing, on the other hand, deals with misrepresentation that concerns boundary-setting issues, where 'community boundaries are drawn in such a way that exclude some people from the chance to participate in its authorized contests over injustice' (Fraser, 2008, p.19). Misframing generally concerns who is included and who is excluded from belonging to the forum that makes justice claims on a transnational level. For example, due to rules that define boundaries of inclusion, feminists in Norway or Switzerland may not take part in feminist activities within the EU 'frame' despite occupying the same geographical continent. This reflects a boundary-setting limitation, where geographical demarcations determine who is entitled to participate in discourses and who is not. It also concerns ensuring that every individual is afforded an opportunity to speak or be represented in the struggle against inequality.

Having discussed Fraser's (2005, 2008) conceptualisation of participatory representation, the next section examines other scholarly work (e.g. Hall 1997; Moscovici 1972) on discursive representation.

3.1.4 Analytical Perspectives on Discursive Representation

As stated earlier in the chapter, while I draw on Fraser's (2005, 2008) conceptualisation on representation to understand the politics of participation as it relates to human actors in blog discourse, I find Moscovici's (1972, 1984, 2000) and Hall's

(1984, 1997) work on (social) representation, as well as the attendant criticisms of social representations theory (e.g. Potter and Witherell, 1987; Wagner, 1998) particularly insightful for understanding the discursive dimensions of representation. This knowledge does not only aid the understanding of the ‘production’ and ‘interpretation’ of blog content, but also considers the impact of these processes on the construction of social reality. This makes social representation theory specifically applicable in this research, which takes a critical approach.

The theories of representation cut across the disciplines of social psychology and cultural studies, which specialise in the study of communicative patterns and the relationships between communication, identity and resistance (Howarth, 2006). The works of Moscovici (1961, 1972, 1973, 1984, 2000) in social psychology and Hall (1980, 1981, 1984, 1988, 1997) in cultural studies capture this. For Moscovici,

Social representations are the systems of values, ideas and practices with a two-fold function: first to establish order which will enable individuals to orient themselves in their material and social world and to master it; and secondly to enable communication to take place among members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history (1973, p.xiii).

Moscovici shows how representations enable the common interpretation of values, ideas and practices by influencing individual social behaviour. Hence, social representations ‘provide collectives with intersubjectively shared means for understanding and communicating’ (Duveen and Lloyd, 1990, p.2). This is because social representation is socio-cognitive, reflecting the need to understand the world by transforming social representations into social realities both for oneself and others (Philogène, and Deaux, 2001). Empirical research (e.g. Howarth, 2006; Philogène, and Deaux, 2001) has shown how such social representations transform the social realities of individuals, and thus, the social order. However, Moscovici’s concept of representations has been criticised for its overemphasis on the influence of representations on social practices and for disregarding the role of human subjectivity and agency (e.g., Jahoda, 1988; Parker, 1987). For instance, Jahoda (1988) states that Moscovici portrays individuals as passive and not active agents who are able resist and challenge the structure

of social representations. This is particularly reflected in Moscovici's portrayal of social representations as an 'irresistible force' that affects social/communicative practices (1984, p.9).

Hall (1997, p.17) on the other hand, digs deeper into the forms of 'meaning-making'⁵⁸⁵⁹ highlighted by Moscovici by defining representation as 'the production of the meaning and concepts in our mind through language'. Hall adds that representation reflects 'the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the "real" world of objects, people, events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events' (1997, p.17). This shows that representation can be classified in two forms. First, where meaning is dependent on a correlation of objects, people and events to a set of knowledge or ideas already held in the mind. Second, where meaning is dependent on the use of a common language, which represents textual information, spoken sounds, images, and so on (1997, p.19-19). Central to Hall's (1980) encoding and decoding model⁶⁰ of communication is the idea that meaning is not only interpreted in relation to contextual experience but that individuals have the ability to resist/transform the messages they interpret, often through collective action.

This enables the study of how 'representations become systematically distorted and naturalised in the maintenance and defence of the dominant cultural order' (Howarth, 2011, p.8). It highlights the tensions often created by social representations exemplified by forms of individual and collective resistance within the context of this research. This means that 'meaning is not fixed but often negotiated through the process of representations which involves social and psychological exchange' (Hall, 1997, p.228). As such, representation is a relational and collaborative activity, in which such communicative process encourages change, stability, and resistance in the creation of knowledge (Hall, 1981). This highlights the relationship between identity, difference and resistance, which is central to the gender in/equality discourse of Nigerian women.

Representations are also presented as a psychological process that is not always neutral. As Howarth (2011, p.11) states: 'by classifying a person, a thing, or an event, or a nation, we are at the same time evaluating it/her'. This relates to Hall's preferred

⁵⁸ The forms of 'social exchange', which involve 'classifying' and 'naming various aspects of the world' (Moscovici 1973, p.xiii).

⁵⁹ Hence, of understanding and communicating.

⁶⁰ Stuart Hall's (1980) encoding and decoding model suggests audience are able to subjectively interpret text and create meaning. These meanings can be dominant, negotiated or oppositional.

meaning on the ideological role of the media in encouraging systems of representations that favour certain interests and identities rather than others. According to Hall (1981), such preferred readings reflect the cultural, historical and ideological aspects of communicative practices:

The choice of this moment of an event as against that, of this person rather than that, of this angle rather than any other, indeed, the selection of this photographed incident to represent a whole complex chain of events and meaning, is a highly ideological procedure (Hall, 1984, p. 241)

This excerpt reveals how the art of communication is defined by ideological practices. It shows ‘how different values and practices are reified and prioritised over others, how social groups and identities are marginalised and excluded from mainstream systems of discourse and how the process of representations supports ideological systems’ (Howarth, 2011, p.12). The concept of representation has also been criticised by numerous scholars, particularly within the field of British social psychology. Most of the critique is centred on the inability to ‘conceptualise the relationship between representations and social practices’ (Howarth, 2006, p.4). For instance, Potter and Witherell (1987) investigate what it means to ‘use’ and ‘mention’ a representation. In this regard, they highlight the difference between stating/revealing forms of misrepresentation, as opposed to showing the effect of (social) representations on communicative practices, and the construction of reality. In addressing such a critique, studies are increasingly questioning ‘what do social representations do?’ For instance, Jodelet (1989) asserts that representation can be ‘used for acting on the world and on others’ (translated by Duveen 2001, p.44). Howarth (2006) also shows how representations are used to ‘react, reject, or re-form a presentation of the world that conflicts with one’s stake, position, and self-identity’ (p. 5).

Having examined Fraser’s (1996, 2005, 2008) conceptualisations on redistribution, recognition and participatory representation and Moscovici’s (1972, 1984, 2000) and Hall’s (1984, 1997) works on (social) representation, the next section explores Habermas’ public sphere (1962, 1989) and the subaltern counterpublics of Fraser (1990).

3.2 Public and Counterpublic Spheres

Researching about Fraser's counterpublics inevitably relates to the idea of the public sphere and the criticisms it attracted, particularly from the feminists of the twentieth century (e.g. Mary Ryan, 1992; Nancy Fraser, 1990).

Habermas (1962) constructed the concept of the public sphere around the social activities of the bourgeoisie in the eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe. According to him, the public sphere was a product of diverse societal transformations of which two are most significant; the rise of the periodical press, followed by rise of social interaction spots like salons and coffee houses. Habermas (1989) argued that these developments provided platforms for individuals to scrutinise the legislature, and to possibly extend the freedom of expression provided by the constitution. Habermas (1989) also posited that for the public sphere to thrive, five major criteria must be met. First, the public sphere must provide the freedom of participation for all individuals. Second, the public sphere must be independent from state control. Third, members' interaction must be characterised by equality, deprioritising social class or status. Fourth, debates must be geared towards attaining a consensus/agreement. Fifth, debates must be informed by 'rational-critical discourse' (Habermas, 1989, p.185). However, Habermas' public sphere has been criticised by scholars for not including women and other marginalised groups, (Fraser, 1990; Ryan, 1992; Oskar and Alexander, 1972), for being idealistic and normative (Fraser, 1990; Kellner, 2000), for lacking consideration of opposition (Mouffe, 1999), for proposing 'rationality' in discourse as a simplistic notion (Rienstra and Hook, 2006; Kellner, 2000), and so on.

Fraser's (1990) critique of Habermas was centred on the public sphere's uneven representation of the various classes in of the eighteenth-century era. Fraser (1990) argued that the public sphere could not be said to have achieved rational discussion or debate as it failed to achieve maximum participation through its exclusion of marginalised groups such as women. Fraser also draws attention to the full title of Habermas' work, 'Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society', as already connoting an exclusion (Fraser, 1990). Specifically, the word 'category' implies a comprehensive division, contrary to the idea of 'openness' which was the major objective of the public sphere. Fraser (1990) has emphasised how most of those that participated in the public sphere debates were not only bourgeoisies according to popular perception, but also a certain class within the broader bourgeoisie class. Citing from Habermas (1994, p.89):

...a new stratum of bourgeois people arose which occupied a central position within the “public”. The officials of the ruler’s administrations were its core – mostly jurists. Added to them were doctors, pastors, officers, professors, and “scholars” who were at the top of a hierarchy reaching down through school teachers and scribes to the people.

Accordingly, aside women, the old occupational bourgeoisies that included craftsmen and shop keepers were not included as they subsequently lost their relevance in society (Habermas, 1994). Therefore, a major weakness in Habermas’ proposition on the public sphere is its failure to acknowledge the possible existence of other forms of public spheres such as women’s public spheres, proletariat public spheres, or other marginalised group-based public spheres within the society of the eighteenth century (Fraser, 1990). The exclusion of women from the public sphere has also been emphasized by feminist scholars such as Mary Ryan (1992) who accused Habermas not only of failing to represent female public spheres in his analysis, but also of declaring a decline in the potential of the public sphere to be effective in society at a time (beginning of the twentieth century) when women groups in America were springing up significantly in a manner that exemplified a public sphere. Specifically, Ryan (1992) cited an example of how women in North America who were excluded from the political affairs of the country, mobilized themselves in an unprecedented manner by creating counter-civil societies and carrying out voluntary philanthropic activities to reform their society.

As a result of such criticisms, Kellner (2000) has argued that due to the diverse socio-political classifications of society, it is difficult to propose a public sphere that is all encompassing of the different classes of society. It even becomes problematic to theorise about the equal representation of such a sphere because it is not practical; certain groups will always be excluded. Hence, Kellner (2000) has argued that it is better to theorize multiple public spheres that sometimes over-lap, as well as conflict rather than advocate for a singular liberal public sphere. In theorising the subaltern counterpublics, Fraser (1990) makes this consideration and acknowledges the existence of not just a single, but diverse publics that sometimes function in opposition to the ideals of the dominant publics.

Specifically, Fraser conceptualised the subaltern counter-publics to describe the unique systems through which traditionally marginalised citizens (such as women,

African-Americans, working class, etcetera) produce and circulate non-dominant forms of knowledge. These 'counterpublics emerge in response to their exclusion within the dominant publics and help expand the discursive space being parallel discursive platforms where individuals formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs' (Fraser, 1990, p.67). Fraser also argued that social groups within this category mobilise themselves to create 'counterdiscourses' which are circulated to share their stories, as well as influence public opinion.

Castells (2011) has also been at the heart of theorising around counterpublics and the production of counter discourses by exploring the Internet's role in collective debate and decision making among citizens who create subversive networks. In his opinion, these networks of resistance contribute to the production of 'counterpower', which is a sort of power that challenges the power within the institutions of society to claim representation for their own interests and advantage (Castells, 2011, pp. 773-774). Castells' notion of counterpower is reflective of Foucault's (1982) theorisation in 'the subject and power'. In this regard, the notion of 'counterdiscourse' reflects less vulnerability or inferiority but it is positioned as a form of power (counterpower) which possesses a strength of its own. It emphasises not only the fluidity or diffusion of power across diverse social institutions but also the complexity of power relations, which is inherent in every form of social relations.

Within the context of this research, this form of power relations is such that exists not only between the government/men and Nigerian women but also amidst the production and circulation of counter-discourses by Nigerian women themselves. Foucault (1982, p.794) describes this approach to understanding inequality as 'a resistance against different forms of power as a starting point', where the study of how counterpublics resist 'dominant' power reveals how power relations affect the confrontation strategies employed by marginalised groups. Foucault argues that this relationship 'creates a reciprocal appeal, a perpetual linking and a perpetual reversal' between these two dichotomised positions (dominant versus countepublics) (Foucault, 1982, p.794).

Hence, by raising questions about the marginalised, one inevitably invites a discussion about dominance, and vice versa. This research is informed by this reasoning, showing how visibility (online presence) is intricately linked to invisibility (online exclusion), and how women's lack of participation in online discourses can potentially affect not just the ability to be included but also the opportunity to raise questions about

how the absent majority is being represented. Operationalising counterdiscourses and counterpublics, helps this study to make meaning of the gender in/equality debate in Nigeria by interrogating conceptions of ‘marginalisation’ and ‘resistance to inequality’. This also helps the study question preconceived notions that define resistance in homogenous terms by investigating the discourse fragmentation evident in the gender in/equality discourse of Nigerian female bloggers.

The next section explores the literature within the field of women’s discursive resistance online, followed by a more specific scrutiny of the literature in relation to economic, cultural and political forms of inequality, which forms a critical focus of this study. The section closes with a discussion of literature on discursive and participatory representations of gender inequality (online), while it highlights gaps that this study seeks to address.

3.3 Female Counterpublics and Online Resistance

Existing research has been concerned with the ways in which the growing use of social media by marginalised groups/individuals has transformed the formulation and publishing of counter-discourses (Afful and Ricciardelli, 2015; Lovheim, 2011; Somolu, 2007; Shaw 2012; Sreberny and Khiabany, 2010). Specifically, scholarship has emphasised that the increasing visibility of gender discrimination topics on social media challenge mainstream discourses, male dominance and the adherence to societal/cultural norms (e.g. Drüeke and Zobl, 2016; Shaw, 2012; Skalli, 2014; Zhang and Kramarae, 2014).

This is reflective of topics featured in North-African women’s online discussions on gender discrimination, which include sexual harassment, rape, and cultural change (Al-rawi, 2014; Mai and Laine, 2016; Skalli 2014). For instance, Al-rawi (2014) examined a discussion forum created by North-African feminists titled ‘Revolution against Patriarchal Society’, which focused on tackling issues that concern violence against women. The analysis of the discussion forum showed that gender violence was often blamed on customs and traditions, which encourage men to perceive women as objects. Also, other scholars studying women’s blog activism in relation to North Africa and in the context of the Arab Spring show that topics often involved discussions on how to break cultural barriers imposed on women, such as gender segregation, obedience to gender norms, authority, and religion (Mai and Laine, 2016; Tschirhart, 2014).

In Western settings, Shaw (2012, p.384) shows that the feminist blogs serve as counterpublics for ‘developing discourse to explain the exclusion of women from the history of alternative music, as well as countering that exclusion through the development of a canon of musical artists’. Studies on the Slutwalk movement also show that feminists use online platforms as discursive spaces to challenge patriarchal attempts to control women’s appearance and sexuality (Carroll, 2014; Keller, Mendes and Ringrose, 2018; Zhang and Kramarae, 2014).

Recent feminist literature is increasingly discussing gendered violence as perpetuated in and by online communities (Garcia and Vemuri, 2017; Lewis, Rowe, and Wiper, 2017; Keller, Mendes; and Ringrose, 2018; Puente, Romero and Cupeiro, 2017). This has been attributed to the rise of ‘rape culture’ in contemporary society (Keller, Mendes and Ringrose, 2018). For instance, Mandolini (2017) recounts how the idea of gender-based killings theorised in the late twentieth century as Femicide; is revisited in feminist discussions in the Italian female blogosphere. While Keller, Mendes and Ringrose (2018) study the representation of rape culture and sexual violence online while drawing attention to how feminists respond to these occurrences. Other scholars investigate how women make public allegations of sexual assault and violence online, as well as how female counterpublics contest rape culture on social media (Garcia and Vemuri, 2017; Salter, 2013; Sill et al., 2016). On the other hand, Lewis, Rowe, and Wiper (2017), in their findings on recipients of online abuse in the UK, reveal alternative definitions of gender violence; including forms of online abuse. In this regard, they argue that ‘online abuse is conceived as a form of violence against women and girls, rather than a form of communication’ (p.1462)

Studies have also highlighted the affordances of technology for feminist and women’s activism, promoting self-expression and identity construction (Drücke and Zobl, 2016; Keller, 2012; Lewis, Rowe and Wiper, 2017; Newsom and Lenge, 2012; Skalli, 2014; Zhang and Kramarae, 2014). ‘Women’s self-expression’ has particularly been the subject of Middle-Eastern studies on women’s use of the Internet (e.g. Lieber, 2010; Salamandra, 2006; Skalli, 2014; White and Hernandez, 2013). Such studies show how women who come from conservative cultures capitalise on the Internet’s openness to discuss ‘personal’ and sometimes ‘political’ issues. In this regard, the discussion of private or personal matters reflects counterpublic behaviour where women ‘write themselves and their communities into being’ (Boyd, 2007, pp. 13-14). This shows how creating the ‘public-self’ through online discourse can be a form of resistance, which

challenges cultural practices that limit women's participation in the public domain (Keller, 2012). Other studies show how women use the online space to construct a feminist identity, and how such activity often generates trolling (Keller, 2012; Rentschler, 2014; Subraimanian, 2014). However, Subraimanian (2014) argues that although Facebook and Twitter have become grounds for contestations on what it means to be a feminist, women often see such platforms as opportunities to resist male trolling and misogyny. Rentschler (2014) also adds that women tend to use such instances of trolling for feminist education⁶¹.

Further, in relation to feminism and feminist identity, research has shown the online collaboration of Western and third world feminists in discussions of gender marginalisation. Al-rawi's (2014) study shows that feminist activists in the US use social media to encourage Egyptian women to liberate themselves from male dominance by rejecting the 'veil /niqab' by arguing that Islam originally came to save Arabs from the backwardness of polytheism and never made it a strict rule for women to wear a veil. However, other studies highlight the tensions associated with Western feminism and the label of 'feminist'. Tohidi's (2016) study on North-African online discussions of females on gender equality shows that many African and Middle-Eastern women tend to isolate themselves from the label of 'feminist' even though their discussions⁶² on gender discrimination align with those in the context of Western feminism. Tohidi asserts that this is because Western feminism is considered a form of hostility towards men and the family.

This relates to the assertion by African scholars that traditional African culture is 'anti-feminist' and driven by the misrecognition of women's identity (Akumu, 2015; Salami, 2016; Ssenyonjo, 2007). Salami (2016) maintains that African tradition remains the standpoint from which feminist rights (e.g. contraceptives, abortion, same-sex relationships) are gunned down. Salami (2016) argues that the popular phrase 'it is not African tradition' is constantly iterated to disapprove the pursuit for the recognition of gendered identities or cultural change within feminist activism.

In summary, this discussion shows that most scholarly work on how women challenge mainstream discourses, male dominance, the adherence to societal/cultural norms and sexual harassment often-presents women as a homogeneous counterpublic

⁶¹ To dish out information on what feminism means, what it means to be a feminist.

⁶² Tohidi (2016) cites topics such as sexual harassment, gender violence and sexism.

group. Such research rarely consider tensions that occur within women's resistance against discrimination. Hence, while this study aligns with such scholarly work by investigating how women resist forms of gender inequality, it unravels underlying tensions within their activities, aiming to show how discourse fragmentations define women's fight against in/equality in Nigeria.

3.3.1 Discursive and Participatory Representations Online

Most online studies on gender representation seem to focus on the discursive dimension of representation, reflective of Moscovici's (1972, 1973, 2000) and Hall's (1997, 1984) conceptualisations. Hence, these studies focus on how the articulations of gender relate to broader class politics and reflect dominant ideology, particularly, hegemonic misogyny and gender stereotypes (Almeida, 2018; Bailey et al., 2013; Buffon and Allison, 2016; Blower, 2016; Farvid and Braun, 2014; Knadler, 2001; Lischinsky, 2017; Morgan and Pritchard, 2017; Zitong, 2013). Others consider how signs and semiotic artefacts produce meaning, as well as how those meanings/representations are challenged, contested or resisted (Puente et al, 2015; Almeida, 2018; Callaghan and Lazard, 2012; Heineken, 2015; Knadler, 2001; Yusof, 2009;).

In relation to how online gendered discourse reproduces hegemonic misogyny, studies, such as Linschinsky (2017), Paasonen (2006), and Farvid and Braun (2014), investigate how 'grammatical patterns' are 'used to attribute agency to male and female participants in sexual acts' (Linschinsky, 2017, p.1). These studies emphasise the representation of females as passive, sometimes sassy, powerless and submissive. Linschinsky's study also reveals how 'narratives tend to represent sexual intercourse as an asymmetric engagement between agent and patient, rather than as a joint collaborative activity'. This shows how dominant discourses/conceptions on gender and sexuality are reinforced on such online spaces.

Buffon and Allison (2016, p.176) adopt a gendered perspective on war by investigating online news sites reporting on attacks by ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). Their study shows how narratives tend to privilege female casualties as a way of projecting a specific narrative of victimhood and how 'Western media draw and reproduce cultural and gender representations, reinstating relations of power infused with orientalist and patriarchal tropes'. Studies in Africa (which are mostly offline) look at how cultural/dominant representations of gender are replicated in mainstream media, literature, as well as school curricula (Carelse and Evans, 2017; Gebregeorgis, 2017;

Messick, 1987; Pandey, 2004; McEwan, 2003). For instance, Gebregeorgis' (2017) study of Ethiopian grade four Student Handbook shows that the representations and discourse style replicates existing stereotypical gender constructions of the society. That study demonstrated that the handbook explicitly associates mathematical and intellectual ability with male characters, while girl characters were portrayed in the handbook as having a specific skill for executing household chores and domestic duties.

Nevertheless, research on online platforms has also looked into how dominant constructions and representations of gender influence meaning-making practices and constitute the lived realities of individuals (Bailey, et al., 2013; Blower, 2016; Kerkhoven, et al 2016; Zitong, 2013). Bailey et al.'s (2013) study shows that stereotypes, such as having an open profile, too many friends or posting too much content, often make young girls stand the risk of being called sluts. Such discriminatory standards that define public participation often police young girls to behave in a certain way, or limit their ability to participate 'fully' online. Similarly, Blower (2016) explores how societal notions of femininity as an integrative part of self-representation often stimulates a conscious gendered practice of blogging into a 'feminised situation'⁶³. This means that such women conform, rather than resist cultural norms. However, by so doing, they establish their identities and feel empowered to control what they articulate of themselves.

However, in line with Hall's (1997) work, studies also illustrate that discourse representations produce tensions and resistance. For instance, Almeida (2018) studies the controversy surrounding the Burkini swimsuits in France. Almeida compares the representations of the Burkini in offline political discourse and online Muslim forums. She explores contested meanings attached to the Burkini and reveals how women who wear the Burkini consider them as an opportunity to claim access to spaces of leisure while still obeying their belief in dressing modestly. This goes against 'hegemonic French representations of Islamic swimsuits as a manifestation of politicised religiosity' (Almeida, 2018, p. 20). Other studies similarly show that new media technologies allow women to challenge gender representations that devalue their identity and body image, allowing them to reinvent and create alternative identities of themselves (Callaghan and Lazard, 2012; Heineken, 2015; Knadler, 2001; Yusof, 2009). For instance, in a study of female bloggers in Canada and America, Afful and Ricciardelli (2015, p.453) illustrated that through discussions on beauty and body image, bloggers are able to challenge 'anti-

⁶³ Hence, blogging about gender and gender roles.

fat discourses. They are able to develop discursive strategies that move beyond the binary of fat as a lifestyle choice, and body size as biologically or genetically determined that dominate the fat acceptance movement'. Also, Heineken (2015, p.1035) challenges media representations of the female athletic body image and perceptions of the female athletic body by studying the twitter handle @SoccerGrlProbs, created by a group of anonymous female soccer players. The study shows how @SoccerGrlProbs enables young female athletes 'to negotiate the conflicting demands of emphasised femininity and athleticism by inspiring self-construction'. This allows them to simultaneously subvert sports discourses that emphasise the need for women to be efficient/successful athletes, as well as be (hetero) sexually attractive.

Further, as discussed earlier in the chapter, Fraser (2008) defines representation as the political dimension of gender inequality, which maps out who gets to participate in gender discourses and who does not. De Vuyst's (2017) study reflects this perspective by focusing on how recent technological changes in journalism confirm traditional gender segregation by reflecting old gender divides. However, while that study highlights the underrepresentation of female journalists online, it focuses on exploring whether social media are used differently by male and female journalists, rather than on the politics that defines women's uptake of online journalism.

Again, most studies on participatory representation in Africa tackle the offline sphere. Such studies examine women's participation in politics and science-based fields, while outlining the inequalities of participation, as well as contributing factors (Bond, 2017; Ette, 2017; Goetz, 1998; Kodila-Tedika and Asongu, 2017; Masengu, 2016; Njoh and Rigos, 2003). For instance, Ette (2017) studies the representation of female politicians in the Newspaper during the 2015 electoral cycle in Nigeria. Her analysis demonstrates that women not only occupy a limited space in the news, but are also marginalised in political news despite their advocacy for gender equality since after military dictatorship in 1999. Nevertheless, similar to the Western context, most literature on women's misrepresentation in relation to participation in Africa (although mostly offline) is focused on highlighting forms of gender inequality rather than on examining the possible factors that define women's lack of participation. My research addresses this general literature gap, by studying women's representations on gender in/equality, against factors that affect their participation in discourse. As seen in Chapter 8, salient factors that define who participates in online discourse in Nigeria include, age, geographical

positioning, and educational qualification. In relation to the African context in particular, this research makes an original contribution by studying gender representations online.

3.3.2 The Cultural and Economic Dimensions of Gender Discrimination

Within the study of women's resistance against inequality, scholars often draw on Fraser's conceptualisation (1996, 2005, 2008) by examining the specific interplay between the cultural, economic, and sometimes-political forms of gender discrimination. Such conceptualisations, particularly on redistribution and recognition, have been widely adopted for the study of policy making and governance (e.g. Albertyn, 2013; Griffin, 2006; Perrons and Skyers, 2003; Williams and Opdam, 2017), of education and schooling (e.g. Eloundou-Enyegue, Maki and Giroux, 2009; Keddie, 2005; Power and Frandji, 2010; Riddell, 2009), of gendered social movements (e.g. Martin, 2001; Carroll and Ratner, 2001), of feminist identity politics (Skeggs, 2001), and of feminist geography (Bondi and Rose, 2003).

For instance, Martin's (2001) study on women's self-help movements depicts how movements that focus on cultural/identity (recognition) politics tend to affect social policy (redistribution) by posing symbolic challenges. Martin demonstrates that by encouraging husbands of women with postpartum depression to participate in house work and health care, women's movements are able to challenge gender discriminations. This is achieved 'by targeting the practices and logic of social institutions that establish gender difference and maintain gender stratification' (Taylor, 1999, p. 26). While Martin highlights the intricate connection and the equal importance of redistribution and recognition in fighting gender discrimination, Carroll and Ratner's (2001) study of social movements in Canada shows that the activities of social movements centred on gender activism prioritise cultural politics over material politics. This supports Fraser's (2005) idea of 'the 'post-socialist' age, defined by neoliberal hegemony and the significance of cultural recognition over material redistribution in the framing of progressive politics' (Carroll and Ratner, 2001, p.605).

In the area of feminist geography, Bondi and Rose (2003, p. 234) show that feminists who live in urban areas often construct gender through the prisms of gender recognition and misrecognition than that of political or economic equality. This is in consideration of multiculturalism as well as the 'gendered geographies of urban fear', which stimulate the production and performance of gendered identity. Hence, the primacy of cultural recognition is reflected by studies that focus on issues, such as how femininity

is perceived, judged and frequently misrecognised through current and historical classed positions (e.g. Skeggs, 2001).

However, Rai (2004) laments over the focus on cultural politics and the neglect of redistributive battles which she believes will help tackle the significant structural inequalities that still exist and are rooted in capitalist systems of ‘production and exchange’ (Rai, 1996, p. 362). Rai (1996) concludes that feminist political practice needs to focus on the politics of redistribution, especially within the context of global governance.

Most African studies tend to examine the cultural, economic and political dimensions of gender discrimination by interrogating policy-making processes and highlighting government’s failure to implement such policies (e.g. Albertyn, 2013; Gouws, 2016; Williams and Opdam, 2017). For instance, Williams and Opdam (2017) study gender-related policy in Sierra Leone and identify areas where government policy seeks to address the misrecognition of gender identity, economic marginalisation and political misrepresentation. Their findings reveal that most of the policy goals were yet to be achieved owing to government’s failure to implement them. Albertyn (2013) also analyses how the South African constitution and legal processes secure the cultural and religious recognition of women without undermining their redistributive rights. The study demonstrates that redistributive inequality is sustained owing to the open-ended and ambiguous nature of the constitution, which does not sufficiently recognise women as a gendered category.

Overall, most of the literature reviewed is on offline communicative practices and political and social processes. Very few studies have related the concepts of redistribution and recognition to online platforms/online-communicative practices. The only work identified is Siapera’s (2006), which focuses on race, as opposed to gender. Siapera’s work is on the dilemmas of multiculturalism among black British, Indian/South Asian, Chinese and Muslim online communities. In this regard, my research makes a contribution to the field of gender research by examining the relationship between redistribution and recognition in gender discourses online. It provides a unique approach⁶⁴ that examines the discursive representations of these forms of inequalities by

⁶⁴ Hence, contrary to Martins’ (2001) study, which was conducted offline, my study looks into women’s discursive practices online and how their discussions highlight and relate different subjects (hence, cultural and economic) of gender inequality.

women. This is important as the attainment of gender parity is hinged on ideological practices that consider economic and cultural forms of gender discrimination as equally important (Fraser and Honneth, 2003). Similarly, the nature of the relationship between cultural and economic forms of inequality in discourse is important for understanding the ideological conceptions that underpin the fight for gender equality in Nigeria.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the theoretical framework this research employs for the study of how Nigerian women discuss gender in/equality on blogs. Reviewing scholarly works on redistribution, recognition, representation and subaltern counterpublics helps to understand nuances of the traits and origins of gender in/equality in Nigeria. The subaltern counterpublics defines women as a marginalised group who produce ‘counterdiscourses’ challenging forms of patriarchal dominance in the public domain. While such counterdiscourses generally reflect discourses that are anti-dominance, or anti-patriarchy, within the framework of redistribution, recognition and representation, the notion of ‘counterdiscourses’ can be complicated by unravelling multiple ideological conceptions that define what gender in/equality means among Nigerian female blog users. This outlook problematises the use of binary classifications or dichotomies (e.g. counterpublics versus dominant publics) in understanding inequalities and the ‘multi-discourses’ they sometimes generate.

Additionally, theorisations on representations help to shed light on the political dimension of gender inequality. While Fraser’s (2005, 2008) concept caters for the participatory dimension of representation, I draw on Moscovici’s (1973, 1984) and Hall’s (1984, 1997) work on social representation to shed light on the discursive aspects of gender representation. Fraser’s conceptualisation shows ‘who’ gets to participate in discourse and ‘who’ does not, as well the factors that define ‘access’ and participation in online discourses. While Fraser defines the actors of online discourse, Moscovici and Hall’s works complement Fraser’s theorisation by unravelling discursive peculiarities, such as how the discursive articulations of gender relate to or deviate from broader class politics and dominant ideology, as well as how discourse representations generate tensions and resistance.

Finally, in assessing the literature field on female counterpublics and online discursive resistance, I highlighted gaps within the literature field of gender research, which this study seeks to address. These gaps include, first, the predominant portrayal of

women as a homogeneous counterpublic group and the lack of consideration for possible tensions or fragmentations that characterise ‘women’s’ resistance; second, few studies have related the concepts of redistribution and recognition to online platforms/online-communicative practices despite the rise of feminist digital activism and the significance of the relationship between these concepts in the attainment of gender parity (Fraser and Honneth, 2003; Fraser, 1996); third, studies on participatory representations online are mostly focused on the inequality of access and participation, rather than on discussing the factors that determine or define women’s ability to participate in gender discourses; fourth, specifically, African studies on gender representations (and of course, redistribution and recognition) are mostly offline despite the growth of ICT and the increasing visibility of women’s resistance against gender discrimination online⁶⁵. For these gaps to be addressed, the research has employed a specific rich qualitative methodology, which I present in detail in the next chapter.

⁶⁵ See Section 3.3.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research design and presents the key decisions and processes in the conduct of qualitative research. I commence by providing an overview of the relevance of the selected research methodology (qualitative methodology) to the Nigerian context and I discuss why the qualitative approach is suitable for this research design. Then, I present the method of online data collection: I justify the sampling techniques for the selection of the case studies, blog sites, posts, and comments, as well as textual analysis as the method used in selecting the specific comments that make up the research sample.

Next, I provide an overview of CDA as a whole. This is followed by a description of the particular version of CDA upon which this study is based. I then consider how CDA has been applied to the study of women's text in Africa and other parts of the globe. I also discuss the rationale for selecting CDA as an online data analysis method and I present the key analytical approaches utilised in the conduct of CDA.

For the second phase of data collection, I present in-depth interviews and justify its choice as an additional method for eliciting data. I also discuss the relationship between interviews and women's studies in Africa and other parts of the world. This is followed by the process of recruiting interview participants. I conclude with a reflection on my position as a researcher within the interviews process and the ethical considerations made in the research. Next, I present the thematic analysis approach and the specific type of thematic analysis employed in my research. Finally, I present the rationale for the selection of thematic analysis and the processes involved in coding and thematising data.

4.1 A Qualitative Approach to the Study of Nigerian Women's In/Equality

I adopt a qualitative approach through textual analysis for the selection of blog data and in-depth interviews of eight female blog authors. The research employs CDA for analysing the selected blog data and thematic analysis for analysing the interview data. These methods have been chosen to achieve a thorough understanding of Nigerian women's discourses on gender in/equality and to address the lack of literature on African women's response to gender discrimination. This paucity of literature is also evident in the lack of qualitative richness of gender research as evident in studies on women from Africa. For instance, studies, such as Somolu's (2007) and Al-rawi's (2014) not only

focused on the emancipatory role of the online medium for women's activism in Africa, but utilised quantitative methods, which provided little insight into how, for instance, contextual factors affected the patterns or content produced on African female blogs or Websites. Although studies such as Mpofu and Rabe's (2017) and Mai and Laine's (2016) use qualitative methods to study the online activism of women in Africa, their study, similar to Somolu's (2007) is focused on the role of blogs in widening communication practices as opposed to investigating the content of women's discourse. Thetela's (2002) study is one of the very few that use qualitative method to investigate linguistic choices in how women narrate incidences of rape in South Africa, albeit in an offline setting. Thetela's study revealed how cultural expectations of women's traditional discourse (which requires avoidance of explicit sexual terms) affects their ability to establish legal linguistic clarity (i.e. explicitness for the sake of clarity and precision of evidence) that can enable the apprehension or conviction of rapists.

Nevertheless, within the context of the broader literature, qualitative methodology has been described as being suitable for the study of events that have been under-explored or researched (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Qualitative methods are also said to reflect political attributes by giving 'a voice to women whose life experiences have been silenced or ignored by more standardized research technique' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.10). Similarly, Mäkelä (2003) has argued that qualitative methods are best suited for the analysis of gender at all levels: at the 'individual/personal level (identifications, subject positions), and in the socially constructed and maintained discourses (texts, ideologies, and social situations)' (p.2). Furthermore, qualitative methods enable the understanding of how 'gender positions are negotiated within the existing gender systems, and how gender discourses produce individual gender positions' (Mäkelä, 2003, p.2). On the other hand, while quantitative approach has the possibility of offering more generalisable insights, it is incapable of providing detailed interconnections and reflective knowledge on gender in/equality, which this project seeks to provide.

Table 4.1: Research Design

	Qualitative Methodology	Description of Research Activity	Research Questions in Focus
Stage 1	Blog data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purposefully select blog sites • Purposefully select blog posts • Purposefully select blog comments through textual analysis. 	<p>RQ1a: Do discourses on Nigerian female blogs reveal patterns in relation to how the subjects of gender inequality are linked?</p> <p>RQ2a: What discourses exist in the female blogosphere that provide an alternative to discourses in support of gender equality and how are such discourse positions legitimised through language use?</p> <p>RQ3a: Which cases of gender inequality tend to be prioritised on Nigerian female blogs?</p>
	Blog data analysis	CDA	
Stage 2	Interview data collection	In-depth interviews with blog authors	<p>RQ1b: How do Nigerian female blog authors perceive (discussions on) cultural roles in relation to gender equality?</p> <p>RQ2b: How are alternative discourses on gender inequality perceived by blog authors?</p> <p>RQ3b: How do Nigerian female blog authors understand their role in relation to the absent female majority offline?</p>
	Interview data analysis	Thematic analysis of interview data	
Stage 3	Interpretation of and reflection on online data and interview findings	Separate discussion of online and interview data, while exploring the connections and overlaps between these two sets of data.	ALL research questions.

4.1.1 Research Design

Table 4.1 shows the three major stages of this research and relates the methods of data collection and analysis to the research questions of the study. The research questions reflect the three broad aspects of my theoretical approach; the economic, cultural and political dimensions of the gender in/equality discourse, as discussed in Chapter 3. These three research questions are subdivided into two, making six questions in total. I apply the first set of questions (i.e. 1a, 2a, and 3a) to analyse blog data using CDA, while I use the second set of research questions (i.e. 1b, 2b, and 3b) to analyse interview data through thematic analysis. Therefore, this sub-division ensures that the basic themes (cultural, economic and political themes) tackled by the first three research questions in the online analysis are also explored in the interviews of blog authors.

Hence, the first phase of my research involved the collection of blog data through four stages of sampling. These stages involved the selection of case studies, blog sites, posts, and comments. Data analysis was carried out through CDA so as to answer the three research questions in focus. Similarly, to answer the second set of (three) research questions in phase two; I collected in-depth interview data, which was thematically analysed. Finally, the third phase involved both separate and joint interpretation and reflection of both online data and interview findings. In addition, as can be seen in Table 4.1, the research questions posed in the study of interview data relate to those explored through online data, meaning that the interviews were coined in order to shed more light on and dig deeper into existing online discourses⁶⁶. While the two data sets were analysed separately, the interviews analysis, which followed the online data analysis, highlighted themes and discourse areas that resulted from both phases of data analysis, thus informing one another⁶⁷.

In designing my research, I drew upon Keller's (2012) study on how teenage female bloggers identify with feminist politics in a postfeminist age. Keller combined online interviews of female teenage bloggers with textual analysis of blog posts and comments. By interviewing young women, Keller was able to reveal useful information on teenage girls' perception of feminism, and by analysing blog posts and their

⁶⁶ For instance, RQ2a seeks to outline the alternative discourse positions of the gender equality debate. While RQ2b seeks to understand blog authors' perception about alternative discourses in the gender equality debate. In this regard, it is possible that the results from both phases of data analysis can easily inform each other, having been coined from the context of alternative discourses. This potential relationship applies to RQ1a and RQ1b, as well as RQ3a and RQ3b.

⁶⁷ See Section 9.8.

comments, the content produced by female teenage bloggers produced provided insight into their ideology. In summary, the findings obtained from both methods allowed Keller (2012) to challenge existing moral judgments about girls' use of the Internet, as well as popular assumptions that label girls as shallow consumers of social media. This combined methods approach is useful in order to provide a holistic and rich study that allows a broad understanding of the contemporary struggle against gender inequality by Nigerian women online. In addition, within the context of this research, interviews complemented the analysis of online data by providing more insight directly from the perspective of female bloggers that produce online discourse. In this sense, interviews helped the study develop a better understanding of how female bloggers in the country make sense of the world and the ideological beliefs that influence their communication patterns.

4.1.2 Rationale for Selecting Case Studies

As presented in Section 2.6, the case studies chosen in this study are 'the rejection of the GEO Bill by the Nigerian Senate in March 2016' and 'President Muhammadu Buhari's position on women.' The selection process of the case studies involved reviewing topics of gender discrimination discussed on Nigerian female blogs from 2012 onwards,⁶⁸ which provided an understanding of the topics that attract most comments from blog readers, as well as provide a platform for multiple stories on gender in/equality to be discussed. Hence, the criteria for selecting the case studies were based on the topics of discussions blog posts attracted and the extent to which blog interactions were equipped to provide answers to my research questions. In addition, as will be seen later in the analysis in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, the use of discourse analysis relies on such interactive content to properly assess the traits and ideological practices that characterise the gender in/equality debate.

Additionally, the specific cases studies were selected to help the study shed light on the different dimensions of gender inequality that the research questions seek to investigate⁶⁹. Therefore, while the GEO Bill provides a suitable example of an occurrence that infringes on the rights of women and stimulates their passion to fight back, in analysing the first research question (tackled in Chapter 7), the GEO Bill is often

⁶⁸ Female blogs such as Linda Ikeji's are reported to have gained popularity in 2012 and my mapping of gender discrimination topics on blog archives reveals that 'the child marriage debate in 2013' (see C14 in Chapter 6) was the first widely discussed gender inequality topic published on Nigerian female blogs.

⁶⁹ Hence, highlighting the cultural, economic and political traits of gender discrimination in Nigeria.

represented as a redistributive (economic) form of gender inequality by some female bloggers. Within the context of studying the representation of gender equality (discussed in Chapter 8), the GEO Bill represents a case that encompasses most of the forms of gender discrimination suffered by Nigerian women. Hence, it provides a significant position for understanding discourses on a variety of gender discrimination topics while focusing on a single event (hence, the rejection of the Bill). It also provides insight into the hierarchical representation of gender discrimination topics on female blogs (as seen in Chapter 8). Further, as discussed in the introduction of this thesis, 'President Muhammadu Buhari's remarks on his wife belonging to the kitchen' reflects a change in the contemporary subject of gender discourse in Nigeria. Hence, it reflects the cultural dimension of gender discrimination, where blog discussions feature comments on the domestication of women, the sexualisation and objectification of women, and so on. In addition, this case study, similar to the rejection of the GEO Bill, provides an appropriate platform to study the current picture of politically formal traditional articulations of womanhood versus 'alternative' discursive positions while assessing the grammar used to legitimise such articulations.

4.2. Sampling of Blog Data: Purposive Sampling

While I discuss the sampling process of blog posts and comments in this chapter, I provide a broader overview of Nigerian women's blog sites, posts and comments in Chapter 5. In selecting the blog sites, posts, and comments analysed in this study, I used variants of purposive sampling technique, which include homogeneous, total, modal instance, non-proportional quota sampling and textual analysis.

Purposive sampling has been defined as a non-probability sampling technique that is carried out based on specific characteristics of a population, as well as the objective of the study (Crossman, 2017). Patton (2002) argues the significance of purposive sampling as a widely used technique in qualitative research for identifying and selecting cases that are information-rich to enable the most effective use of limited resources. It also involves selecting cases based on the level of occurrence in the entire population of study. In this case, the aim is to retrieve 'typical' cases that will allow the researcher to make certain assumptions on the entire study population (Kozinets, Dolbec and Earley 2013)

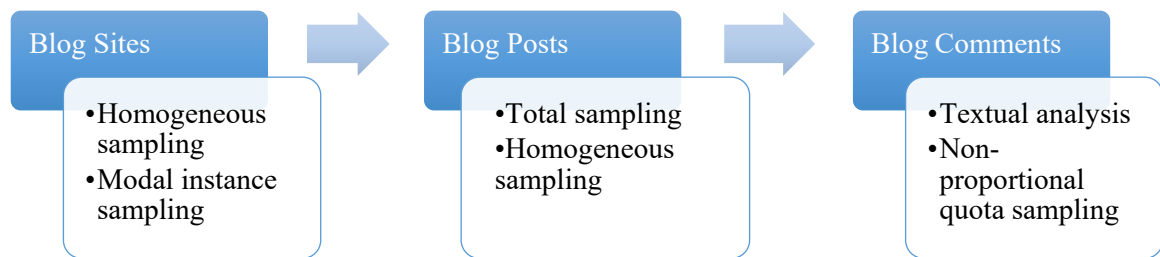
According to Trochim (2006), 'modal instance sampling' refers to sampling by making reference to the 'mode' which is the highest occurring value in the distribution, or the 'typical' case. While 'non-proportional quota sampling' involves specifying the

minimum number of units needed in each category of a sample. In this case, the goal is not to select numbers that are reflective of the proportion of the entire population but to make sure that the researcher has ‘adequate’ data that allows for the analysis and understanding of the phenomenon or event studied. Crossman (2017) also identifies ‘Homogeneous purposive sampling’, which refers to the selection of a sample based on its sharing a set of characteristics with the event or phenomenon studied. ‘Total purposive sampling’ on the other hand, refers to a situation where the ‘whole’ population forms part of the research sample based on one or more shared characteristics.

The decision to apply purposive sampling is in consideration of my research design, which involves multiple phases of online data collection, with each phase building on the previous one⁷⁰. Purposive sampling becomes useful in providing a variety of techniques that help in retrieving online data and justifying data selection. Hence, I was able to select sample that was directly related to my research aims. However, being a non-probability sampling technique, purposive sampling is mostly criticised, as with qualitative research in general for being prone to researcher bias (Patton, 2002). Nevertheless, the critique of subjective bias is mainly applicable where such judgments on the research sample are poorly considered, where judgments are not based on accepted criteria, such as theoretical framework, expert elicitation, and so on (Laerd Dissertation, 2017). To overcome this limitation, the judgments I made in selecting my sample of study were based on clear criteria, influenced by the research objectives and the theoretical framework of my study. In addition, purposive sampling technique is criticised for its lack of representativeness (Patton, 2002). This research, however, does not seek to achieve generalisability but carries out an in-depth qualitative research that produces rich descriptive results. Figure 4.1 shows the three stages of online sampling that follow the selection of the case studies discussed in the previous section:

⁷⁰ As discussed below.

Figure: 4.1: **Sampling of Blog Data**



4.2.1 Sampling Blog Sites

As seen in Figure 4.1, the criteria I used in selecting the blogs that form my sample frame is a combination of homogeneous and modal case sampling techniques. First, my selection criteria were based on blogs that share a set of characteristics, such as blogs run by Nigerian female bloggers. This is in line with the focus of my research, which allows me to capture the unique contextual challenges experienced by women who are currently resident, or have lived in Nigeria for more than twenty years. This allowed me to recruit women who were in touch with and understood the inequalities faced by Nigerian women. Second, I applied modal case sampling to select the specific blogs for study. In this case, ‘popularity’, identified by the ‘total number of page views’⁷¹, as identified by Alexa.com (2018)⁷², formed the major criterion for selection.

Alexa.com determines a blog’s ranking based on a combined measure of unique visitors and page views. Unique visitors are determined by the number of individual Internet users who visit a site on a given day, while page views are the total number of user URL requests for a site. However, multiple requests for the same URL on the same day and by the same user are counted as a single page view. Hence, the site with the highest combination of unique visitors and page views is ranked number one. By considering these criteria, I was able to retrieve blogs with high traffic or message threads on postings, as well as blogs that involved more or richer discourses (Kozinets, Dolbec and Earley, 2013). This was useful because more interactions or reader comments enabled me to properly assess the type or traits of blog interactions in relation to my research

⁷¹ Alexa.com updates its metrics every 30 days.

⁷² Alexa.com is an Amazon.com company dedicated to monitoring the browsing behaviour of individuals particularly in relation to monitoring website traffic and ranking website performance.

aims. Overall, my goal was to select blogs where interaction⁷³ is a major component. However, most of the weight in my analysis was placed on blog comments and less on blog posts especially because as discussed in Chapter 5, most Nigerian female blog authors adopt either a filter or a notebook style of blogging⁷⁴; hence, their blog posts rarely reflect personal opinion which is an important trait needed to tackle the aims of this research.

The table below lists the blogs selected for study, ordered by ‘popularity’ ranking, as per Alexa.com’s statistics of March 2018.

Table 4.2: **Blog Sample**

S/N	Blog	Monthly page views	URL
1	Linda Ikeji	18,612,905	lindaikajiblog.com
2	Bella Naija	765,543	bellanaija.com
3	Stella Dimokokorkus	441,851	stelladimokokorkus.com
4	Laila’s blog	217,143	lailasblog.com
5	Ladun Liadi	201,489	ladunliadinews.com
6	Misspetite Nigeria	148,342	misspetitenigeria.com

As on the 28th of February 2016⁷⁵, the six blogs shown in Table 4.2 were the only Nigerian female blogs that showed a ‘significant’⁷⁶ amount of traffic that allowed their inclusion in the web analysis of Alexa.com. This traffic is measured based on how a website is doing relative to all other sites (both globally and country-specific) on the Web every 30 days⁷⁷. In order to practically assess Alexa.com’s statistics, I visited some Nigerian female blogs that were not captured in Alexa.com’s ranking, but held similar discourses on gender in/equality as the top blogs under study. It became clear that the comments on posts in ‘unpopular’ female blogs were sparing in comparison to the

⁷³ My analysis was mostly focused on textual forms of interaction because the comment section of blogs rarely contains images or videos. However, the analysis of blog discourse (e.g. see Chapter 8) contains screen captures of blog author posts.

⁷⁴ See Chapter 5 for discussion on filter and notebook styles of blogging.

⁷⁵ When the blogs were selected.

⁷⁶ Alexa.com defines ‘significant amount of traffic’ when having over 100,000-page views a month. Hence, if a blog Website acquires this amount of traffic, (100,000-page views); it is included in Alexa.com’s statistics.

⁷⁷ The rank is calculated using a proprietary methodology that combines a site's average of daily unique visitors and its number of page views over the past 30 days. I retrieved this data on the 22nd of April 2018.

comments made on posts within ‘popular’ blogs. For instance, while posts on the GEO Bill have an average of approximately 60 comments per post on blogs such as Bella Naija blog, blogs like Tybeautyworld (which is not part of Alexa.com’s ranking) have an average of 5 comments (per post) on similar blog posts.

4.2.2 Sampling Blog Posts

The Selection of the blog posts involved ‘total sampling’ technique, where I selected all blog posts that were pertinent to the selected case studies. Specifically, I started out by conducting a search using the ‘search column’ of the blogs by entering search terms, such as: ‘Buhari and the kitchen’, ‘Buhari and the other room’ ‘Aisha Buhari on BBC’, ‘gender and equality bill’ ‘rejection of the gender and equal opportunities bill’, ‘Aisha Buhari’s BBC interview’, ‘President Buhari’s press conference in Germany on his wife and the kitchen’, and so on. Another method of retrieving blog posts was through the use of blog archives which allowed me to trail specific posts to the timelines of occurrence. Additionally, while all the six blogs under study had a functional search tab, Laila’s blog did not. Hence, I reached out to Laila (Lalia’s blog) on the 7th of March 2017 to ask if she could update a search tab on her blog site. Laila responded by updating her site on the 9th of March 2017 with a Google search tab that enabled me to retrieve additional blog posts.

These search procedures yielded 135 blog posts that focus directly on the case studies of this research. In this regard, posts obtained from the search process that did not focus on or relate directly to the topic or period of interest were discarded. For instance, where blog-search for terms such as ‘President Buhari’s press conference in Germany on his wife and the kitchen’ produced other posts on business related matters discussed at the Berlin press conference, such posts were discarded. Also, it is important to note that despite the fact that 135 blog posts (relating to the specific case studies) were sampled, only those that reflected the personal opinion of blog authors and other Nigerian women (e.g. female politicians, a Nigerian Traditional Queen, Nigerian female actresses) were considered for CDA⁷⁸. As mentioned earlier, the sampling process showed that blog authors rarely reveal personal opinion in relation to gender discrimination topics. The

⁷⁸ As discussed earlier in the chapter, the personal opinion of female bloggers is important as this study aims to understand their meaning-making practices, which hinges on such traits of personal opinion.

interview of blog authors, therefore, became important to fill in this gap, by providing insight into blog authors' ideological and other conceptions on gender in/equality.

Table 4.3: Sample of Blog Posts and Comments

Blogs	Case studies	
	The rejection of the GEO Bill	President Muhammadu Buhari's position on women
1. Linda Ikeji	Posts 11 Comments: 1,363	Posts: 25 Comments: 1,506
2. Bella Naija	Posts: 24 Comments: 1,407	Posts: 13 Comments: 627
3. Laila's blog	Posts: 5 Comments: 106	Posts: 15 Comments: 209
4. Stella Dimokorkokus	Posts: 13 Comments: 881	Posts: 6 Comments: 527
5. Ladun Liadi	Posts: 14 Comments: 910	Posts: 5 Comments: 89
6. Misspetite Nigeria	Posts: 2 Comments: 87	Posts: 2 Comments: 105
Total	Posts: 69 Comments: 4,164	Post: 66 Comments: 3,020

Although the blog posts, which did not contain the personal opinion of women, were not directly analysed in this research, they were sometimes useful in providing the context needed to understand the comments made by blog readers in the course of CDA. Table 4.3 shows the total number of blog posts and comments selected for each case study across the six blogs.

While the total number of posts was 135, the total number of comments under these posts was 7,184. In selecting the specific comments under each blog post to make up my research sample, I used textual analysis and non-proportional quota sampling techniques. Applying non-proportional quota sampling technique enabled me to cope with the large number of comments under the studied posts. Hence, I selected the first

three comments of every post that proved useful in relation to the analytical procedures of textual analysis (discussed in the next section), which is research-question driven. This process yielded 405 comments in total.

4.2.3 Textual Analysis to Sample Blog Comments

To understand the process of selecting the comments that make up the third element of the blog data sample for analysis, it is pertinent that I discuss textual analysis as a data-selection method as well as how textual analysis complements CDA as a method of data analysis.

Textual Analysis

Fairclough (2003) and McKee (2003) iterate the existence of diverse approaches to textual analysis, which are mostly informed by the research questions, and aim(s) of the study being undertaken. Fairclough (2003) distinguishes between the qualitative and quantitative approach to textual analysis, where qualitative analysis approaches specific textual features, while quantitative analysis takes the form of corpus analysis that follows the tradition of corpus linguists such as De Beaugrande (1997) and Stubbs (1996). The quantitative system of analysis focuses on the use of ‘key words’ to study peculiar patterns that appear together in sequence or simultaneously. However, Fairclough argues that even though such findings from quantitative textual analysis are significant, ‘they are limited and need a follow-up with a detailed form of qualitative textual analysis’ (Fairclough, 2003, p.6).

Although my study employed a detailed form of data analysis (i.e. CDA), it used a simplified version of qualitative textual analysis to gather blog discourses by ‘focusing on selected features of text’ (Fairclough, 2003, p.6). Scholars, such as Fairclough (2003) argue that this data-selection technique is a productive way of coping with the labour-intensive characteristic of textual analysis. Hence, even though qualitative textual analysis can be time-consuming considering the data overload one can encounter especially on the Internet, it is useful in enabling research to elicit information that is rich and descriptive enough to allow the productive use of CDA for data analysis purposes. While quantitative corpus-based textual analysis - particularly that executed through the use of software - can be less laborious and time consuming, there is the possibility for important information to be omitted, particularly because this system relies on the use of words/phrases. In this regard, while words and phrases that are important to the research

can be lost, in other cases words/phrases, which are not relevant to the study, can be selected by the software (Kennedy, 1998). It is also difficult to make an exhaustive search of all possible words or phrases that meet one's research aims; therefore, there is the possibility that information valuable to the research may not be captured.

It is in consideration of these weaknesses that I opted for a more detailed approach to retrieving data in my research. In addition, I opted for textual analysis in consideration of Fairclough's (2003) argument that textual analysis is an essential part of CDA because it allows appropriate bodies of text to be selected so that the analysis can shed light on relationships and factors, such as the ways in which ideological representations contribute to social relations of power and domination (Fairclough, 2003). In addition, textual analysis enables the selection of text that reflects the opinion of divergent groups or groups that are likely to be left out in methods and techniques, such as survey techniques or corpus-based analysis, to be selected and further analysed critically.

Selecting Blog Comments through Textual Analysis

Chandler (2007) draws on Fairclough's (2003) approach to textual analysis by outlining textual dimensions to be considered when conducting semiotic/textual analysis. These dimensions include modality, paradigm, syntagmatic structure, rhetorical tropes, semiotic codes, textual interaction and so on (Chandler, 2007, pp. 59-209). For the purpose of my study, which aims to use textual analysis for data collection, I break down and categorise Chandler's (2007) conceptualisation into rhetorical, discourse and new/alternative contexts. Rhetorical context deals with assessing the identity of the writer and the reason behind communication. Discourse context questions the issue being addressed, the 'position' the writer takes, if the writer's position or argument is 'qualified', the evidence the writer provides to prove claims and the effectiveness of such claims. Finally, the new/alternative context interrogates how the text relates to others, how other writers might possibly interpret the text. I applied this perspective more interpretively by critically assessing how the content retrieved from blogs might relate to other forms of literature that I have been reading in relation to the study (e.g. academic literature, as well as other posts and comments). Nevertheless, in selecting the comments that make up my study sample, I focus more on the discourse and rhetorical contexts, which provide me with the necessary tools to select content that reflects the meaning-making practices of Nigerian women online. Hence, I broke down my analysis of text into three categories: assessing the identity of the writer, the discourse structure, and the

nature of the argument. Overall, textual analysis was applied to the first three comments of the 135 posts sampled and those that met the criteria of the analysis were selected to form the pool of data sample. The decision to select ‘three’ comments per blogpost was in consideration that an approximate number of 400 comments would be adequate for analysis.

(i) Assessing the identity of the writer

First, before selecting a comment to form my research sample, I assessed the gender of the blog reader to ensure that it was represented as ‘female’. While it was not possible to ascertain the gender of blog readers in all cases, the first system I used was by studying the user profiles of the blogs under study to verify information that validates a blog user’s gender identity. Effectively, the information I used included ‘profile information’, ‘profile image/name’ or ‘discourse information’. I mostly verified ‘profile image/name’ against discourse or profile information, owing to the fact that it was difficult to assess if the picture on a user’s profile was of themselves. In addition, some names, particularly, of Nigerian origin can be unisex and this challenges the consideration of gender by certain names in isolation. Overall, the gender status represented in blog users’ profile information was paramount in determining gender and this information was always available on most of the blogs sampled. However, Stella Dimokokorkus (SDK) blog allows for users to blog anonymously⁷⁹, and where such blog users omit their gender status in their profile information, their gender identity is sometimes revealed within discourse information in an attempt to legitimise a gendered argument. Overall, such anonymous users represent a minor category of blog commenters on SDK blog.

The open declaration of gender identity in blog discourse is, however, common both among women on the side of ‘dominant’, or ‘inferior’ arguments. For example, a blog reader on Linda Ikeji blog, in a bid to oppose President Buhari’s statement about his wife belonging to the kitchen states: ‘I am a woman. I do not belong to the kitchen...’ Another woman fighting against gender equality states: ...If we as women mind our business and play our roles as who we are, we can even be more superior and

⁷⁹ Anonymous commenters do not normally use name captions but are represented as ‘anonymous’ on Stella Dimokokorkus blog. However, there are instances where individuals are captioned as anonymous but provide profile information, such as gender, nationality, and so on. The study sample contains one comment tagged as anonymous from Stella Dimokokorkus blog. This comment was selected based on the identity of the commenter being disclosed both within discourse and profile information.

powerful than men’. While the first writer emphasises her identity by a declaration in the first-person-singular style, the second writer adopts the first-person-plural style by speaking on behalf of herself and others whom she believes share the same identity. Ensuring that the writer of a comment is female is important considering that members of other gender categories (such as men) share the same discursive space. Hence, anonymous readers who do not reveal their gender identities through profile information or discourse information were not considered for the sample of this study so as to make sure that the sample of focus is representative of individuals who identify as (Nigerian) women.

(ii) Assessing the discourse structure

Assessing the discourse structure enabled the selection of comments that helped to answer the relevant research questions (see Table 4.1). For instance, in the case of the first research question, the goal was to identify discourse patterns that related cultural and economic forms of gender discrimination on blogs. This involved reflecting or questioning what prompted the writer to make a certain post or comment in relation to gender in/equality. The process of textual analysis mostly demonstrated the perception of gender in/equality as serving a function of economic survival and gender in/equality as serving a function of cultural change. This also broadened the possibilities of how one subject of gender in/equality was often implicated in another. For instance, a blog reader had this to say in relation to the rejection of the GEO Bill:

I am 20 years old and I have experienced what this gender inequality is. A few years ago, I applied for a job and I was not called back, it was weird. I confronted one of my friends working in the same company... she confirmed from the HR department that I was qualified but I won't be employed because I am a female... I was very upset but I took it as one of those things.

While a critical analysis of this comment will be carried out subsequently using CDA, within the context of textual analysis this comment is an example of how a commenter relates a form of economic ‘injustice’ (being turned down from a job) to the issue of identity difference (being female). In addition, by asking what prompted the commenter to write? I was able to contextualise this comment as a response to the blog

author's post about a Nigerian traditional Queen's opinion about the rejection of the GEO Bill. The Queen stated:

I am not a fan of gender equality because we can't be equal. We can't be men. We have our own role to play, a very pivotal one...Everyone is beginning to dance, what a man can do a woman can do better! I cannot go to my husband and say your majesty; can I wear your crown and hold your staff? No, because he is the king and I am the queen and while he has his role to play, I have mine.... Women are beginning to take roles that are not theirs and marriages are beginning to break up because of this gender equality thing...

The Queen's position reflects a cultural perspective of appreciating traditionally prescribed roles, while the blog reader, in response, draws on (economic) redistributive inequality to explicate the severity of gender inequality in the public domain, which she (the blog reader) further attributes to the cultural perception of women as inferior to men. By drawing on these connections and possibly others, I was able to select posts that were relevant (within the context of CDA analysis) in shedding light on the patterns/links that characterised the subject of the fight against gender inequality among Nigerian women online.

(iii) Assessing the nature of the argument

Selecting comments in this context helped the study to map out the communicative and conflictual dimensions of the discourses found on Nigerian female blogs on gender ine/quality. In this regard, I assessed the major argument or claim of the writer, and the discourse position the text seems to be part of. For instance, in relation to the second research question 'What discourses exist that provide an alternative to the dominant discourses of gender in/equality articulated on the female blogosphere?', in analysing text in this context, I tried to ascertain the issue of gender in/equality in focus, if the argument contained in the comment had 'sufficiently' rich information for CDA and to answer my research question. Next, I assessed if the argument could be classified as a dominant

position within the counter-publics, an alternative position, or both⁸⁰. Hence, did the comment reflect a support for gender equality, an attempt to keep women subordinate, or both? In this context, the terms of legitimisation were mostly reflected by linguistic choices, which outlined the positions of dominant and alternative discourses.

Since the goal of this analysis was to retrieve and possibly classify the various alternative positions that fight against gender equality, I focused more on comments that explicated the reason why a certain alternative position was taken as opposed to single statements of affirmation. In essence, I selected comments that had more detailed discussions to enable me to identify ideological interpretations/understandings of gender in/equality. For instance, an opinion such as the Queen's discussed earlier, which first reads, 'I am not a fan of gender inequality', clearly defines her position as an alternative argument. In addition, by further providing an example of gender role reversals⁸¹, the Queen broadened her argument, which gave a clearer picture of her discourse position and perception of gender inequality. However, comments were considered in cases where blog readers did not openly declare a discourse position (like the Queen) but provided examples or narrated life experiences in a bid to legitimise their argument. In summary, the goal was to retrieve comments that provided reasons for aligning with a particular argument.

After the process of textual analysis, the research sample for CDA comprised 405 comments. However, as noted earlier in the chapter, the personal opinion of blog authors themselves was lacking in the 135 posts sampled. Blog authors tended to feature the personal opinion of popular Nigerian women (such as, female celebrities, politicians, and actors) in relation to gender in/equality. In this regard, the interviews helped to tackle this gap by providing directly, blog author's beliefs and conceptions on gender in/equality, as well as enabling the interrogation of why their personal opinion are absent from their blog reportage.

4.3 Blog Data Analysis: CDA

I used CDA to analyse both the comments of blog readers and the posts of blogs authors.

4.3.1 Why CDA?

My methodological aim for using CDA to analyse online discourses on Nigerian

⁸⁰ As will be seen in the analysis of Chapter 7 and 8, some women tend to support certain forms of gender discrimination while rejecting others.

⁸¹ When asking to take over the King's cultural role.

female blogs was to draw on the potential of CDA as an analytical tool for exploring the activities of individuals and groups engaged in social struggles against diverse forms of oppression such as gender inequality. While my research built on previous work on CDA in Africa (e.g. Ezeifeka and Oskakwe, 2013; Thetela, 2002), it also represents a significant new perspective in terms of focus and depth of analysis in studying the online discourses of gender in/equality in Nigeria/Africa.

As regards the depth of analysis, I have provided a broader and more critical picture of online gender discourse practice than has previously been attempted in Nigeria⁸² by examining how contextual factors⁸³ contribute to the production of discourses online. By so doing, I have tackled criticisms about CDA's inadequate theorization of context, as presented by scholars such as Chouliaraki and Fairclough (2010) and van Dijk (2006).

Diverse approaches within the tradition of critical social research, such as pragmatics, stylistics, sociolinguistics, conversation analysis, literary criticism, and so on, have employed CDA. In this research, I mainly drew on Fairclough's approach to CDA, which is rooted in the tradition of critical realist philosophy, which argues for the emancipatory potential of rational inquiry. In this regard, CDA proponents not only seek to describe issues relating to inequality but also aim to contest and transform such practices of inequality (Fairclough, 2013). This goal has, however, been criticised by scholars opposing CDA who argue that scholarship should not be saddled with the responsibility of anticipating practical transformations or changes (Widdowson, 2004). Similarly, other scholars believe that CDA has not yet lived up to such goals, and has only managed to thrive within the confines of academic rhetoric (Pennycook, 2001). Weighing in on this debate, I believe that concepts of change, transformation, and emancipation should be mostly defined by relative contexts rather than normative perceptions that are mostly linked to 'amount of coverage' or 'level of impact'. This reflects the approach taken in this study, which sought to understand the subjective experiences and conceptions (of blog authors and readers) on gender discrimination while highlighting the implication on the attainment of gender equality, as opposed to primarily measuring the 'amount coverage' or 'the level of impact' of gender in/equality

⁸² As evident from the African literature field on gender research explored in Sections 1.4, 3.3, 4.1 and 4.4.

⁸³ By, for instance, drawing on the cultural, political and economic challenges faced by Nigerian women within the context of African feminism, I am able to establish a contextual background that allows a better understanding of how Nigerian women communicate online.

discussions in the Nigerian online or offline domain.

The position of the analyst in CDA has also been problematised (Fink, 2000). Fairclough (1989) maintained that for analysts to gain access to the discourse process of production and interpretation, they would need to function as both insiders and outsiders within the discourse process. By virtue of being a researcher, the analyst is an outsider, but also an insider because, ‘in the absence of shared beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and knowledge, the analyst will find it difficult to interpret discourse in a productive way’ (Fairclough, 1989, p.167). Hence, as a system of ensuring ‘objectivity’ in interpretation, Fairclough suggests that the analyst must also question the resources that they themselves rely upon to carry out the analysis. To achieve this, ‘the analyst must develop a self-consciousness about the rootedness of discourse in common-sense assumptions’ (Fairclough, 1989, p.167). In my analysis of the discourses of gender in/equality on Nigerian female blogs, the question of my position as a researcher is a pertinent one. In this respect, I adopted Fairclough’s suggestion of ‘sensitivity’ and ‘self-consciousness’ by paying attention not only to the social practices of Nigerian female bloggers, but also to my personal academic and non-academic experiences as a Nigerian woman in the execution of this research (Fairclough, 1989, p.167).

4.3.2 Fairclough’s CDA

Fairclough’s CDA mainly draws from linguistics and critical social theory. From linguistics, discourse is sometimes used to define a wide range of written or ‘spoken language’, while discourse is also defined from a perspective rooted in Michael Foucault’s work⁸⁴ as ‘different ways of structuring areas of knowledge and social practice’ (Fairclough 1992, p.3; Sunderland, 2004, p.6). Hence, discourse reflects embedded systems of meaning, which include social and institutional practices associated with defining areas of knowledge (Fairclough, 1992). Fairclough’s approach to CDA, is, therefore, suited to this study because it combines interdiscursive analysis and linguistic analysis. It is, however, important to note that the idea of interdiscursive analysis exists in many forms and the ways of interpretation varies among scholars. Fairclough’s interdiscursive analysis involves analysing texts (i.e. comments) by considering ‘different discourses, genres, and styles they draw upon and articulate together’ (Fairclough, 2003, p. 26). In this context, ‘genre’ implies a ‘way of acting’, which means a system of

⁸⁴ This mostly reflects Foucault’s (1972) work in ‘the archaeology of knowledge’.

interacting discursively, mostly by speaking or writing. 'Styles' reflect particular social or personal identities, a system of 'using language as a resource' for identifying oneself (Fairclough, 2003, p.26). In addition, 'discourse' means 'ways of representing' (Fairclough, 2003, pp.26-27). In this respect, Fairclough (2003) argues that representations could be of the material world, of other social practices, or even of oneself in relation to the social practice in question. Hence, 'genre', 'style' and 'discourse' are reflective of the theoretical perspective, as well as the research questions of this study which involve a combination of how women 'speak' or communicate online, how they represent the world in which they live in, and their actions, characterised by how they make sense of their social and personal identities.

Specifically, 'genre', as an element of interdiscursive analysis, implies a system of 'interacting', and since the text studied in this thesis reflects written language, 'interaction' draws attention to how one text is brought into another, which describes a process whereby the action (or discourse) of one participant triggers that of another. This qualifies all comments, which respond to blog author posts as being interactive. This is because such comments imply a 'way of (re)acting' that includes speech acts of writing (or replying) (Fairclough, 2003, p.26). However, such interactive comments can be made up of 'discussions' (e.g. between multiple persons), which are specific forms of conversations where commenters not only exchange information in the form of language, but also do so with the explicit intention to convince the other commenters of their opinion, to clarify a point of view, or even contribute to an argument. Overall, this means that the data sample of this study includes both interactive content, and in some cases, discussions between multiple commenters.

Overall, while Fairclough's (2003) interdiscursive analysis involves bringing together the different elements of text (genre, style and discourse), it may also be worth mentioning that other approaches to interdiscursive analysis, such as Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) and Kristeva's (1980), tend to consider the dialogical nature of text. In this regard, attention is drawn to the fact that to produce every new text, the opinions already in the previous text are transformed and used in the new text.

CDA in this study is further accompanied by a form of discourse analysis which draws on semantic structures identified by van Dijk (1993, p.264), such as 'argumentation', 'rhetorical figures', 'lexical styles' and 'story-telling, which help to understand the perception of, interpretation of, and reaction to issues of gender in/equality by Nigerian female blog users. The goal of this research is, therefore, to study how blog

authors and readers use language to construct a relationship between context and ideology, as well as the gendered social practices that produce such discourses. The production, selection, and (subjective) interpretation of ‘relevant’ social practices are, therefore, significant.

4.3.3 CDA in Gender Studies

Discussing CDA in relation to women’s studies is significant because of its focus on analysing the emancipatory struggles of marginalized groups (van Dijk, 1993). Even though the use of CDA to study women’s online discourses in Africa is rare, it has been applied to the study of a visible number of offline discourses (e.g. Ezeifeka and Oskakwe, 2013; Thetela, 2002). For instance, Ezeifeka and Oskakwe (2013) used a socio-linguistic approach to CDA to study how language is used to encode particular ideological positions and values in the Nigerian constitution. Drawing on Mey’s (2001, p. 297) notion of ‘emancipatory linguistics’, Ezeifeka and Oskakwe used CDA as an analytical method to describe and explain the ‘oppression’ of Nigerian women in political discourse. By focusing on grammatical cohesion, they examined ‘the lexical and grammatical expressions that encode gender in the constitution, the ideological positions evident in expressions, and their impact on gender parity and socio-political equity’ (Ezeifeka and Oskakwe, 2013, p.687). Ezeifeka and Oskakwe’s use of CDA enabled overlooked normative or androcentric policies that discriminated against women to be unravelled. Hence, their use of CDA within this context buttresses the argument of CDA scholars who use Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL)⁸⁵ that linguistic choices and forms can be systematically related to ideological positions and values. In addition, Thetela (2002) drew on CDA to analyse interview scripts that studied the rape of females by male police officers in South Africa. The study revealed how cultural expectations of women’s traditional discourse (which requires avoidance of explicit sexual terms) affected their ability to establish legal linguistic clarity (i.e. explicitness for the sake of clarity and precision of evidence) that enabled the apprehension or conviction of rapists. This unravelled the role of context in the reproduction of traditional gendered identities, which defines women’s behaviour and response to violence or gender inequality.

Further, CDA has been defined as an integral part of feminist studies in America

⁸⁵ SFL focuses on studying the function of language, what language does and how it does it. Hence, it is the study of the elements of language and their combination (Halliday, 1994).

and Europe owing to its focus on social emancipation and transformation regarding cases of inequality (Lazar, 2007, p. 141). Lazar (2007, p.141) argued that the use of CDA in feminist studies has become more significant as a result of ‘the increasing complexity and subtlety of issues of gender, power, and ideology’. According to Lazar (2007), gender ideology is hegemonic because domination is made to appear natural, consensual and acceptable to society. Diverse scholars have also critically studied ways in which gender inequality is institutionalised through discursive means (Lazar, 2004; Remlinger, 2005; Talbot, 1998; Walsh, 2001; Wodak, 2005). For instance, Lazar (2007) drew attention to how CDA has provided feminist scholars with useful insights in understanding the recognition of difference where previously equality was defined as being the ‘same as men’ and ‘women were forced to fit into pre-existing androcentric structures as opposed to recognising a radical shift in the gender order’ (Lazar, 2007, p.148). Another significant use of CDA in feminist studies is in distorting the hegemonic ideology that all women are the same. Hence, it has enabled non-Western, non-white, disabled, lesbian and poor women around the world to share their unique perspectives on gender inequality (Lazar, 2007; Mohanty, Russo and Torres, 1991). While I drew on the perspectives of these numerous studies on gender and CDA, I have brought fresh insight into the relationship between women’s fight for the recognition of gendered identities and the redistribution of economic resources and how this takes place online.

4.3.4 CDA in the Context of this Research: Rationale and Procedures

CDA allowed me to gain insight into the theoretical approach of this study by examining the ideologies of Nigerian women online in relation to the subject of their struggle against gender inequality. This is manifested in ways of acting and interacting and in ways of establishing their identities, and how these factors contribute to the gender in/equality discourse (Fairclough, 2013). Table 4.4 summarises the approaches and key analytic categories used in conducting CDA in this study, as well as the research questions tackled accordingly.

Table 4.4: CDA Analytic Categories

Research Questions in Focus	Analytic Category
RQ1a. Do discourses on Nigerian female blogs reveal patterns in relation to how the subjects of gender inequality are linked?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysing the patterns and connections between discourses (e.g. of economic, and cultural change) by investigating the issue of gender in/equality discussed and related discourses.
RQ2a. What discourses exist in the female blogosphere that provide an alternative to discourses in support of gender equality and how are such discourse positions legitimised through language use?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mapping the alternative discourses on gender inequality. Analysing alternative arguments on gender inequality by carrying out a rhetorical oriented analysis of discourse.
RQ3a. Which cases of gender inequality tend to be prioritised on Nigerian female blogs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mapping the representation of actors in discourse. Interrogating the representation of cases of gender in/equality in discourse. Assessing the inclusiveness of the inequalities faced by the ‘offline majority’ in discourse.

First, my analysis sought to understand the subjects of gender in/equality discussed on blogs and the possible relationship between them. In this regard, I adopted Fairclough’s (2013) approach to analysing emergent discourses by questioning how and why particular discourses emerged in particular social circumstances. This is achieved by analysing discourses to understand if they were formed in the process of discussing existing discourses or social practices (Fairclough, 2013). This enabled my assessment of where connections are evident between discourses (e.g. discourses of policy change and cultural change), as well as if there are identifiable patterns that characterise such connections.

Then my analysis involved the analysis of the discursive strategies used to legitimise arguments in discourse. Hence, I drew on Fairclough’s (2013) and van Dijk’s

(1993) approach to assessing dominance. Van Dijk (1993, p.255) has argued that in the study of dominance in CDA, 'a clear picture of the villains and the victims is far from straightforward' (van Dijk 1993, p.255). Considering this perspective, I critically examined the hegemonic perception that power struggle on issues of gender in/equality in Nigeria is mainly between the government and women, by analysing alternative arguments within women's discourses on gender in/equality. CDA, therefore, provided particular insights on different discursive strategies used to legitimate arguments on gender in/equality.

Hence, in analysing 'discourses that provide an alternative to the dominant discourses of gender in/equality' on Nigerian female blogs, I drew on van Dijk's (1993) approach to the study of dominance in discourse. This approach involved the study of 'argumentation', which interrogated statements of negative evaluation on gender in/equality from their basis of 'legitimacy' to understand how discussants make sense of the world. I also studied 'rhetorical figures' by examining the use of exaggeration in emphasising 'their' negative attributes as opposed to 'our' positive attributes. This was also sometimes achieved through the use of euphemisms and denials that the 'other' is marginalised. In addition, 'lexical style' highlighted the specific choice of words that imply negative evaluations of gender in/equality. While 'storytelling' assessed how events were narrated, and how the use of persuasion legitimised a discursive position by highlighting negative features of the event or validating the event by an assurance of 'personal experience', or by 'quoting credible a witness' (van Dijk, 1993, p.264).

I analysed these semantic features interpretively against contextual factors to understand varying discursive positions. Van Dijk has argued that these semantic structures, which are sometimes subtle, may be interpreted as managing the processes of understanding in such a way that 'preferred models are being built by the hearers/readers' (1993, p.264). My goal, therefore, was to contribute to the understanding of such intricacies.

In addition, an important feature of CDA is the study of how discourse language enables the production of dominance (van Dijk, 1993). Hence, understanding conceptualisations on gender in/equality requires a study of the discursive strategies used to legitimise arguments by Nigerian women on blogs. The study of such discursive strategies has enabled my reflection on how access to digital communication in Africa can be an important power resource; hence, how communicative skills, age, geographical positioning and education might enable women online to execute forms of social power

(e.g. by speaking on behalf of the absent majority) (van Dijk, 1993).

Finally, one of the significant features of CDA is to unravel missing discourses and critique why issues are talked about in particular ways rather than others (van Dijk, 1993). CDA also contextualises discourses by showing how particular discourses become dominant or hegemonic and their ‘dissemination across scalar and structural boundaries’ (Fairclough, 2013, p.20). Therefore, CDA draws attention to often neglected discourses or groups in a bid to create a holistic representation of the phenomenon under study. In analysing discourses in the final phase of the CDA, which seeks to interrogate the cases of gender in/equality that tend to be prioritised, I critically analysed the position of ‘invisible’ groups, such as women offline who are not able to be a part of the online discussions on gender in/equality. This analysis involved examining how the interests and experiences of those offline are represented in the discourses of those who are online, as well as studying discourses of gender in/equality that are mostly given preference to, or are likely to draw attention from the public and why.

4.4 In-depth Interviews

In choosing the specific type of interview method to use in this research, I considered two major factors.

The first factor was my research questions, which sought to understand the thoughts, conceptions and perceptions of Nigerian female bloggers in relation to the gender in/equality discourse. Hence, I needed a method of inquiry, which allowed the ‘adequate’ flow of information required to understand the sense-making practices of Nigerian women on blogs and how such practices affect their understanding of gender discrimination. I decided to go with in-depth interviews, which allowed me to maximise the understanding of the gender in/equality discourse by probing deeper for understanding or to ask for clarification where there was the need. In addition, in-depth interviews and their semi-structured attribute allowed me to maintain focus on my research aims while giving the interview participants room to speak freely. This is in contrast to unstructured interviews, which even though, allow for open discussion, have the potential to steer off focus. On the other hand, structured interviews, which mostly use close-ended questions, limit the interview participants’ ability to express themselves adequately and present new themes/areas of inquiry to emerge.

The second factor that influenced my choice of in-depth interviews was the paucity of literature on women’s struggle against gender inequality online in Nigeria and

the need to produce rich, exploratory empirical work that can serve as a valuable reference for future researchers. Hence, by allowing interview participants to freely express themselves, the possibility of achieving such a goal was initiated. Although conducting interviews and analysing interview data was tedious and time-consuming, my selection of a narrow sample of participants (eight) allowed me to allot adequate time to interview sessions and the subsequent analysis of data.

4.4.1 Interviewing and Gender Studies

In-depth interviews have been particularly associated with the study of gender across the globe. Biber and Leavy (2006, p. 118) argued the significance of in-depth interviews in allowing the researcher ‘to access the voices of the marginalised in society; women, people of colour, homosexuals’, and so on. Reinharz (1992, p.19) also saw the interview method as an important tool that allows feminist researchers to ‘gain access to women’s ideas, thoughts, and memories into their own words rather than the words of the researcher’. In-depth interviews have also been used to uncover the motive behind social practices. In a practical use of unstructured interviews, Keller (2012) drew on this approach to understand how girl bloggers in the United States and the Middle East use blogs to challenge traditional notions of womanhood. Keller revealed that the common belief in postfeminist media culture that girls are not interested in feminism is false (Keller, 2012). By investigating the perception of girl bloggers about feminism as well as their motivations for blogging, Keller’s results proved that girls blogging practices have become a phenomenon to be understood as ‘the intersection between changing technology, neoliberal culture, and political activism’ (Keller, 2012, p.430).

Further, whereas previous studies in Africa focused on areas of quantitative gender parity, such as the number of girls in school (Colclough, Rose and Tembon, 2000; Wiseman, 2008) and access to education (Brock and Cammish, 1991; Fleisch and Schindler, 2009; King and Hill, 1993; Motala, Dieltiens and Sayed, 2009), within the last decade there has been a growing use of in-depth interviews to examine the local realities of African women (specifically girls) struggling against gender discrimination (mostly in relation to education). For instance, Farag (2012) used in-depth interviews to understand the feelings, experiences, and expectations of nomadic Sudanese girls in respect to empowerment in the area of attaining basic education. That study revealed that socio-economic and cultural factors influence girl’s understanding of gender, equality, education and empowerment. Nomlomo’s (2012) study of girls in South Africa also used

in-depth interviews to understand how gender identity is socially constructed and how oppressive practices and gender stereotypes can be challenged in educational environments. Nomlomo argued that gender identity construction is influenced by stereotypes embedded in socio-cultural beliefs and practices, which permeate the school system and are reproduced in various forms, which impede girls' ability to learn. Although these examples mainly focus on girls' inequality within an educational setting, they provide examples of how in-depth interviews as a method of eliciting information is valuable for understanding female participants' feelings and perceptions, and for uncovering the nuances of issues concerning gender in/equality in Africa.

4.4.2 Sampling

Some of the authors of the selected six blogs (such as Laila of Laila'sblog, Emeh of Misspetite Nigeria blog, and Aderonke of Bella Naija blog) made up part of the interview sample, while 5 additional blog authors (Vivian of Viviangist.com, Lateefah of that1960chick blog, Tosin of Olorisupergal blog, and Susan⁸⁶) were added to the sample, making a total of eight interview participants. At first, my decision was to interview all the blog authors whose blogs I analysed through CDA, as well as to include a few others to gain additional perspectives. However, after sending out emails to the top ten bloggers within Alexa.com and the Nigeria Blog Awards website's ranking, I received responses from six bloggers who agreed to participate in the study. Although I was aware that most of the bloggers who belonged to this category (of the top ten) were celebrities, having attained the status of writing some of the most popular blogs⁸⁷ in the country, I was quite surprised, as I expected that their reportage of gender issues meant they had a passion within this area and would all be willing to participate in the study. Nevertheless, I scheduled interviews and exchanged contacts through email with the five blog authors out of the six who had consented to participate in the study. The sixth blogger (Aderonke) informed me that she was not in Nigeria 'at the moment'. However, within the context of phone interviews, Aderonke revealed that she 'recently' (in 2016) moved to Canada where she now resides. Hence, while my study was initially interested in investigating blog authors who were residents in Nigeria, I decided to retain Aderonke in the study considering that she continues blogging about Nigerian-related news and she has a

⁸⁶ Susan is a pseudonym for one of the blog authors who requested to remain anonymous.

⁸⁷ As revealed by the number of page views presented earlier in the chapter.

substantial blogging history from Nigeria. Hence, from 2010 when she started blogging on Bella Naija from within Nigeria, to 2016 when she relocated to Canada.

I travelled to Nigeria on the 24th of July 2017 to start the interviews and explore the possibility of recruiting additional participants through the five ones with whom I had secured an interview. Once, in Lagos⁸⁸, I soon realised that, despite having scheduled the interviews, it was difficult to get the blog authors to make sufficient time out of their busy schedules to meet physically. After two weeks of planning and re-scheduling meetings and locations, I was only able to meet Laila, the author of Laila's blog and Emeh, the author of Misspetite Nigeria blog. These two bloggers later connected me with two other bloggers (Tosin of Olorisupergirl.com and Susan of Susansblog.com⁸⁹) whom they felt could provide insight based on the discussion I had with them. Thus, I reached the point where eight bloggers had consented to participate in the study, including Aderonke. Table 4.5 provides some basic information on my eight interview participants.

Table 4.5: Interview Participants⁹⁰

Name	Age	Educational Qualification	Region of Origin in Nigeria
Laila	Mid 30s	Bachelor's Degree	South-East
Emeh	Early 30s	Bachelor's Degree	South-West
Tosin	Mid 30s	Bachelor's Degree	South-West
Aderonke	Early 30s	Master's Degree	South-West
Shola	Late 30s	Master's Degree	South-West
Vivian	Late 20s	Higher National Diploma	South-South
Susan	Early 30s	Bachelor's Degree	South-West
Lateefah	Early30s	Master's Degree	South-West

4.4.3 The Process of Face-to-Face Interviews

For the first interview with Laila (on the 17th of August 2017), I requested that she

⁸⁸ The largest city in Nigeria, known for its commercial activities. Most of the Nigerian female blog authors are based in Lagos.

⁸⁹ Again, this is a pseudonym for the blog author who did not want to be identified.

⁹⁰ See the interview participants profile in Appendix B.

could choose a convenient location, preferably somewhere public but quiet. She came up with a restaurant in Ikeja mall where she felt it would be relatively quiet before lunchtime, hence, by 10 am. Emeh, whom I interviewed 4 days after Laila (21st of August 2017) suggested that I recommend a suitable location within the Ikeja area. Owing to the relative quiet ambience of the interview location with Laila, I suggested the same restaurant (and for the same time, 10 am).

After retrieving personal information such as age, highest educational qualification and region of origin, I commenced the process of in-depth interviews. Both interviews covered similar topics, including access to digital technology, motivation of blogging on gender topics, perceptions of gender in/equality, divergent discourses in relation to gender in/equality and inclusivity in blogging practices⁹¹. I also followed up on some points discussed by the participants to encourage them to speak more freely about their blogging experiences on gender in/equality (Rapley, 2004). Laila's interview lasted 59 minutes and Emeh's 45 minutes⁹². Generally, both participants were enthusiastic in discussing their perceptions of gender in/equality and related blogging practices.

At the end of the interview session, Laila was particularly interested in the other bloggers who were participating in the study. I discussed the challenge I was having meeting with the bloggers face-to face owing to their busy schedules. I also asked her if she could introduce me to any active bloggers she knew who would fit the criteria of my study. She suggested Tosin of Olorisupergal.com whom I called on the spot. Tosin was happy to participate but she said she was only available to do a phone interview. I asked if she could carry out a video interview via Skype but she drew my attention to the poor Internet service of most mobile subscribers in the country. I too had faced similar challenges trying to load Web pages in my day-to-day activities. I, therefore, considered that a phone interview could be the most practical option going forward, since most bloggers seemed to be difficult to track-down for a face-to-face interview. After discussing my considerations with my supervisors, I sent out email messages to the other bloggers whom I was not able to meet face-to-face to request a phone interview, and all of them (hence, Vivian, Shola and Lateefah) consented and affirmed that it was a better option for them. In addition, following my interview with Emeh, she introduced me to

⁹¹ See Appendix E for the interview topic guide.

⁹² This excludes times when the recording was paused for the participant to take toilet break or to receive an urgent phone call.

Susan who also consented to have a phone interview. In addition, when I presented Aderonke, (i.e. the blog author that recently moved to Canada) with the options of having a video or a phone interview, she requested to have a phone interview.

4.4.4 Phone Interviews

As stated, having considered that the conduct of online interviews (audio or video), would not give me the quality of communication with the interviewees needed owing to the poor Internet connections in Nigeria, I decided to conduct telephone interviews which promised to be a more reliable option. In this regard, I used an international call recording application (simply called, 'call recorder'), which allowed me to record phone conversations and send them to my email thereafter. Before the interviews, I ran a test on the quality of the application by calling a friend. I was impressed with the quality of the application and proceeded with the interviews.

The phone interviews generally followed a similar format with the face-to-face interviews, which started with retrieving personal information about the interview participants, followed by a discussion. However, interestingly, I found that most of participants interviewed over the phone seemed more enthusiastic to expound on their experiences in relation to gender in/equality more than those I conducted face-to-face. Probably, speaking over the phone allowed them to speak from a more relaxed environment. For instance, most of the interviews were conducted in the evening when most of the participants had returned home from the day's hustle. One participant was stuck in long traffic, which lasted throughout the duration of the interview (58 minutes long). Her friend was driving, and this afforded her the time and opportunity to speak on the phone. Most of the phone interviews lasted for about an hour with the longest lasting for about 97 minutes.

However, as discussed in Chapter 9, one participant refused to comment when asked about her perceptions on gender in/equality. I shall discuss this further in the next section, which deals with the challenges faced in the collection of the interview data. In addition, while the phone interviews generally went well, with participants expressing themselves freely, it was difficult to develop the type of rapport I had with the blog authors I interviewed face-to-face with whom I still chat from time-to-time. However, the interview participants in both phone and face-to-face interviews seemed to be interested to know what part of Nigeria I come from, my decision to do a PhD and my interest in gender studies. This brings into focus my social 'situatedness' within this research work

(Costley, Elliot, and Gibbs, 2010), which is discussed in section 4.4.6.

4.4.5 Limitations

As noted previously, my decision to carry out phone interviews came as a result of the difficulty I faced meeting physically with blog authors who seemed to be very busy. I was, however, aware that this decision (to go with phone interviews) would come at a cost as visual cues, which could potentially improve the quality of blog-author participation were lost in the interview process. For instance, within the course of my interview with Tosin, she was narrating a sexual assault incident on a young girl and she went quiet for a few seconds, when I said, ‘hello’ to ensure she was on the line, and she then responded, ‘I am sorry, I am crying right now’. Such visual cues would have helped to shed light on the level of interest on the subject matter being discussed. In addition, most of the phone interviews were straightforward and smooth except for the interview with Vivian where the line went off for no apparent reason and I had to call her back immediately to carry on. In addition, as stated in the previous section, I found it quite challenging to get one of the bloggers (Tosin) to talk about gender in/equality as a concept, as shown in the following extract:

R (researcher): What you think about the phrase, ‘gender equality or inequality?’

Tosin: No comment

R: I’m sorry, what do you mean?

Tosin: This gender equality thing, I don’t have a say. I have no comment now, maybe later.

R: It’s okay if you don’t want to state your opinion on the concept but can you tell me why?

Tosin: A lot of women have been misquoted and called feminists when they made comments on gender equality. Three years ago, some women made comments online supporting feminism and suffered a lot of backlash from the public. I need to properly understand gender equality before I comment on it, because gender equality has been related to feminism. A lot of bloggers are careful not to associate with something that will affect their site traffic. Also, I feel gender equality has not been properly explained for women to understand and feel comfortable to say they believe in it.

R: When you say that it has not been properly explained, who are you referring

to?

Tosin: To be honest, this is all I want to say on gender equality.

Tosin's position was quite surprising considering I had emailed the research invitation letter and consent form to her, which she signed and returned prior to the interview. Hence, she would have been aware that my research revolved around the concept of gender equality/discrimination. Her position was, however, contrasting to her detailed discussion during the interview on her fight for the rights of women who are victims of sexual assault (see chapter 9). Hence, it seemed she was just not keen on the term 'gender equality'. Therefore, my decision to ask 'why' was an attempt to possibly unravel ideological conceptions that defined her silence as regard the phrase 'gender equality'.

Although most of the other interviews went smoothly, two participants (Susan and Aderonke) seemed very so enthusiastic about the topic of gender equality and often provided many examples to buttress a point such that sometimes they would veer off the focus of the interview. For instance, one of these two interviewees went into a discussion on some family-related issues and I found it quite difficult to interrupt her. However, I found that I improved in terms of keeping the participants on track as the interviews went on.

4.4.6 The Position of the Researcher

For scholars such as Murchison (2010) and Asselin (2003) my position as a Nigerian woman arguably defines me as an 'insider' in this research. However, the 'insider', 'outsider' binary constructs have been criticised for oversimplifying the complexities inherent in occupying the space between (insider and outsider). Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p, 61) argue that based on the fact that 'our perspective is shaped by our position as researchers, we cannot fully occupy one or the other of those positions' because 'sometimes we feel closer to the insider position or outsider position'.

Regardless, being a part of the Nigerian culture means that I do not need to establish a background knowledge of it. This means that I already have an 'emic' conception of the Nigerian culture and knowledge of the 'principles that account for the way in which' the Nigerian culture 'is organised or structured in the mental life' of Nigerian women (Harris, 1976, p.331). My position as a female indigenous researcher was made apparent in several ways during the research process. As stated in section 4.4.4,

although when I introduced myself at the start of the interviews I mentioned my nationality, most of the participants were interested to know the specific region (hence, the North-Central) I hail from. I could see that mapping out my identity helped them contextualise their experiences, while seeking a shared understanding of what happens in certain instances, or specific regions of the country. This brings to mind Williams and Heike's (1993, p.287) argument that 'the shared and developed understanding between the interviewer and the participant is gendered in which the same-sex assumes that they have gone through similar experiences'. This probably explains why some of the participants felt comfortable to share certain family-related issues with me.

However, the shared understanding sought by some of the interview participants seemed to come at a cost. Some blog authors had the tendency to be less explicit in discussing issues, expecting that I should have an understanding having come from the same culture. As such, there was the occasional use of phrases such as, 'you know how it is in this country', or 'you remember this incident' or they would call the name of a person whom they regard as popular/influential in Nigeria and expect my affirmation. In this regard, I would normally ask them to explain or describe the situation, which sends a message going forward that (although I belong to culture) I possibly do not know as much about the culture as they thought I do. This helped the participants to express themselves more, which further unravelled meaning-making practices by their attempt to describe and explain events and experiences.

During my analysis, I consciously tried to question whether my position of having an inside knowledge of the Nigerian culture influenced my interpretation of the interview data. Although it was difficult to be consistent in creating such distance while analysing the data, my supervisors, being 'outsiders', helped to draw my attention where needed. For instance, occasionally, they would point out areas where I would transcend the meaning of an extract by explaining the participants' possible intention or an idea. Hence, they helped me distance myself from the data by cautioning my presuppositions owing to my own knowledge of the country's norms and culture. However, scholars (e.g. Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002) have argued that cultural behaviour is inherent and exhibited in ways of criticising, judging and participating in discussions. This means that it is almost impossible to establish complete distance from one's culture or avoid the influence of the researcher on the analysis. Hence, although some level of 'insider' contribution might be evident in my analysis, by considering secondary 'outsider' perspectives, I trust that such contribution has not harmed the research and its purposes.

4.4.7 Ethical Considerations

The conduct of in-depth interviews was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Leicester. While planning my project, I was particularly cautious with issues of access and informed consent. I was also aware of the possibility for ethical issues to arise unexpectedly. I was, therefore, alert of ethical issues in the planning, as well as during the entire process of my research.

Typically, before I conducted an interview with a participant, I informed them of the purpose of my study, the benefits and possible risks⁹³. I also provided them with information on the duration of the interview and the fact that the interviews would be recorded, and how their anonymity would be protected in reporting the research findings. Hence, I obtained written consent from the first two interviews, while I obtained oral consent from the participants interviewed over the phone. The consent form, which I sent to all the interviewees also made it clear that their participation was voluntary and they had the right to freely withdraw from the research process at any time if they wished to⁹⁴.

In addition, in making other ethical considerations, I focused on my primary participants, limiting the amount of data that I present in relation to their friends or family that was shared during the interview process. I have discussed such friends and family members in general terms and have not provided any real names or personal information about them.

Finally, although my expectation was that the research aims were not ‘sensitive’ and that all the interview participants would be happy to be identified within the research process, one blog author asked to remain anonymous. Hence, through email, I asked if she would like to pick a pseudonym that I could use to refer to her during the phone interview, for which she chose, ‘Susan’. I, therefore, decided to carry on the pseudonym through transcription and the reporting of the research data. I also made it clear to her that I would not use any content that would make it easy for her to be identified, such as photos from her blog, or her blog name.

4.5 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is defined as ‘a rich/detailed method of identifying, analysing and reporting themes or patterns within data’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). At the

⁹³ Find letter of invitation to participate in research in Appendix C.

⁹⁴ Find consent form in Appendix D

same time, thematic analysis reflects various methods that share a search for certain themes or patterns within research data. For instance, thematic Discourse Analysis is used to identify methods used to study themes/patterns within data that allows for the theorisation of language as constituting meaning which reflects the social (Potter, 1997). In essence, the linguistic attribute of discourse is believed to shape the way an event or phenomenon can be understood in a specific socio-cultural context. In addition, thematic analysis conducted within the context of grounded theory usually involves coding and thematising data in such a way that analysis is aimed at theory-development (Charmaz, 2002).

This is not in line with the use of thematic analysis in this and other studies, such as Braun and Clarke's (2006) which intended to draw from the set theory and research questions to code and subsequently thematise. Nevertheless, while I coded in reference to the research questions of study, as seen in the analyses of interview data in Chapter 9, I also gave room to capture new themes that emerged from the interview data. In addition, thematic analysis is often confused with qualitative content analysis, which similarly entails generating codes and themes within data. However, thematic analysis is believed to be more rigorous in procedure to elicit themes that build up the analysis in the most cohesive manner, while qualitative content analysis focuses more on the statistical frequency of various themes or categories (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Mayring, 2000).

The approach I took in interpreting, thematising and analysing interview data in this research is constructionist. This position did not seek to merely report the experiences or meanings derived from thematising discourses on gender in/equality but examined how those experiences affected the attitudes and behavioural practices of female blog users in Nigeria.

4.5.1 The Rationale for Thematic Analysis

The major conceptual framework that I adopted to analyse the interview data is Braun and Clark's (2006) step-by-step guide to conducting thematic analysis. I found Braun and Clarke's approach particularly suited to the aims of my research (which relies on pre-existing theoretical positions) as opposed to broad techniques identified by scholars such as Ryan and Bernard (2003) which apply more to a grounded theory approach or other Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis where thematic coding is not tied to pre-existing theories but is focused on the overall data. Specifically, I found Ryan and Bernard's (2003) perspective on interrogating 'missing data' a useful critical

approach that meets the aims of my research. I, therefore, drew on this approach by not only questioning what data is in my interviews but also what is missing. This technique provides useful insights on topics consciously or subconsciously avoided by interview participants (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975). For instance, by paying attention to such missing data in this study, the analysis in Chapter 9 shows how blog authors, just like blog readers, omitted the forms of inequality faced by categories of women offline, such as disabled women and older women.

In addition, thematic analysis has been identified as one of the most popular methods used in analysing qualitative interviews based on its usefulness in working within participatory research paradigms (Jugder, 2016). Owing to the fact that interviews have been argued to be an effective method of data collection in women's studies, thematic analysis has been applied to the analysis of interview data to identify, analyse and report themes and patterns around issues of gender disparity (Henry, 2017; Quinn, et al., 2016; Salinas and Romani, 2014; Westwood, 2016;). Thematic analysis becomes a reliable method of analysing interview data with 'its ability to summarise key features of large bodies of text while offering a thick description of the phenomenon under study' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.97). My choice of thematic analysis is in consideration of these factors as well the fact that thematic analysis has proven to be 'a rigorous approach that can provide useful insights that answer particular research questions' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.97).

Hence, by approaching thematic analysis from a constructionist perspective, I was able to build themes that were directly useful to the aims of my research. For instance, this approach allowed me to exercise interpretive skills needed to critically interrogate the ideological beliefs and conceptions that influence blog author selection, production, and representation of gender-related content on blogs. Thematising data also helped my assessment of how blog-author beliefs replicate or deviate from blog-reader conceptions of gender in/equality and what this means for the struggle against gender discrimination in Nigeria. Finally, it helped me shed light and explain blog content and generated discourses among blog authors.

4.5.2 The Procedure for Thematic Analysis

The interview topic guide was structured into five major parts: personal information, technology-use, blogging activities, the subject of gender in/equality, divergent discourses, and inclusivity in blog discussions. Hence, the last three sections

focused primarily on the research questions of study, which seek to understand blog author perception on the subject of gender in/equality, alternative discourses and the exclusion of the offline majority in blog discussions (find the interview topic guide in Appendix F).

Owing to the nature of my research questions, which aim to understand broad perceptions and conceptions as regards gender in/equality (also amidst poor literature on the subject), it became mandatory to code (theoretically) only after retrieving data from the field. This is because developing rigid categories beforehand (prior to coding or theorisation) has the potential to inhibit the formation of (new) ideas or making surprising connections (Charmaz, 2002). Hence, my approach to thematic analysis provided a richer description of blog author conception and communicative practices on gender in/equality. However, this approach also gave room for other themes, such as ‘geographical space and gendered identity’ to emerge from the overall data⁹⁵.

In terms of process, I first acquainted with the data by reading through multiple times so as to immerse in the corpus. This also allowed for a focused reading to look out for patterns and meanings that are related to my research questions. I, therefore, started making notes and marking ideas for the coding process, which I returned to subsequently. In addition, the process of transcription was thorough, marked by a verbatim transcribing of all spoken forms of communication to ensure that the representation of the interview process and content was aligned with the original as possible. This also meant that I captured expressions such as laughter with ‘hahaha’ or cultural forms of expressions such as ‘kissing the teeth’⁹⁶ with ‘mtcheeeew’. Finally, after transcribing, I listened to the interview recordings alongside the transcriptions to ensure that all was accurate. This process also helped for a thorough understanding of the research data.

After reading and familiarising with my data, and drafting ideas about its interesting parts, I commenced producing initial codes from the data using NVivo coding software, which served as a practical system of identifying repeated patterns in large data sets. Codes were drawn from the interview data by following participant responses in the order of the interview topic guide. I also employed latent coding, which allowed flexibility in the coding process. In this regard, I relied on my interpretive skills, which allowed me the freedom to code around the research questions by looking out for as many

⁹⁵ See Section 9.3 and the coding framework in Appendix F.

⁹⁶ Discussed as a form of cultural behaviour signifying disgust or anger in the analysis of Nigerian blog language in Section 2.7.

patterns as possible. In addition, I coded data extracts inclusively, ‘keeping a little of the surrounding data’ where relevant to ensure that contextual factors were captured as much as possible (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.89). Having generated a list of all the codes in the data set, I manually⁹⁷ began sorting out the various codes into themes and sub-themes. For instance, the code ‘conception on gender equality’ encompassed ideas of ‘gender equality versus feminism’ and ‘economic issues and gender equality’. Similarly, the theme, ‘outlook on cultural change’ had sub-themes such as ‘in support of cultural change’, ‘cultural change as necessary for gender equality’, and ‘highlighting areas of cultural disrespect but less critical of cultural practices’⁹⁸.

By the end of this process, I had organised my major themes and sub-themes as well as the extracts of data that had been coded in relation to them. I also considered if certain sub-themes could be merged (in discourse) under a major theme. For instance, sub-themes on ‘culture and economic inequality’, ‘culture and sexual assault’ and ‘culture and female domestication’ were analysed under the main theme ‘cultural roles and gender inequality’, as opposed to separate individual themes, which enabled such sub-themes to ‘cohere together meaningfully’ (Braun and Clark 2006, p.89) (see Chapter 9).

Then I reviewed main themes to ensure they had enough data to support them. I also re-read all the collated extracts under each theme to ensure that they were consistent in form and pattern. Once I had a clear and coherent set of major themes, I considered the validity of individual themes in relation to the data set to ensure that they were reflective of the meanings evident in the whole data set. Re-reading the entire data was to make sure that themes work in relation to the data set and to code any additional data within themes that were omitted in the previous coding stages.

I further defined and refined the themes featured in my final analysis, and analysed the data within them. This involved providing sufficient information about data extracts; such as what is interesting about them and why. For instance, in relation to the theme ‘conception on gender equality’, I considered how the data extract contributes to my knowledge of how cultural roles are conceived and articulated within discussions on gender equality. This helped me reflect on the story that each theme told and how this related to my research questions. Again, in relation to the theme ‘conceptions on gender equality’, I questioned ‘the meaning of the theme’, which aimed to unravel how women

⁹⁷ My decision to switch to manual coding was because I found the NVivo software on Mac OS (my MacBook) not very user friendly in comparison to the version on Windows OS for which I was conversant.

⁹⁸ See Appendix F for the coding framework.

perceive cultural roles in relation to the gender in/equality discourse. Next, I considered ‘the assumptions that support the theme’, which revealed women’s conception of ‘feminism’ as concerning the support for recognition and ‘gender equality’ as connoting a redistributive cause. This revealed how the struggle for gender equality is limited in the belief that it concerns redistributive battles. However, this conception allowed me to probe further into the ideological conceptions that define the meaning-making practices of blog authors. Overall, I was able to understand how the story that the theme (conceptions on gender equality) tells connects to the first research question, which seeks to understand how blog authors perceive cultural roles in relation to the gender in/equality discourse.

In producing the report of my analysis, I ensured to provide sufficient evidence of the themes within my data by providing data extracts that reflect the prevalence of the theme (Braun and Clarke, 2003). Hence, data extracts chosen were vivid examples that captured the meaning-making practices of blog authors as it relates to the gender in/equality debate Nigeria. However, as highlighted earlier, drawing on Bogdan and Taylor’s (1975) idea of ‘missing data’, I was conscious to not only to focus my analysis on evident data, but to reflect on topics/issues on gender in/equality that were omitted consciously or unconsciously by blog authors. This further helped to shed light on issues that tend to be prioritised/ranked above others on the gender in/equality agenda.⁹⁹

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the mixed qualitative methods used in this study and highlighted the significance of their use. I explained the design of study, procedures, and limitations of the selected methods. In relation to both textual analysis/CDA and interviews/thematic analysis, I addressed issues concerning my position as a researcher and the practical steps taken to ensure that I minimise ‘insider’ bias in the research process. I have also shown the importance of integrated qualitative methods, which in this regard comprise techniques that provide an understanding and complementary approach to women’s blog discussions on gender in/equality in the Nigeria context. Hence, I discussed the usefulness of using both methods (CDA and thematic analysis in order to make up for the limitations of each alone.

⁹⁹ For instance, the analysis of Chapter 9 shows how blog authors, just like blog readers, seemed to omit the forms of inequality faced by categories of women offline, such as disabled women, or older women.

While designing this project, my goal was to collect rich data through a combination of methods that involved gaining insight from communicative practices as well as directly from individual female bloggers/actors. This enabled me to avoid the bias of relying solely on one method. It also made it easier to consider the extent to which discussions on gender in/equality online matched the attitudes, beliefs and knowledge of blog authors interpersonally. For instance, my discussion with blog authors enabled the understanding of why most blog authors resort to using filter and notebook styles as opposed to personal techniques of blogging (see Chapter 9). An analysis of blog comments and posts in isolation would hardly provide knowledge on these peculiarities.

CHAPTER 5: A MAPPING OF THE NIGERIAN FEMALE BLOGOSPHERE

This chapter aims to provide a clear perspective of Nigerian female blog sites, the structure of blogposts and the communicative nature of blog comments. I commence by providing a background of the history, typology and communicative elements of blogs. I shed light on how trends and traits of blogging in the global context inform or deviate from the current state of blogs in Nigeria. I further provide an overview of the layout and profiles of the female blogosphere in the country, considering the structure, topics of discussion and the communicative style adopted by Nigerian bloggers. A mapping of the 135 posts that make up the study sample and the key traits that define them follows this. Next, I consider the ties that exist between blogposts and comments sampled, as well as the interactive potential of blogs. Further, in order to rightly locate Nigerian blog discourse in its social context, considering that I use CDA to address some important questions of identity, in/equality, and ideology, I discuss the language style of Nigerian female blogs in relation to the study sample. This highlights the (contextual) meaning-making processes of Nigerian women on blogs and provides a better understanding of blog discourses in general, and particularly, the rhetorical oriented analysis conducted in Chapter 7. Finally, I discuss the characteristics of the sample of comments, highlighting how it relates to the broader discourses on gender in/equality articulated on Nigerian ‘female’ blogs.

5.1 Blogs: Definition and History

A blog is an abbreviation of the word ‘Weblog’, which refers to a website that produces and shares content in the form of chronologically ordered articles, called posts (Retterberg, 2014). Users can react instantly to these posts by commenting. A significant part of blogs is a blog roll, which contains links to other blogs that an author reads often. It is seen as a system of acknowledgment as well as a navigational tool to find other bloggers who share similar interests, thereby conferring a general sense of awareness of the author (Marlow, 2004). In addition, Retterberg (2014) argues that blogs rolls are a social genre that enable discussions with a single, as well as multiple blogs. Hence, the network between blogs discussing a specific topic is usually referred to as a blogosphere, a term that will be used occasionally in this study.

Blogs can be traced to pioneers who started with online diaries in 1994. They started by developing densely hyper-textual websites into blogs (Retterberg, 2014). In 1994, Justin Hall, an early pioneer, used his site *link.net/vita* to tell the story of his life and started publishing regular diaries which were similar to what we consider as blogs today (Retterberg, 2014). The term 'Weblog' was coined in the 1990s as a system that monitored the patronage of particular websites by the administrators of web servers (Retterberg, 2014). It showed information that related to numbers of visitors of particular sites, the traffic to such sites, information transfer across websites, and more (Retterberg, 2014).

By December 1997, Jorn Barger, who owned the site 'Robot Wisdom: A Weblog by Jorn Barger', was recorded to have been the first to use the term 'Weblog' (Barger, 1998). Barger's site consisted of a list of diverse links from other sites he had visited and wished to recommend to his readers (much like blogrolls) (Barger, 1998). Jorn Barger, therefore, reflected the early use of blogrolls as a system of networking, which has dominated the definition of the blogosphere in contemporary times. His unique use of this technique was a significant indicator of the blogosphere as a platform for interaction, rather than a personal diary that thrives on solely publishing stories without connecting to other sites. By 1999, an early blogger, Peter Merholz, was noted to have used the term 'blog' on the sidebar of his blog (Blood, 2002). He differed from the other early bloggers in the sense that his posts were more discursive and informative (Blood, 2002). Peter Merholz's blog provided room for more comments and discussions from blog readers, going beyond publishing news stories or posting links to creating a participatory platform where individuals could share ideas.

In the year 2000, free, easy-to-use, blog creation services like blogger.com became available and blogging took off on a large scale. The renowned blog search engine Technorati.com was launched in 2002 and it began tracking the number of blogs created which was already about three million by July 2004 (Retterberg, 2014). By June 2003, Google launched its AdSense to match adverts to blogging content. This boosted the business prospects of blogs, which became a platform for information-sharing as well as making money. By the year 2004, Technorati reported that the number of blogs had doubled every month and shortly after, the Merriam-Webster declared the word 'blog' as the word of the year (Retterberg, 2014; Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2004). Since then, the world continued to witness the increasing proliferation of blogs, which shifted from being purely an American breakthrough to a global one. For instance, as of January 2018,

Tumblr is said to have hosted over 390 million blogs, and WordPress.com, over a 100 million (Statistica.com, 2018; Wordpress.com, 2018).

5.1.1 Blog Typology

While numerous classifications of blogs exist (e.g. Camerlang, 2006; Murray and Hourigan, 2008; Retterberg, 2014), In this study, I focus on Rebecca Blood's (2002) which enables the understanding of how content is represented on Nigerian female blogs. Rebecca Blood's (2002) classification of blogs is one of the most cited typologies. Blood classifies blogs into three types: filters, personal journals, and notebooks. Filter blogs offer stories from an observational point of view without being reflexive, as the blog often adopts a news reporting style. Personal journals, however, talk about the writer's experiences or stories from a personal perspective, thereby giving access to thoughts, feelings or emotions. They reflect the qualities of personal diaries, and although they might not 'document every aspect of their life, they record episodes and anecdotes that give readers a strong feeling of knowing the blogger' (Retterberg, 2014, p. 20). A 'notebook' mixes qualities of both personal journals and filters; it involves publishing information as retrieved from external sources in non-reflexive form, as well as publishing from a personal perspective and about personal experiences.

5.1.2 Blogs as an Interactive Platform

Blogs are said to promote reflective and critical thinking, allowing individuals to express ideas and share opinions in the form of authored posts while receiving feedback from multiple individuals in the form of 'comments' (Silver, Goel and Mousavidin, 2009). The comment attribute of blogs was created in 2002, allowing users to be actively engaged with blog authors as well as other readers by sharing their thoughts through the act of writing comments (Bolander 2012). As such, the comments feature has allowed blogs to be 'an online space where discussion and debate can take place' (Garden, 2011, p. 46) and this enables the general outlook of blogs a dialogic platform. However, Kaiser (2017) has also highlighted the tensions inherent in blog comments, by describing the comment section of blogs as a field of contestation, where the counter public speak out against the mainstream.

Overall, studies have portrayed the usefulness of comments in the activity of blogging (e.g. Kehoe and Gee, 2012; Corlatescu et al., 2018; Keller, 2012). For instance, Corlatescu et al. (2018) observe that the relevance of blogs is hinged on the amount of traction they receive from users in terms of the number of comments. Yano and Smith

(2010) also argue that a significant measure of the popularity or breath of interest of a blog post is the extent to which readers of the blog are inspired to leave comments. In relation to gender research, Keller's (2012, p. 438) study of girl feminist blogs reveals that 'the comment section of blogs can serve as a productive space from which to build community through the sharing of personal opinion and experiences'. Such conversation is believed to help women find a voice in cultures that often do not value women's voices.

Nevertheless, although the comment feature of the blogosphere is conceived as allowing 'open' dialogue, collaborative discourse, and the sharing of knowledge between blog users, studies have shown that the interactive potential of blogs does not seem to be fully explored by blog users (e.g Hoffmann, 2012). First, commenting on a blog post is an optional activity as blog authors can choose to disable the commenting facility, while blog users/authors can choose whether to participate in discussions or not. In this regard, Hoffmann's (2012, p. 199) study of Ausburg Blog Corpus, comprising 10 personal blogs revealed that communicative exchanges between blog authors and readers are not common and when commenters respond to a blog post, they mostly do so in an 'appreciative and acknowledging manner' rather than engaging in critical debates.

5.1.3 Blogging in Nigeria

The Nigerian blogosphere includes both bloggers from the Nigerian diaspora and locally based authors who, in contrast to those in diaspora, mostly started to join the blogosphere in the mid-2000s (Akoh and Jagun, 2012). The acquisition of AdSense by Google and the release of WordPress in the same year (2003) is believed to have set the precedent for the proliferation of Nigerian blogs (Onwuka, 2014).

By 2006, the country witnessed the rise of popular female blogs like Bella Naija blog, Linda Ikeji, Laila's blog, among many others. Linda Ikeji blog is believed to be one of the first female blogs to be created in 2006. From 2006 onwards, many other female blogs, such as Bella Naija, Laila's blog, Misspetite Nigeria, Kemi Filani, and Ladun Liadi, began to spring up (Onwuka, 2014). By May 2018, Nigerian women were said to make up 57% of the over 8,000 blog authors identified by the Nigerian Blog Awards Website. These statistics are significant because the total number of Nigerian men nearly doubles that of women on other social media such as Facebook (65 % vs 35 %), and this makes blogs a fruitful space to analyse gendered discourses (Socialbakers.com, 2018).

There is a huge readership of blogs by Nigerian women as well. For example, popular female blogs such as Linda Ikeji and Bella Naija¹⁰⁰, have over 200,000 unique visitors daily, with blog posts on their sites generating an average of 250 comments from readers daily (Alexa.com, 2018). Particularly, Alexa.com and the Nigerian Blog Awards Website reveal that over 75 % of Nigerian blog visitors identify as women. This means that women dominate the blogging platform both in terms of authorship and readership (Alexa.com, 2018; Nigeria Blog Awards, 2018). Also, regarding country demographics, approximately 84% of individuals who visit the top six blogs under study identify as Nigerian¹⁰¹(Alexa.com, 2018¹⁰²) Despite these statistics, as noted in Chapter 1, blogging is not an opportunity afforded to all Nigerian women as socio-economic inequalities continue to limit who has the resources, time and skills to blog, an issue that is tackled in this thesis. Finally, it is important to note that the Internet loading speed of most Nigerian blogs is rated ‘very slow’ by Alexa.com. This means that over 90% of global sites are faster in comparison to most Nigerian blogs¹⁰³ (Alexa.com, 2018). This highlights some of the challenges associated with Internet accessibility in Africa (Somolu, 2007).

5.2 Mapping the Nigerian Female Blogosphere

5.2.1 Layout and Profile

All the blogs sampled in this study were created by individuals who identify as Nigerian women as indicated on the Nigerian Blog Awards Website. Most Nigerian female blog authors create a unique web design using colour, page layout, photographs, video and other features, probably as a way of creating a certain impression of their blogs. A majority of the blogs sampled in this study provide minimal information about the blog authors, as typical descriptions include business contacts, professional qualifications, nominations and awards. However, Laila and SDK blogs are quite the exception as the blog authors provide pictures of themselves and other detailed personal information, such as early life and career progression, marital status and number of children. Nevertheless,

¹⁰⁰ These are some of the blogs under study discussed in Section 4.2.

¹⁰¹ It is important to bear in mind that Alexa’s statistics is reflective of Nigerians who blog from Nigeria. Hence, readers who contribute to Nigerian female blogs could involve those who are normally residents of Nigeria but are studying or visiting an alternate country. However, this category of individuals might not be captured in Alexa’s statistics. In addition, in 2015, the UN estimated that about 1.2 million Nigerian-born people live abroad (The Economist, 18th June 2015).

¹⁰² See additional information on Nigerian blog demographics in Appendix A.

¹⁰³ See additional information on Internet speed in Appendix A.

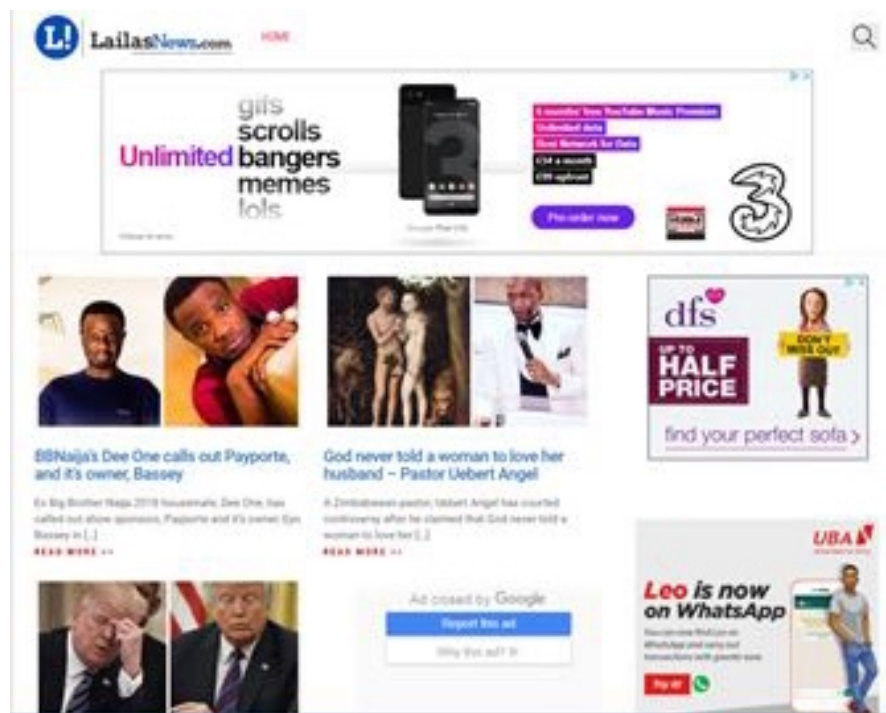
general information about popular Nigerian blog authors, such as nationality, place of origin, hobbies, and so on is hosted on the Nigerian Blog Awards Website and other blogs, such as Woman.ng, that typically host a collection of top female blog author profiles in Nigeria.

All the blogs sampled consist of time-stamped posts arranged in reverse chronological order, which is the most popular blogging pattern worldwide (Retterberg, 2014). Like blogs in general, Nigerian female blogs allow comments, and as will be discussed later in the chapter, reflect a social presentation of a relational mode of communication (Sirpa Leppanen, 2015). The commercial activity of blogging in Nigeria is also evident on all six blogs sampled, with adverts thriving alongside blog posts, as can be seen in Figures 5.1 and 5.2, which picture Linda Ikeji and Laila's blogs, respectively.

Figure 5.1: Screen Capture from Linda Ikeji Blog



Figure 5.2: Screen Capture from Laila's Blog



As such, most Nigerian female blogs look very much like news websites. The prominent gender issues on the six most popular female-authored blogs in Nigeria include socio-economic inequality, domestic violence, girl kidnapping and forced marriage, gender-related policies, and women trafficking. Other topics include hard news, beauty, fashion, celebrity gossip, and so on. This general-topic approach makes the structure of the Nigerian female blogosphere peculiar. Specifically, it refutes the notion that topic-centric blogs are more likely to attract discourse on more particular issues or topics of focus than general topic blogs. For instance, political blogs are said to attract more discourse on politics than general-topic-blogs reporting political news (Pole, 2010; Tremayne, 2012). Hence, focusing on a single topic has more discursive potential in the area that concerns the topic, than dabbling into multiple topics simultaneously. However, this study reveals a divergence, where Nigerian female blogs that focus on general topics attract wide range of discourses on topics related to gender in/equality despite being reported alongside a variety of other, often unrelated topics. This also makes sense logically, as one post on gender in/equality on a popular Nigerian female blog (that hosts over two hundred thousand visitors daily) has higher chances of being seen even by people who do not deliberately go online seeking gender-related news, compared to a gender-related topic-centric blog with five thousand or even less visitors daily. Jackson

and Weller (2015) buttress this point by asserting that general topic blogs play a significant role in exposing citizens not actively seeking alternative political narratives to counter public content. As such, while Nigerian female blogs often publish on general topics, this approach to blogging does not seem to affect the visibility of gender in/equality related topics, which is evident from the length of comments that such topics/posts attract. As argued by Yano and Smith (2010), a significant measure of the popularity or breath of interest of a blog post is the extent to which readers of the blog are inspired to leave comments.

5.2.2 Blog Posts

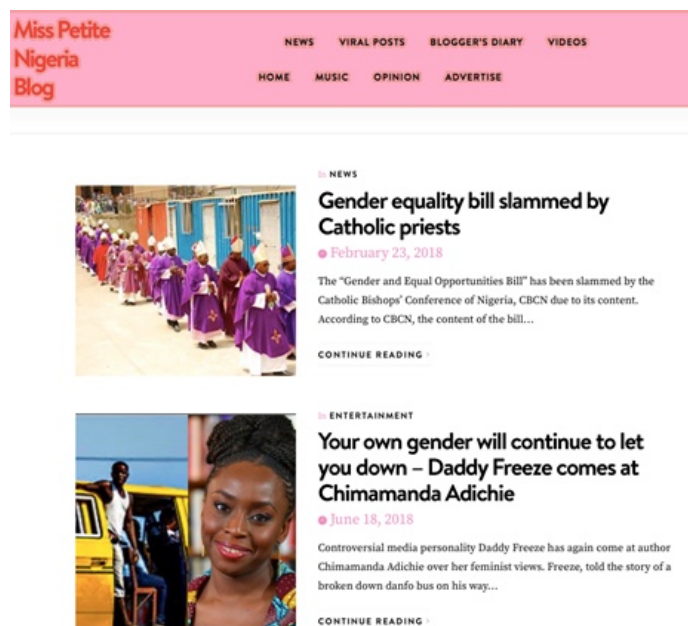
Most Nigerian female blogs are single authored with blog post headlines written in formal English language and typically accompanied by photos. Although, the Nigerian blogosphere reflects the global trend of having more female bloggers than men, it deviates from the global trend in terms of genre, where female blogs are divided between ‘filter’ and ‘notebook’ styles. Specifically, out of the six blogs studied, four reflect a ‘notebook’ approach to blogging and two adopt the ‘filter’ style. In the filter style, the blog author reports the story from a non-personal perspective and blog authors rarely inform blog readers about themselves, provide personal information, or communicate their personal feelings or thoughts. Figure 5.3 shows an example of this filter approach, where the blog author (Uche Pedro of Bella Naija blog) does not elaborate on how she feels about the given news story, but merely presents the story in a reporter’s style.

Figure 5.3: Screen Capture from Bella Naija Blog



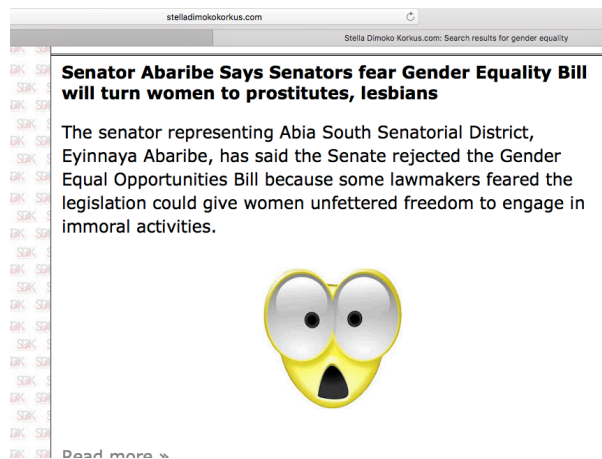
Bella Naija blog reports the rejection of the GEO Bill but the blog author (Uche Pedro) does not reveal her personal opinion on the rejection of the Bill; whether she supports or rejects the Nigerian Senate's verdict on the Bill or if she seeks the support of Nigerian women against the Senate's decision. The blog author's approach to storytelling is, therefore, very descriptive. Similar filter-styled posts can be seen in the screen capture of the Misspetite Nigeria blog in Figure 5.4:

Figure 5.4: Screen Capture from Misspetite Nigeria Blog



Hence, Bella Naija and Miss petite Nigeria blogs mostly report news stories from a non-personal viewpoint. Aside from the information on their blog profile that provides background personal information, there are hardly any stories or blog posts that reveal the blog authors' personality, personal experiences, thoughts or feelings. However, on SDK blog, which reflects the notebook approach, the personal opinion of the blog author is sometimes evident from emoticons used to accompany blog posts, as seen in the screen capture of Figure 5.5.

Figure 5.5: Screen Capture from SDK Blog



In this screen capture, while the information reflects a filter style post on Senator Abaribe's perception of the GEO Bill, the emoticon beneath depicts the blog author's feeling about this news story, which is that of shock or surprise. The use of emoticons is common on SDK blog and another example is the sad smiley that SDK posted in reaction to the rejection of the GEO Bill by the Nigerian Senate (see Figure 8.1, Chapter 8). On rare occasions, Stella, the blog author of SDK, uses personal interpretive captions in posting stories, but even then she does not elaborate her opinion on gender issues and her expressions are mostly made up of short statements. This can be seen in the screen capture of Figure 5.6.

Figure 5.6: Screen Capture from SDK Blog



Stella shares a Facebook post from a woman on her blog who believes that children should not be taught in schools that fathers are the head of the home and Stella argues that she personally disagrees with the angle the Facebook poster argues from. However, Stella does not expand on the specific angle that she claims to disagree with. In some of Stella's other posts, she ends statements with remarks/expressions, such as 'LOL', 'SIGH', 'great news!', 'sad news' or 'pen your thoughts below'. The post also shows the tendency to bring into the blogosphere, discourses from other social media platforms, such as Twitter and occasionally Facebook. While this study focuses on blogs owing to the dominance of the female gender and female discourses therein, the blog posts show that certain prominent in/equality discourses happening on other platforms are occasionally represented on blogs. For instance, some of the sampled posts include tweets from the Nigerian Senate's rejection of the GEO Bill and a former female legislator's (Oby Ekwesili) perspective on gender equality.

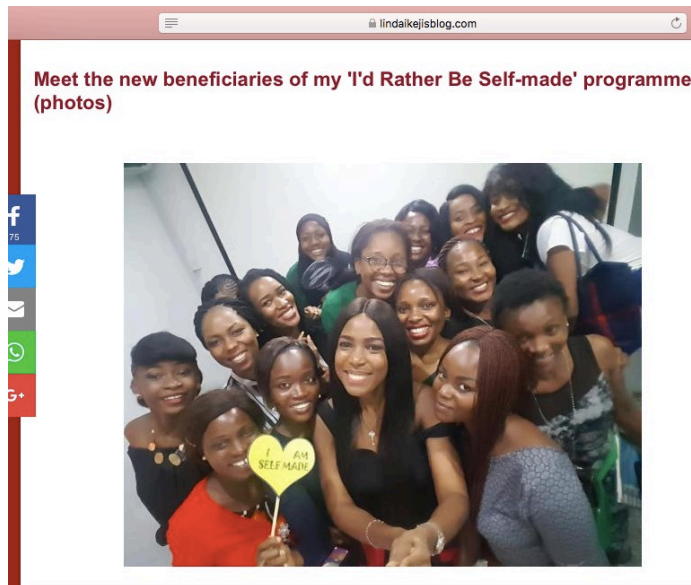
Moving on, unlike other blogs, such as Linda Ikeji, Laila and Ladun Liadi, which exemplify a notebook approach, Stella rarely posts stories about her personal life or experiences. Linda Ikeji, Laila and Ladun Liadi occasionally post stories on their personal experiences or achievements as seen in the screen capture in Figure 5.7 taken from the Linda Ikeji blog.

Figure 5.7: Screen Capture from Linda Ikeji Blog



Here, Linda Ikeji, the author of Linda Ikeji blog, reveals to her blog readers, whom she calls LIB (Linda Ikeji Blog) family, that she bought a house. As seen in the blog post, she not only provides photos of the house but also detailed specifications. The idea of 'LIB family' and that the blog author has formed a strong network with her blog readers are evident in a project tagged 'I'd rather be self-made', as shown in Figure 5.8.

Figure 5.8: Screen Capture from Linda Ikeji Blog

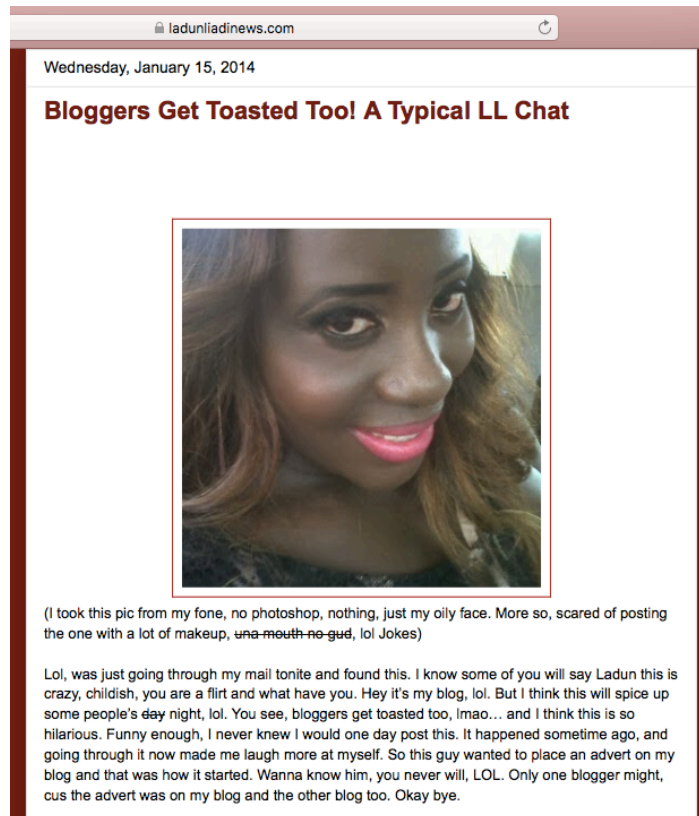


Through this project, Linda Ikeji provides young female graduates with funds needed to start small-scale businesses. Her blog reveals that Linda Ikeji has toured over 25 secondary schools in Nigeria giving talks to young girls about values centred on self-esteem, independence and integrity. To arrange a meeting with her blog readers, Linda typically writes a post asking to meet with blog readers at designated locations. However, she seems to rarely reply individual blog reader comments on her blog. Overall, the personal attribute of Linda Ikeji blog is seen more from Linda Ikeji's philanthropic deeds and personal achievements than from her reportage on other issues, such as gender in/equality.

Another dimension of personal blogging within a notebook approach can be seen in Ladun Liadi's blog, where, as shown in Figure 5.9, Ladun Liadi posts a picture of herself and a long thread of chat messages between herself and a man who wanted to place an advert on her blog, but was also trying to ask her on a date. Ladun Liadi reveals that her decision to share this information with her blog readers is to reveal her personality, which she rarely does. In this regard, Ladun Liadi views the need to present

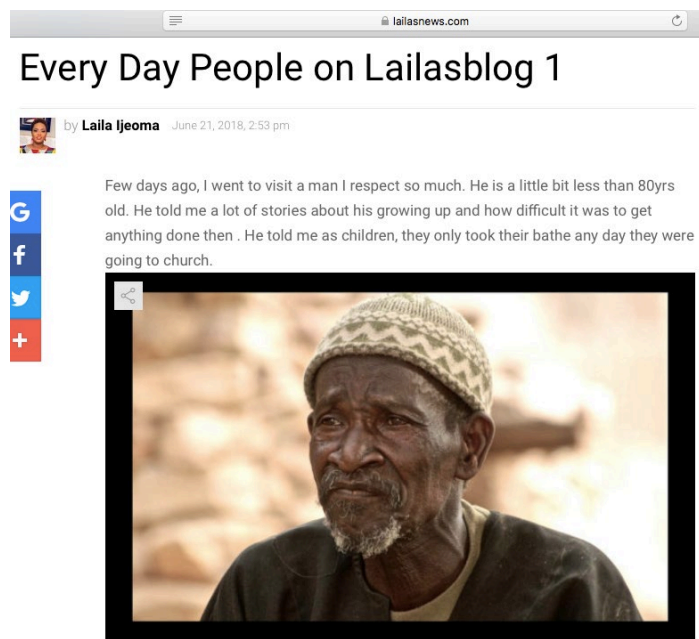
herself to her blog audience, both in terms of physical appearance and personality traits, in the fashion of typical personal blogging style that female blogs tend to be associated with (Keller, 2012). However, this personal approach to blogging is not consistent; in fact, in the Nigerian female blogosphere is rare for blog authors to publish stories on themselves and they tend to focus on non-personal issues.

Figure 5.9: Screen Capture from Ladun Liadi Blog



Nevertheless, aside from the tendency to occasionally post stories about oneself or personal achievements, Laila, the author of Laila's blog, occasionally publishes stories on her personal experiences which she archives in a dedicated column on her blog tagged 'everyday people'.

Figure 5.10: Screen Capture from Laila's Blog



For instance, as shown in Figure 5.10, Laila narrates a discussion she had with an elderly man on his life experiences growing up and how much society has transformed, particularly, how modern medicine has impacted human life expectancy in Nigeria. In this regard, Laila takes a personal approach to blogging by recounting her experience of events or occurrences in a reflective manner. On the other hand, she rarely publishes from a personal perspective when reporting on other news stories outside this dedicated ‘everyday people’ column of her blog. This means that, on the whole, there seems to be a fine line between reporting on personal issues and on other topics, such as gender discrimination. The sampled blogs under study also reveal that the specific nature of the notebook approach varies from blog to blog. On Stella Dimorkokus blog, for instance, the notebook approach is represented by the use of emoticons and personal interpretive captions that accompany blog posts, while on Linda Ikeji and Lailas’s blogs it is represented through occasional postings on personal achievements or experiences. Finally, on Ladun Liadi blog, the notebook approach is occasionally evident through the representation of personal identity.

Figure 5.11: Screen Capture from Bella Naija Blog



Although the personal opinion of the blog authors themselves is limited in blog posts, it is typical for blog posts to be centred on the personal opinions of other women, such as celebrities, politicians, movie actresses, traditional female monarchs and so on. This is shown in Figure 5.11, where the post in double inverted commas is not the opinion of the blog author but that of the female politician, Senator Binta Masi Garba. Another example is shown in Figure 5.12, where a female traditional monarch was quoted saying that she was not a fan of gender equality.

Figure 5.12: Screen Capture from Bella Naija Blog



Overall, while blogs, such as Bella Naija and Miss Petite Nigeria, mostly post stories in filter style, Linda Ikeji, Ladun Liadi, Laila's blog and SDK take a notebook approach, sometimes - publishing posts in a personal style. While this study has established that blog authors who take a notebook approach tend to draw a fine line between blogging about personal issues and other topics (e.g. gender in/equality), there is a need for further study in this area to assess inter-topic blog reportage techniques and the possible ideological traits that define such blogging patterns.

5.2.3 Sample of Blog Posts

As discussed in Chapter 4, 135 blog posts on the rejection of the GEO Bill and President Muhammadu Buhari's remarks about his wife belonging to the kitchen were selected from six Nigerian blogs to form the pool of data for CDA analysis. The blog posts vary in terms of length, with some being single statements of no more than 20 words to others being full-fledged articles comprising over 700 words. In the case of long articles, the blog post would often have a short title summarising the article, followed by a hyperlink (often tagged 'read more') to the main article. The blog posts sampled generally cut across various themes within the context of the discourse on the rejection of the GEO Bill and President Muhammadu Buhari's position on women.

Table 5.1 shows a summary of the major themes of blog posts and the number of comments under each theme.

Table 5.1: Major Themes in Blog Posts

Major themes in blog posts	No. of unique posts	Total posts replicated across sampled blogs
Breaking news of the GEO Bill	2	10
Popular Nigerian women in support of the GEO Bill ¹⁰⁴	9	35
Popular Nigerian women against the GEO Bill	2	9
Muslim religious clerics and other men's reaction to the GEO Bill	3	7
Other discussion topics on the GEO Bill	2	2

¹⁰⁴ Blog posts reflecting the personal opinion of Nigerian women are in grey-toned rows.

Nigerian Senate's response to the public on the GEO Bill	3	15
Aisha Buhari's BBC interview	3	12
President Buhari's response to his wife's BBC interview	3	14
Popular Nigerian women rejecting domestication	4	12
Presidential aids' response to Aisha Buhari's interview	3	7
Women's negative reaction to Aisha Buhari's interview	2	9
Other negative reactions to Aisha Buhari's interview	2	3
Total number of posts	38	135

On the rejection of the GEO Bill, a set of posts reflect the breaking news of the occurrence. Broadly speaking, two types of posts in the study sample introduced the rejection of the GEO Bill: the first explains the key issues addressed in the Bill, providing a summary of Senate deliberations on the Bill and citing key opponents of the Bill. Such posts also emphasise the role of culture and religion as influencing factors in the rejection of the Bill - hence, the idea that it would turn women into lesbians and prostitutes. The second category of posts reflects a screen capture of the Nigerian Senate's tweet on the outcome of deliberations on the GEO Bill. Such posts served as practical evidence, showing the official statement made by the Nigerian Senate on the deliberations.

In addition, some posts focus on the reaction of popular Nigerian women who are in support of the GEO Bill. Posts under this category reflect a tweet by former Nigerian legislator, Oby Ekwesili calling for an improvement in the representation of the National Assembly to enable gender-oriented Bills to succeed. However, the tweet failed to elaborate if the representation sought was gender-based. Other posts feature the reactions of Nigerian female actresses, such as Uche Jumbo, Joke Silva, Tosin Akinbogyo, Stella Damasus, Omotola Jakande and Rita Dominic who argued that female empowerment was not a threat and called on women to bury their differences and support the Bill. Another set of posts capture the initiative by popular musicians, Waje and Omawunmi to sponsor young girls go to school following the rejection of the GEO Bill.

Another theme reflected in the posts is that of popular Nigerian women who are not in support of gender equality. In this regard, posts capture the opinion of Nollywood actress, Funmi Daramola who argued that ‘the man is ahead of the woman in all spheres of life’. Under this theme, posts also reflect the news story of a female traditional monarch, Olori Wuraola, who stated that she was not a fan of gender equality because men and women were not created to be equal.

The posts sampled also reflect the reaction of Muslim religious clerics and other men to the GEO Bill. Such posts depict the opinion of Nigerian Muslim cleric Sheikh Isyaka Rabi'u warning Muslim Lawmakers that they will be condemned as unbelievers if they back the GEO Bill. Other posts reflect the opinion of the sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammad Abubakar who also advised the Senate not to consider the Bill as it has religious implications. Specifically, the Sultan argued that the Bill, which proposes that men and women inherit an equal share of inheritance, violates the Koran. Some posts also reflect the statement made by a Nigerian male On Air Personality called Daddy Freeze claiming that gender equality is an attempt by educated Nigerian women to overthrow men.

Laila's blog also featured a unique question-type post tagged, ‘are men equal to women, what do you understand by 50/50?’ Stella Dimorkokus also captioned a post, ‘What are your thoughts on women belonging to the kitchen?’ These posts allowed for blog readers to provide their opinion on the subject of discussion.

Some posts further reflect on the Nigerian Senate's response following public reaction to the rejection of the GEO Bill. Some of these posts feature the Senate President's speech promising that the GEO Bill would be revisited after amendments were made. Other posts reflect a declaration that the GEO Bill had been re-presented to the Nigerian Senate after amendments were made (these posts, however, do not go into detail on the nature of amendments made to the Bill). Finally, a few posts under this theme report that the Bill had passed the second stage of hearing at the Nigerian Senate and was left to undergo the next two legislative processes of Bill-passing¹⁰⁵.

On the second case study of President Muhammadu Buhari's position on women, some posts focus on Aisha Buhari's BBC interview. Posts under this theme concern the first lady's interview with the BBC where she argued that her husband had lost control of

¹⁰⁵ As discussed in Section 2.3.1, Nigerian Bills have to pass through four legislative processes.

his administration, which had been hijacked by a certain cabal. Other posts are audio clips of Aisha Buhari's interview with the BBC. Posts within this category also comprise articles reacting to Aisha Buhari's BBC interview, such as by former Nigerian legislators Femi Fani Kayode, Reno Omokri and Rueben Abati. The articles draw on occurrences, which insinuate leadership failure within the Buhari government to support Aisha Buhari's claim. Additional posts reflect an article written by Charlie Boy, a Nigerian human rights activist, in support of the first lady's criticism of the President's administration.

Another set of posts reflect President Muhammadu Buhari's response to his wife's interview. Posts in this category relate to the President's press conference in Germany, where he made the remark: 'I don't know which party my wife belongs to, but she belongs to my kitchen and my living room and the other room'. Some posts include a video footage of the occurrence. Posts within this theme also reflect a follow-up interview with the President at Duetsche Welle where he insisted that his wife's job is to look after him.

Other posts are on the opinion of influential Nigerian women who declare that they do not belong to the kitchen. For instance, writer Akudo Abengowe-Adebayo asserts that she would not let go of her dreams because marriage or motherhood happened. In addition, some posts reflect the opinion of Hilda Dokubo, a Nigerian veteran actress, arguing that she does not belong to the kitchen or the other room. Other posts reflect the opinion of the writer Precious Richard-Okon, rejecting the perception of women as domestic slaves. Some posts further reflect a picture of Aisha Buhari taken by a Nigerian journalist, Safaar Jafaar, on the All Progressive Congress campaign trail, arguing that such pictures of Aisha Buhari were not taken in the kitchen or other room.

Posts also reflect the reaction of the President's aids (e.g. Governor Rochas Okorocha and Garba Shehu), claiming that the President's remarks on his wife belonging to the kitchen were taken out of context and that the President made this remark as a joke. Other posts reflect the counter-argument of the Chief Whip of the Nigerian Senate, Senator Rowland Owie, who stated that if a woman does to him what Aisha Buhari did to her husband, she would return to her father's house.

Additional posts reveal negative reactions to Aisha Buhari's interview. For instance, Sheikh Ismail Illyasu's speech at the Friday Jumaat prayers where he requested that Aisha Buhari be arrested over her interview with the BBC, as it was capable of inciting millions of citizens against the government. Other posts reflect the opinion of Senator Binta Masi Garba, a member of the Nigerian Parliament, who argued that her

kitchen role precedes her Senate responsibilities. Finally, some posts focus on the article by the Adamawa League of Women who criticised Aisha Buhari, saying that she violated the Fulani culture of modesty and decorum by speaking against her husband.

The 135 posts sampled reflect the total number of posts replicated across the six blogs under study. In essence, a post on one topic can sometimes be published on several blogs and it is, therefore, recorded according to the number of times it appears on those blogs. This is because although the single blog post replicated on multiple blogs is centred on one subject, the comments that trail the blog posts (on the multiple blogs) are different or unique. A unique post in this regard, reflects a post by a different individual on the same topic or a new/follow-up post on the same topic. For instance, the posts by Nigerian movie actresses Stella Damasus and Rita Dominic condemning the rejection of the GEO Bill reflect two unique posts being the perspectives of two separate individuals, albeit on the same subject. In addition, a follow-up topic on a specific post counts as a unique post. For instance, while the first post made on President Buhari's remarks about his wife belonging to the kitchen would count as a unique post, a follow-up post on the second interview conducted with the President at Duetsche Welle, where he insisted that his wife's job is to look after him, constitutes another unique post. In other words, a unique post also reflects an additional or new content or perspective on a gender in/equality topic on blogs.

The lack of blog author personal opinion can be seen throughout the sample of 135 posts, where blog authors' personal thoughts, feelings or experiences are not evident. However, as seen in Table 5.1 as well as in Figures 5.11 and 5.12, blog authors tend to report the opinions of influential Nigerian women in their blog posts (this is highlighted by the grey-toned table rows). As such, approximately 40 per cent¹⁰⁶ of the sample of 135 blog posts reflect the personal opinions of Nigerian women, such as politicians, movie actresses, musicians, a traditional monarch and so on. Most of these influential women tend to declare their support for gender equality issues. However, as discussed in the next chapter, blog users tend to share the perception that female politicians often avoid gender in/equality issues. This relates to the blog posts sampled, where most of the support for

¹⁰⁶ As presented in Table 5.1, 65 blogposts (which translates to 17 unique blog posts) reflect the personal opinion of Nigerian women. Out of such 17 unique posts, 7 posts were featured in the study's analysis. As stated in Section 4.2, the lack of blog author opinion in the analysis of online content in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 is however, complimented by the interview of blog authors (in Chapter 9), which provides insight on the attitudes and beliefs of blog authors as it relates to the gender in/equality.

gender equality by popular women comes from those in the entertainment industry (which reflects the private sector) as opposed to those with primary legislative powers. This also relates to Ajayi's (2007) critique of Nigerian female politicians as not challenging gender discrimination within the political realm. Table 5.2 shows the specific blog posts out of the 135 sampled that reflect the personal opinion of Nigerian women.

Table 5.2: Blog Themes on the Personal Opinion of Nigerian Women

Major blog post themes on women's personal opinion	No. of unique posts	Total posts replicated across sampled blogs
Popular Nigerian women in support of the GEO Bill	9	35
Popular Nigerian women against the GEO Bill	2	9
Popular Nigerian women rejecting domestication	4	12
Women's negative reaction to Aisha Buhari's interview	2	9
Total number of posts	17	65

As discussed in Chapter 4 (section 4.2), 135 blogposts and 403 comments were selected through total sampling and textual analysis¹⁰⁷ respectively. As seen in table 5.2, out of the 135 posts, only 65 reflect the personal opinion of Nigerian women on gender equality, which makes them eligible for CDA. However, the total 135 blogposts were recorded in the study sample based on the number of times they appeared across the six blogs studied. For instance, a single news story on a popular Nigerian actresses' opinion on gender equality can be reported on Linda Ikeji, Bella Naija and SDK blogs. This means that the post is recorded as '3 posts' because it embodies a unique trail of comments that emanate from the three individual blogs. However, within the context of CDA, the post counts as (one) unique post because although replicated across three different blogs, the content to be analysed in the post is on the same/one subject. As such, as represented in Table 5.2, out of 135 blogposts (hence, 38 unique blogposts), 65 blogposts (which translates to 17

¹⁰⁷ As discussed in Chapter 4, textual analysis was applied to the first three comments of the 135 posts sampled and those that met the criteria for analysis were selected to form the pool of data sample. The decision to select 'three' comments per blogpost was in consideration that an approximate number of 400 comments and 17 unique blogposts, would be adequate for analysis.

unique blogposts) reflect the personal opinion of Nigerian women. From these 17 unique blogposts that focus on the personal opinion of Nigerian women, 7 unique blogposts were featured in the thesis. The 7 unique blogposts were featured in the thesis alongside 63 comments selected from a sample of textually analysed 405 comments (see Chapter 4) that formed part of the study sample. As such, the specific 63 comments and 7 unique blogposts that featured in the thesis were those that I considered as more insightful and/or as providing a fresh or alternative perspective on a given gender in/equality discussion¹⁰⁸. This enabled a multi-dimensional CDA of the key themes within the 17 unique posts and 405 comments sampled, tackling the study's aims¹⁰⁹.

Overall, the 135 blog posts sampled reflect the gender in/equality-related tensions inherent in the Nigerian polity, which is represented in the comment section of blog posts - tensions reflective of religion, culture, politics and broadly speaking, inter/intra gender ideological differences. Having discussed the themes and discursive attributes of the sampled blogposts, the next section provides a background on the communicative and interactive nature of blog comments, which in addition to the mapping of the sampled blogposts, helps to understand the blogging practices of Nigerian women.

5.2.4 Blog Comments

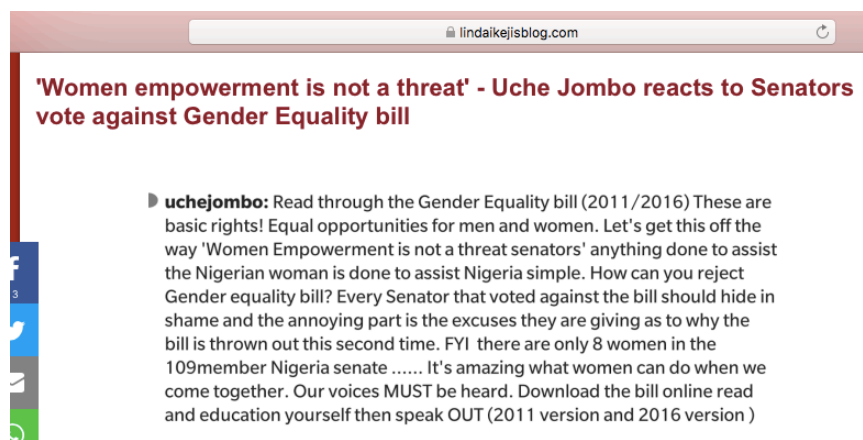
Blog comments are mostly arranged in reverse chronological order with the most recent positioned at the top of the comment section. Blog readers typically create profile accounts, which allow them to upload a photo accompanied by other personal information such as gender, nationality, location, email address, as well as work history. However, as discussed in Section 4.2, on SDK blog, users can be more selective about the information they disclose. For instance, commenters can choose whether to have a username or be identified as 'anonymous' as seen in Figure 5.14. Nevertheless, majority of commenters both on SDK and other blogs tend to reveal their identity by having a username, sometimes using a using a profile photo, sharing their gender status, nationality, and other details. In addition, on Bella Naija, blog, users can add other blog readers to their

¹⁰⁸ A limitation in this study is that it takes a qualitative approach, which involved subjective judgements in the sampling process.

¹⁰⁹ It was possible for the study's aims to be tackled because the comments and posts were sampled through forms of purposive sampling in reference to the research questions of study.

friendship circle and are able to receive notifications on comments made by their friends on blogs. As stated earlier in this chapter, Alexa.com's (2018) statistics show that 75% of the blog visitors across the six blogs sampled are women. The age range of blog visitors is mostly from 18 to 45 and blog users typically possess a higher education qualification (see Appendix A for further statistics). In addition, it is typical for blog readers to show familiarity of the blog authors' identity by implicating them in blog comments. This can be seen from a few comments on a post reflecting the opinion of a Nigerian actress, Uche Jumbo on gender equality, which was published on Linda Ikeji blog:

Figure 5.13: Screen Capture from Linda Ikeji Blog



Some comments under this posts state:

LB: Linda, I think you wrote the reply.

PD: Linda, stupid feminist, I know this is coming from you.

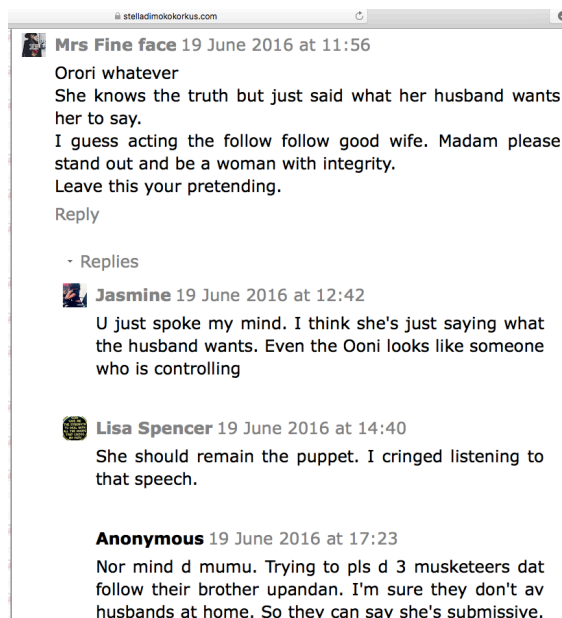
DM: Linda, why didn't you mention Uche Jumbo's name? Are you scared of her or is it because she is one of your friends?

The blog readers identify with the author's identity which they sometimes fail to isolate from the stories the blog author publishes. In addition, discussions mostly seem to take place between blog readers but less between blog authors and readers. Even where blog readers implicate blog authors in their comments, there is hardly any reply from the blog authors as seen across the six blogs studied. This trend resonates with Hoffmann's (2012, p. 199) study of Ausburg Blog Corpus, which revealed that dialogue or interaction

between blog authors and readers is not common on blogs. However, it is evident that even though there is rarely communicative exchange between blog authors and readers on blogs, as discussed, earlier, blog authors, such as Linda Ikeji, seem to have offline meetings with dedicated blog readers.

As such, while a majority of blog comments seem to be direct responses to blog author posts, dialogue or discussions among blog readers is an evident characteristic of Nigerian female blogs. To facilitate discussion, most blogs have a ‘reply’ option under each comment that allows blog readers to comment on other users’ comments. An example of this can be seen from Figure 5.14.

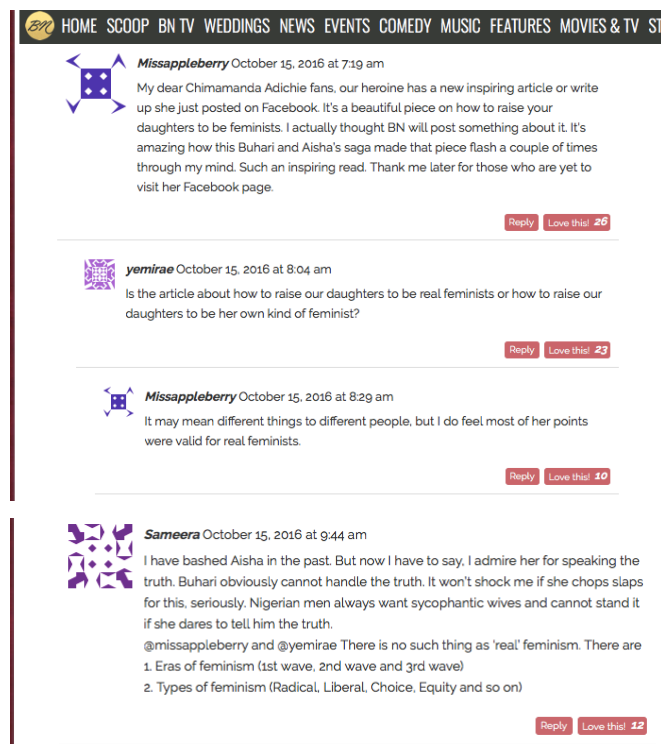
Figure 5.14: Screen Capture from SDK Blog¹¹⁰



Hence, Jasmine, Lisa Spencer, and Anonymous’ comments are responses to Mrs Fine face’s comment and their comments are, therefore, positioned under Mrs Fine face’s comment. Other blog users simply use the ‘@’ symbol to make reference to a specific commenter or to engage them in dialogue. Figure 5.15, which is a screen capture of the Bella Naija blog, reflects a discussion among blog readers who respond to the blog post on President Buhari’s remarks on his wife belonging to the kitchen:

¹¹⁰ The screen capture also provides an example of comments (on the rejection of the GEO Bill) outside those sampled in this study.

Figure 5.15: Screen Capture from Bella Naija Blog



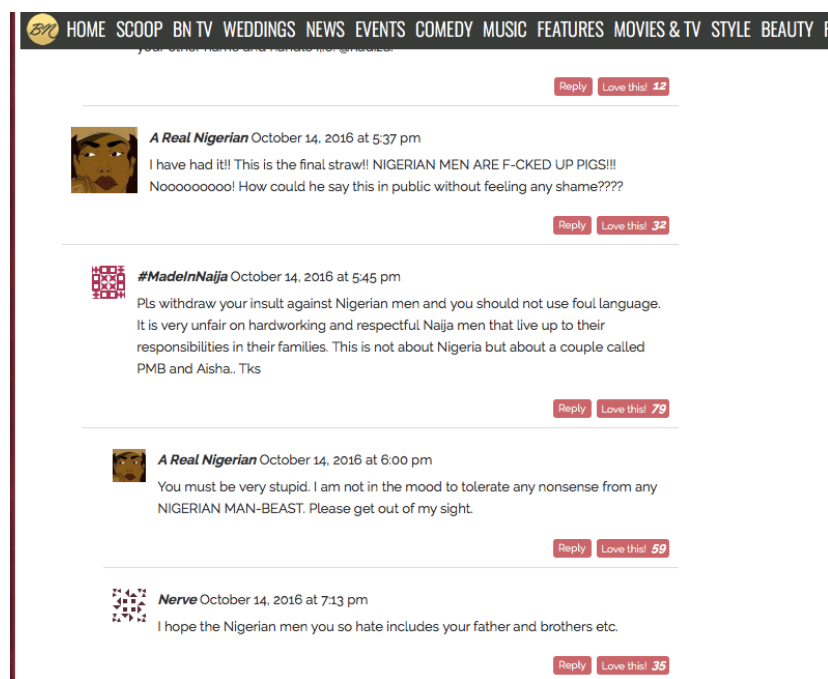
In this example, while a discussion about President Buhari's remark on his wife belonging to the kitchen led to a discussion on feminism, it is interesting to see how Nigerian blog users make sense of the term 'feminism', which the study revisits in Chapter 9. Hedging is also witnessed in Sameera's comment, where the writer tries to clarify the definition of feminism to Missappleberry and Yemirae¹¹¹. In addition, because Sameera comments outside Missappleberry's reply section to make reference to the conversation about feminism, she uses the @symbol to identify the discussants. This excerpt also shows that blog discussions occasionally veer off the focus of the blog post, which is on President Buhari's remarks on his wife belonging to the kitchen. However, while, in this context, the discussion still focused on a gender-related issue, that is, feminism, in other cases, few commenters can be seen focusing on totally unrelated matters, such as advertising commercial products or seeking financial aid. Nevertheless, a majority of comments tend to relate to the subject matter of the blog post.

Overall, the sampled comments show that Nigerian female blog forums are interactive and reflect virtual communities where there is dialogue between members of a discussion group. Particularly, Missappleberry's comments reveal that the comment

¹¹¹ This exemplifies the discourses on African feminism discussed in Chapter 2.

section of blogs can provide a productive space from which to ‘build community’ through her reference of Chimamanda Adichie’s ‘fans’ whom Missappleberry believes occupy the same discursive space (Keller, 2012). In addition, the nature of discussions in blog comments varies; some are exchanges between no more than two people, while others are long conversation threads between 5-8 people. However, such dialogue on blogs is also often characterised by forms of disagreement as seen from Figure 5.16 below:

Figure 5.16: Screen Capture from Bella Naija Blog¹¹²



The screen capture shows blog users reacting to President Buhari’s remarks about his wife belonging to the kitchen on Bella Naija blog. It depicts the tensions evident in blog comments, aligning with the belief that the comment section of blogs sometimes operates as a field of controversy (Kaiser, 2017). These tensions and disagreements do not only occur between women, but sometimes between men and women, since men share the same discursive space. Considering that the topic of discussion is gender in/equality, men often see the need to voice their opinion on gender issues. As evident from the wider comments on gender in/equality on blogs, most men seem to be resistant to the notion of gender in/equality but there are occasional comments from men supporting women’s

¹¹² The comments in the screen capture provide an example of comments (on President Muhammadu Buhari’s position on women) outside the study sample.

rights. Their support mostly stems from redistributive standpoints, citing the need for girls to be encouraged to go to school or for women to be empowered socio-economically. However, while it may be considered the norm in Nigeria for tensions to exist between men and women in relation to gender in/equality topics¹¹³, this study focuses solely on a sample of women's blog comments to interrogate the preconceived homogeneity of women as a marginalised group.

5.2.5 The Language Structure of Blog Comments

Understanding the language structure of blog comments is important as it helps to contextualise the unique communicative practices peculiar to Nigerian women online, as well as to enhance the understanding of meaning-making practices unravelled through the socio-linguistic analysis of blog discourse undertaken in Chapter 7.

Studies on the language of computer-mediated communication have argued that this type of writing is less complex and lacks coherence in comparison to standard written English (Herring, 2001). The comments on Nigerian female blogs can be broadly categorised into two; some comments are reflective of grammatical and punctuation issues, while others reflect features of standard British-American English, mostly with syntactic patterns. This is not surprising since Alexa.com (2018) profiles the average visitor on Nigerian female blogs to possess a University degree or some form of Higher National Diploma¹¹⁴. Similarly, Chiluwa's (2012, p.226) study on Nigerian participants online shows that communication reflects various levels of English proficiency, and that 'language variations are much more based on linguistic choices of the people rather than on English proficiency'.

Hence, the language in blog comments is diverse, reflective of obscenity and slang, emoticons (e.g. smiley face, angry face, and so on), and shorthand (e.g. 'laugh out loud' written as 'lol', 'you' replaced with 'u', 'oh my God' abbreviated as 'OMG', and so on). In general, the tone of the language structure across all six blogs is less formal or complex reflecting what Crystal (2006, p. 244) describes as lying 'uneasily between spoken and written language'. Chiluwa (2012, p.227) adds that language use on 'the Nigerian web is reflective of ethnic and national identity which includes culture-specific words and names and verbal genres that are particularly Nigerian'. The text on the six

¹¹³ For instance, the GEO Bill was rejected by a male dominated Senate, where Senate deliberations featured key male legislators openly rejecting the Bill.

¹¹⁴ See additional information on blog user profile in Appendix A.

blogs under study¹¹⁵ reflects the cultural diversity of Nigeria in the occasional use of cultural slangs that are shared across cultures (e.g. ‘tufia’ or ‘tufiakwa’, means ‘abomination’, ‘Oya’, means ‘okay’, ‘Odi n mma’ means ‘thank you’ and ‘mbanu’, means ‘no’, etcetera.) In addition, being a multi-lingual speech community with over 400 languages, code switching, particularly, between standard and broken English is common in blog comments. This is because unlike Standard English, broken English is understood across diverse cultures and classes of the Nigerian society. Hence, blog readers’ use of codes switching probably implies the awareness of communicating with a diverse range of Nigerians and the need to be understood widely across cultures. An example of code switching can be seen in Figure 5.17.

Figure 5.17: Screen Capture from SDK Blog

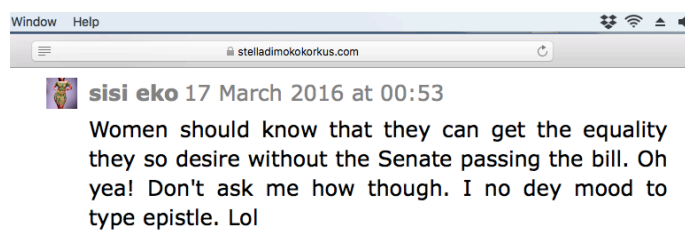
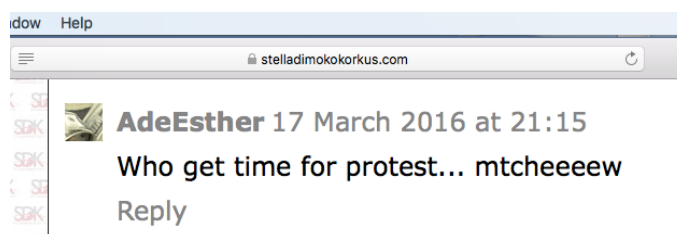


Figure 5.18: Screen Capture from SDK Blog



Hence, while sisi eko’s comment commences in English, it ends with the sentence, ‘I no dey mood to type epistle’, which means ‘I am not in the mood type an epistle’. AdeEsther’s comment as seen from figure 5.18, is however, completely written in broken English. The commenter states: ‘who get time for protest...mtcheeeew’, which means ‘who has time for protest’. The writer also ends with a form of unconventional orthography, ‘mtcheeeew’. This is a non-language sound made by ‘kissing the teeth’ popularly used in Africa to convey disgust, shame or anger. Overall, although code

¹¹⁵ I present these blogs and the criteria for their selection in Section 4.2.

switching is quite evident in the wider blog comments on Nigerian female blogs, there are occasional commenters who write purely in broken English.

5.2.6 Sample of Blog Comments

Overall, the sampled comments mirror the major themes of the blogposts highlighted in Table 5.1 having emanated from each of the 135 posts sampled (see section 4.2). This means that the comments sampled effectively reflect the broader topics in relation to the case studies across the six blogs studied.

Having established in Section 5.2.4 that most commenters across the six blogs sampled identify as women, comments sampled through textual analysis selected the opinion of individuals who identify as women. As stated in Section 4.2.3, the identity of blog commenters was ascertained through profile images/names, the statement of gender status in profile information, and from the content of blog discourse. As discussed in Chapter 4, 405 comments were selected through textual analysis from the 135 posts sampled. Owing to the nature of textual analysis conducted, which involved sampling three comments from every blog post, the order of the comments sampled is quite diverse. In other words, the process of comment selection, which considered how a specific comment meets the aims of the study, means that the comments in the study sample stem from various positions within the order of comments on blog posts. Considering that comments on all the blogs sampled are arranged in reverse chronological order, and my selection procedure for textual analysis started from the latest comments, some of the comments sampled were the latest published on blogs, while others reflect older comments. Some consecutive posts, such as those comprising discussions between two or more persons were also selected. The longest thread of dialogue in the study sample comprises three comments. While there are longer threads of discussion comments in the wider comments on blogs, I found that they rarely provided content that met study's objectives (see procedure for textual analysis in Chapter 4). As such, while most of the comments sampled were direct responses to blog posts (owing to their predominance on blogs), there were a few clusters of discussions, comprising two or more commenters, which formed part of the study sample. Some of these discussions between multiple commenters are reflected in 'C10 and C11' in Chapter 6 and in Chapter 8: 'C44 and 45', 'C49, 50 and 51', and 'C61, 62 and 63'. The length of individual comments in the study sample also vary, shorter comments are around 10 words while longer comments are over 150 words. This relates to the broader length of comments on blogs, although certain

comments in the wider blog discourses might be fairly longer, comprising over 200 words. The comment sample also reflects the broader language tone of Nigerian female blogs, which involve the use of slang, emoticons, shorthand and code-switching. Some examples can be seen from C13 in Chapter 6, C22, C28, C36 in Chapter 7, and C48 and C49 in Chapter 8.

As discussed in Section 4.2, the sampled comments cover broad themes, such as ‘the subjects of gender discrimination’ and ‘alternative discourses on in/equality’. In this regard, although blog comments were positioned under varying blog post themes, the comment sample comprises data that reflects various topics and arguments in relation to gender discrimination in Nigeria. In relation to topics of gender inequality, blog comments featured topics, such as socio-economic inequality, educational disparity, political misrepresentation, domestic violence, widowhood practices, rape, women’s inheritance, child-marriage and girl kidnapping, sexual abuse and harassment, and women’s freedom of movement. In addition, it is often common for commenters to pit different forms of gender discrimination against each other allowing the analysis of the role of ideological practices in the representation of gender discrimination on blogs. Alternatively, sampled comments can be broadly grouped into three: those in support of gender equality, those not in support of gender equality and those that are selective in supporting some forms of gender equality and not others. This categorisation is important as it takes into cognisance, tensions and disagreements, which are defining traits of gender discourses as evident from Nigerian female blogs.

5.3 Conclusion

Following an overview of blogosphere, this chapter provided insight into the main format and layout characteristics, the language used, the textual and interpersonal relations established, as well as the interactive potential of the Nigerian female blogosphere. Key discussions in the chapter showed that, although Nigerian female blogs report on general topics, this does not seem to affect the visibility or discursive impact of gender-related topics, which often attract a wide range of comments. In addition, there is limited discussion between blog authors and readers but more dialogue is witnessed in blog reader comments. This allows Nigerian female blogs to qualify as some sort of virtual communities where discussions exist between members of a group. Nigerian female blogs also reflect filter and notebook styles, which contrasts personal blogs that women globally are associated with (Keller, 2012). This divergent trend provides an

interesting object of investigation for this research and could possibly explain why the Nigerian female blogosphere is a viable platform for discourses centred on gender in/equality. In essence, it provides a forum for discussion on ‘general topics’ that affect ‘public livelihood’, as opposed to personal issues or experiences.

While the discussion of the chapter draws attention to the fine line between reporting about personal topics and other issues on Nigerian female blogs, there is a need for additional research to analyse this trend in relation to the diverse topics published on blogs. In addition, as stated in the introduction of the thesis, although male commenters make up part of the population of the Nigerian blogosphere, I chose to focus on women’s blog discourses to unravel their meaning-making practices in the Nigerian context where such discourses are not common. This also deviates from the tendency to study gender inequality as an inter-gender war, which emphasises power relations mechanisms without considering how the ideological practices of the conceived marginalised group reinforces their subjugation.

In conclusion, Table 5.1 shows that the sampled comments mirror the major themes of the blog posts having emanated from each of the 135 posts sampled¹¹⁶. As such, commenters mostly stay on focus as regard the subject in the blog post. It is worth noting that although, the adoption of textual analysis as a sampling technique allowed the selection of comments that met the study’s aims, this was done in a flexible manner to allow the extraction of data that provided a holistic perspective of the meaning making practices of Nigerian female bloggers in relation to gender equality. However, comments analysed in the study do not provide an exhaustive account of the broader comments on the 135 posts sampled. Having taken a qualitative approach, this study has compromised the size of data sample for depth of investigation. Future researchers can draw upon the theoretical, methodological and practical/policy contributions of my study, while expanding on the comment sample and case studies on gender inequality in order to provide a larger-scale analysis.

Finally, having provided an overview of the communicative elements of blogs, the next chapter analyses the patterns of communication in blog posts and comments as it relates to gender in/equality topics.

¹¹⁶ See figures 5.14, 5.15 and 5.16 for examples of some comments that were not sampled but focus on the case studies.

CHAPTER 6: REDISTRIBUTION AND RECOGNITION IN BLOG DISCOURSE

This chapter analyses blog posts and comments to address RQ1a focusing on how the patterns and themes of discussions reveal connections between various subjects of gender discrimination. Drawing on Fraser's works, such as 'social justice in an age of identity politics: redistribution, recognition, and participation' (1996) and Fraser and Honneth's (2003), 'redistribution or recognition – a political philosophical exchange', I highlight the relationship between two forms of inequality - redistribution and recognition¹¹⁷ - which are often treated separately in feminism and other social movements. Although Fraser argues that very little research has been done in this area, she maintains that 'only a fight that combines the two forms of injustice would allow for the attainment of the right kind of justice, 'that guarantees each subject an equal participation in public life'¹¹⁸ (Fraser and Honneth, 2003, p.36). While I agree with Fraser's position that the fight for gender equality by Nigerian women should be such that combines the fight for both redistribution and recognition, I argue that in the case of Nigeria, such a struggle should commence from the point of redistribution. As will be discussed later in this chapter, this is because of the tendency for a fight against economic or political marginalisation to be considered valid on the grounds of pertaining to survival and livelihood.

Having retrieved online data through the use of textual analysis, this chapter presents their CDA. The analysis process involved a comprehensive reading and reflection on the posts and comments to look out for traits and patterns that would allow the effective use of CDA in order to answer the relevant research question. In the online data analysis presented in Chapters 6-8, the posts are numbered starting from P1, in this chapter, and ending with P7, in Chapter 8. The comments also start from C1, in this chapter, and end with C63, in Chapter 8. Hence, posts are indicated by the letter 'P' and comments by the letter 'C'¹¹⁹. It is important to note that the presentation of the posts and comments as P1 and C1 from Chapters 6-8 is more in relation to their ordering in the

¹¹⁷ Fraser (1996) also theorises representation as the third form of injustice, which I tackle in Chapter 8.

¹¹⁸ Namely the ideal of "participatory parity". While redistribution secures the objective condition of such an ideal, recognition is said to safeguard its intersubjective condition.

¹¹⁹ It is useful to clarify that in this study, 'P' and 'C' sometimes refer to the actual posts and comments, as well as to the women producing these comments or posts.

thesis rather than their position within the data sample. However, where comments in the analysis reflect a discussion between two or more commenters (e.g. ‘C10 and C11’ in Chapter 6 and in Chapter 8: ‘C44 and 45’, ‘C49, 50 and 51’, and ‘C61, 62 and 63’), this is made clear (e.g. see Sections 5.1.2, 7.2, 7.3.1 and 7.4). Overall, the posts and comments analysed covered the key topics of the entire sample of 135 posts and 405 comments sampled¹²⁰, which enabled me to address the research questions of study. It is important to note that some of the comments overlapped in content. In this regard, the posts that were very closely related were combined in the analysis and considered as one unit of data.

6. 1 CDA of Blog Discourse

My analysis is divided into three topics: ‘policy-making and cultural change’, ‘socioeconomic status, education, and cultural roles’, and ‘policy-making and the cultural position of the girl-child’, which reflect the three broad areas where discussions on cultural roles are associated with forms of economic redistribution in blog discourses.

In line with Fraser’s (1996) broad definition of redistribution and recognition, it is important to note that redistribution encompasses broader class politics in this study. It involves areas of socioeconomic reforms such as economic equality, policy-making and political participation in terms of real world politics, equality in education, and health-related forms of equality. It reflects issues that are perceived to threaten the survival and livelihood of women, such as domestic violence, widowhood maltreatment, girl kidnapping and child-marriage practices. Similarly, the politics of recognition involves areas of the unjust devaluation of identities, cultural domination and cultural disrespect exemplified by issues such as the domestication of women, objectification of women, sexualisation of female identities, child marriage, and so on. In this regard, child marriage often reflects a redistributive right where it is positioned as a threat to women’s survival as well as a cultural practice where it is associated with certain religious practices. This illustrates that some forms of inequality can intersect between cultural (recognition) and economic (redistribution) issues.

It is, therefore, important to note that redistribution (hence, the economy) as discussed in the study (and in this chapter specifically), reflects the topics and diverse forms of gender discrimination discussed by blog authors and users. Hence, as stated

¹²⁰ See Chapter 4.

above, economic issues also encompass policy-making and political misrepresentation discussed on blogs, as these issues have a bearing on women's economic well-being (and survival). However, in Chapter 8, I tackle the political dimension (therefore, misrepresentation) of gender inequality in isolation, which aligns with Fraser's (2008) concept of misframing. In this regard, I interrogate the participation of blog actors, as well as their discursive representation on gender discrimination. This means that the political dimension of gender inequality is reflected in two forms in this study: (a) as a gender discrimination topic that is classified as 'economic', hence, highlighting areas of political misrepresentation or lack of policy implementation in real-world politics, and (b) as reflecting the participation of blog actors in discourse and their discursive representation of gender discrimination topics.

6.1.1 Policy-Making and Cultural Change

Blog posts and comments depict how political roles and policy-making are implicated in discourses related to President Buhari's remark about his wife belonging to the kitchen.¹²¹ For instance:

C1: Where is Dabiri, Amina Mohammed, Adeosun, Women Affairs Minister - Alhassan—where is She? They should have immediately come out to condemn their boss. It is telling that even Toyin Saraki and Remi Tinubu etc. have all been silent. What about the female Senator that proposed the Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill¹²²? Okay fine, no one wants to rock the boat, after all, jobs are hard to find.

C1 calls on women in political and other influential positions to respond to President Buhari's remark, such as: the Minister for Finance, Kemi Adeosun; the House of Representatives member representing Ikorodu Constituency, Abike Dabiri; the Deputy Secretary-General of the UN, Amina Mohammed; the Minister for Women Affairs, Aisha Alhassan; the Health Care Philanthropist and Founder, Well-being for Africa, Toyin Saraki; and the Senator of Lagos Central Senatorial Zone, Remi, Tinubu. By so doing, C1 implies that the fight against women's domestication should be championed by

¹²¹ As discussed in Section 2.6.

¹²² The blog reader refers to Senator Biodun Olujimi who introduced the GEO Bill to the Nigerian House of Assembly.

women in power. C1, therefore, attributes the silence of women in power to such cultural issues as having an economic objective: ‘after all jobs are hard to find’. This implies the tendency for women in positions of power/influence to prioritise their economic statuses over cultural change.

Similarly, C2 calls for more women in positions of power by emphasising the lack of effectiveness shown by female politicians serving in the Buhari administration:

C2: Our first problem is that we lack enough females in positions of power in this country. The average Nigerian man does not believe in gender equality so let us not act surprised that the Bill was thrown out. At least by criticising her husband in the public, Aisha Buhari has shown some integrity which a lot of female politicians lack.

C2 suggests that by speaking openly about governance-related issues, women are able to build integrity, which allows them to transcend traditional roles that confine them as sex objects. Political and economic misdistribution, exemplified by the lack of enough ‘females in positions of power’ and the ‘rejection of the GEO Bill’¹²³ is related to the inability of cultural roles to be changed. C2 cites an example with Aisha Buhari being a woman who criticised her husband’s administrative style¹²⁴. However, it is interesting to see that Aisha Buhari’s critique of her husband, although regarded laudable by many women, focused on general political issues as opposed to those centred on women or cultural matters. Aisha Buhari is, therefore, one among other Nigerian women who have publicly criticised the government on political and economic issues. Among these women are Obiageli Ekwesili, who was at the forefront of the Bring Back Our Girls Campaign, and put immense pressure on the government to act and Senator Biodun Olujimi, who by introducing the GEO Bill to the Nigerian Senate, faced resistance from other legislators. Also, while C1 and C2 are reactions to posts published on Nigerian female blogs between the 15th and 16th of October 2016, on the 20th of October 2016, Nigerian female blogs posted new stories about a remark made by Senator Binta Masi Garba – the Senator representing Adamawa North Constituency. While making a statement on the Senate

¹²³ Discussed in Section 2.6.

¹²⁴ Discussed in Section 2.6.

floor of the National Assembly, Senator Masi Garba made reference to President Buhari's remark on his wife belonging to the kitchen by saying:

P1: My primary constituency is to be in the kitchen before even being in the Senate as a woman. And I am even proud to be in the kitchen and even in the other room.

A blog reader responded:

C3: Dear Ma, if your primary constituency is your kitchen even before the Senate then you have absolutely no business representing people at the Senate. They elected you to make their views your primary responsibility at the Senate. If the kitchen remains your primary responsibility, then you are failing your constituents and as such should resign and leave the floor for some other more dedicated person. Madam, you are the problem we have in the fight for feminism, when the opportunity is given for women to show themselves strong, people like you undermine that strength by saying your home affairs supersede public office. O di mma, oya¹²⁵ come out of public office and keep cooking.

Here, we see different perspectives on the hierarchical order of cultural and political or economic roles. For P1, her role in the kitchen is primary, while her role in the Senate is secondary. Looking at the wording of P1's statement, she says that being in the kitchen precedes being in the Senate as a 'woman'. By emphasising her gender, she highlights gender difference as defined from a cultural perspective that is saddled with cultural roles and other expectations. Hence, P1 seems to view her position in the Nigerian Senate as a privilege (considering that the Senate consists of only eight women and over a hundred men), therefore, the need to appeal to a male-dominated legislature. In addition, C3, in response to P1, states 'when women are given the opportunity to show themselves strong' and highlights the outlook of women as the weaker sex by the male folk and the need to prove otherwise. Therefore, C3 suggests that women who hold public office should be only those that are willing to make their domestic (cultural) roles secondary to their political responsibilities. Failing to abide by the structure of this hierarchy is perceived as a sign of weakness ('inability to show oneself as strong'). Hence, while the

¹²⁵ 'O di mma' means thank you in Igbo language, a predominant South-Eastern tribe in Nigeria, 'oya' means 'alright' in broken English'.

public office is seen as a position of power and influence, cultural roles are projected as a threat to the 'proper' execution of public roles. This is reflective of the primary discourse of the second wave feminism which considered women's roles as housewives as negatively affecting their lives and reinforcing gender inequality. Within this context, 'domesticity is associated with immobility and stasis, and against the adventurous spirit of modernity' (Hollows, 2006, p. 110).

Similarly, blog readers such as C4 argue that women in power feel obliged to advocate for the preservation of cultural roles in order to be rewarded by the male folk:

C4. The funny thing about these influential Nigerian women who like to announce to the public how much they love the kitchen bla bla bla is that some of them are lying. They probably don't set foot in their kitchen because they have servants doing all the work for them, the most they do is instruct them on what to cook. So why the need to tell lies in public? Of cos to pander to a patriarchal society that only rewards women who are seen as subservient and "virtuous".

C4 draws attention to the fact that women in politics feel the need to develop publicly the perception that they are inclined to domestic roles in order to secure their economic position. Hence, it does not matter whether a woman carries out her domestic responsibilities in person, or not, but projecting the image that she does (particularly in person) in the fashion of 'gendered labour'¹²⁶ is important in boosting her political image, thereby maintaining her economic status. In essence, cultural roles carried out 'indirectly' (i.e. by giving out instructions to domestic servants) as a form of 'gendered identity'¹²⁷ do not qualify as executing domestic roles in the public eye. In addition, the relationship between policy-making and cultural change is visible in discourses that relate president Buhari's remark on his wife belonging to the kitchen to the rejection of the GEO Bill. For instance:

C5. It is fair to conclude that Mr Buhari the Nigerian leader does not respect his wife by publicly putting her in her place, the kitchen and bedroom. No wonder

¹²⁶ Representing women carrying out labour-type domestic chores, such as cooking, cleaning and child-rearing.

¹²⁷ Reflecting the housewife figure that is a feisty character and can afford lavish lifestyles, housemaids, and so on.

the Nigerian legislatures were having a hard time passing the gender equality bill. A Bill that will protect a widow from being thrown out by her in-laws is rejected. Nigeria, we hail thee!

C6. That is why you all can't pass a gender equality bill. That is why you threw the bill out on the premise 'it will encourage women to be prostitutes and lesbians.' This is not BANTER! It's this kind of sentiments that puts women in social and cultural prisons.

C5 and C6 show that President Buhari's remark becomes secondary in relation to the possible effect of his perception on women's subjugation in Nigeria. Hence, the President's enactment of his (political) power (in this case, being able to define his wife by cultural roles on such a global platform) is not limited to political decision-making and directly restricting the rights of women, but also, and possibly more important, 'justifies and legitimises such acts' of inequality 'through the manipulation of public opinion' (van Dijk, 1993, p. 268). Hence, the President's cultural perception of women sends a message that has the potential to influence the outlook of a male dominated Senate on issues related to gender equality. In addition, C5 draws on one of the Bill's objectives; ensuring property ownership for women to show the (redistributive) significance of the Bill as opposed to the perception that it seeks to turn women into prostitutes and lesbians (cultural change) as explicated by C6.

6.1.2 Socioeconomic Status, Education, and Cultural Roles

The analysis of blog posts and comments also showed the existence of a relationship between socioeconomic status and the execution of cultural roles. For example, a female blog reader commenting on President Buhari's remark on his wife belonging to the kitchen writes:

C7. Traditional cultures require women to belong to the kitchen and the other room though. Women are property to their husbands.... If women agree for men to provide for them financially, I don't believe men will have any problems with them.

Blog readers such as C7 indicate that a significant issue in the struggle against gender inequality is related to economic independence. In this regard, traditional African culture reinforces patriarchal dominance where women are regarded as ‘properties’, and therefore, economically marginalised. Hence, the GEO Bill, which seeks to establish women’s freedom of movement and economic activity directly impacts on cultural practices that treat women as domestic objects. While C7 relates female domestication to the issue of economic independence, C8 takes a selective approach and distinguishes the fight for economic equality from that of cultural change.

C8. I only support equality in some areas, basically, in areas like employment, but I accept belonging to the kitchen because I am an African woman.

It is interesting that C8 alienates cultural roles from economic ones by endorsing a selective support for gender equality. C8, therefore, focuses on the aspects of gender inequality (e.g. employment) she feels are more credible. In addition, this position about economic inequality as a more credible form of injustice in comparison to areas of cultural disregard for women relates to the neo-liberal discourse of post-feminism articulated by Lazar (2007). According to this discourse, as long as (redistributive) ‘equality indicators (such as rights to educational access, labour force participation and property ownership) have been achieved by women’, feminism is believed to have lived out ‘its purpose and ceases to be of relevance’ (Lazar, 2007, p.4). This position relates to the tendency to prioritise redistributive injustices over the cultural devaluation of women on the basis that they (redistributive injustices) concern ‘more important issues’ as seen in the discourses of Nigerian female blog readers as well as of policy-makers (e.g. P1). A Nigerian Traditional Queen further responding to the rejection of the GEO Bill states:

P2. I am not a fan of gender equality because we can't be equal. We can't be men. We have our own role to play, a very pivotal one.... Everyone is beginning to dance, what a man can do a woman can do better! I cannot go to my husband and say your majesty; can I wear your crown and hold your staff? No, because he is the king and I am the queen and while he has his role to play, I have mine.... Women are beginning to take roles that are not theirs and marriages are beginning to break up because of this gender equality thing...

Here the Queen interprets gender equality in relation to the GEO Bill as being the ‘same as men’, where women are on a mission to take over culturally assigned roles that belong to men. This perspective is shared by other Nigerian women on blogs, as discussed in the context of divergent discourses in Chapter 7. Hence, the Bill’s focus on equality of sexes which implies ‘equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for both men and women’ seems not to be understood by many women (Billing, 2013). The Queen similarly interprets the Bill from a marriage perspective as opposed to having the potential to affect young girls or single women’s daily lives. By so doing, the Queen suggests that policy change (through the GEO Bill) is a risk to the cultural institution of marriage. Consequently, a blog reader responds to the Queen:

C9. I am 20 years old and I have experienced what this gender inequality is. A few years ago, I applied for a job and I wasn't called back, it was weird. I confronted one of my friends working in the same company... she confirmed from the HR department that I was qualified but I won't be employed because I am a female... I was very upset but I took it as one of those things.

For C9, the severity of gender inequality can be explained narrating a story about the economic marginalisation she faced on the basis of her gender. This shows a case of the cultural devaluation of gender identity being the premise from where C9 suffers economic misdistribution. Therefore, despite being ‘qualified’, she was turned down from the job on the basis of being female. This raises questions about the perception among African scholars that ‘education’ is the sole liberator of women from patriarchal dominance (e.g. Holmarsdottir, Nomlomo, Farag, and Desai, 2012; Male and Wodon, 2018). C9’s experience reveals an institutional bias that is born out of cultural disregard for women and the need for additional tactics in the fight against gender inequality. This approach, as would be discussed later in this chapter, could be one that targets both inequalities of redistribution and recognition (Fraser, 1996). Other blog readers discussing President Buhari’s remark about his wife belonging to the kitchen raise similar concerns that relate education to cultural change:

C10. His wife belongs to the kitchen yet he sent her to school to obtain an MSc?

C11. Lol. So you don't know they (men) can send you to school to make them look good but still not want you to use the education? I know a woman with a Master's degree and Law degree. If she wants another degree her husband is ready to pay for it, but to allow her to work, no way!

The dialogue between C10 and C11 shows that being 'educated' in some cases does not suffice in the fight against gender inequality. Because women who obtain degrees seem to revert to a system of patriarchal dominance. As recounted by C11, the culture of being dependent on a man for sustenance, where the man pays the woman's tuition fee and living expenses confines her to his control. Therefore, the woman considers the education paid for by the man as a rare gift in a patriarchal society that frowns on women's ability to be economically independent¹²⁸. In this instance, a woman's educational qualifications become an accessory that adorns the man and possibly, re-enforces the culture of dominance. This also presents a case where education and cultural roles do not conflict but cohabit peacefully as long as the woman does not try to use her education to seek employment outside the home.

6.1.3 Policy-Making and the Cultural Position of the Girl-Child

In the discourses analysed in relation to the GEO Bill, there was also a significant link between policy-making, girl kidnaping, and child marriage. The following discourses exemplify this trait:

C12. Oby Ekwesili never gives a shit about anybody's opinion...why isn't she condemning the president's statement? If by Monday none of these women make a public comment denouncing this statement by the president, then they are all fools and they don't deserve to be role models for our girls who suffer from child marriage and kidnapping.

C12 calls on the President of the Bring Back Our Girls Campaign Group (BBCOG), Obiageli Ekwesili, to respond to the President's remarks. This is because Oby Ekwesili was popularly known for putting pressure on the government to act by championing the fight for the rescue of the Chibok girls between 2014-2017. C12,

¹²⁸ As it became evident by the rejection of the GEO Bill.

therefore, expects Oby Ekwesili's input on the domestication of women to be of benefit to 'our girls'¹²⁹. 'Our girls' or 'Our daughters' was a popular phrase first used to define the missing Secondary School girls in Chibok but has come to mean any young teenage girl in the country. C12 suggests that the significance of the fight against gender discrimination is to make an example for younger girls. Hence, it is important because it relates to young girls who are a vulnerable group in need of a voice to speak on their behalf. In this regard, President Buhari's remark, interpreted as the domestication of women, is believed to be an avenue for women in power to speak up in order to inspire young girls to aspire towards such positions of power or political influence (occupied by e.g. Obiageli Ekwesili). Similarly, another blog reader commenting on P1 (the post on Senator Binta Garba) states:

C13...What a vile, VILE woman! So funny that we don't hear about Binta Masi Garba on ground breaking policy changes, but she is breaking into the news based on kitchen matters, lmao. At least Senator Olujimi introduced the Gender Equality bill and has given us an insight into the 'intellect' of the people we elected to pass laws. The intellect, which summarizes the bill as an avenue for women to become lesbians, prostitutes and engage in sexual orgies. Binta on the other hand did not break the news during this period. She however found her 'voice' because Olujimi said girls don't ONLY belong in the kitchen. And Binta is the chairman for the Senate committee on WOMEN AFFAIRS. Lmao!!!!

Here, C13 puts forward an interesting comparison between two female legislators: Senator Biodun Olujimi, who introduced the GEO Bill to the Nigerian Senate and Senator Binta Garba, who argued that her domestic roles supersede her official duties¹³⁰. C13 narrates that the GEO Bill not only reveals how some male Senate members feel about gender equality (having the potential to turn women into lesbians and prostitutes) but also how women such as Binta Garba stand in the way of teenage girls' empowerment by reinforcing their domestication. In essence, the Bill's objective to ensure girls' access to education is compromised where girls aspire to become housewives as opposed to

¹²⁹ A phrase coined from the BBCOG and popularly used to refer to young girls in Nigeria, mostly of secondary school age.

¹³⁰ As discussed in P.1.

furthering their education. Therefore, a position against cultural change is presupposed to be one against redistributive policies (i.e. implementation of the Bill). Fraser (1996) highlights this connection when she argues about the tendency of the politics of recognition whether intended or not to have redistributive effects. C13 also draws attention to the irony that Senator Binta heads the Committee on Women's Affairs in the Nigerian Senate. This shows that not all women in positions of power (that relate to women's interest) consider women's cultural disregard as something worth fighting for. Instead, such positions of power are used by women such as Binta Masi Garba to reinforce gender stereotypes:

C14. Just this year alone we have seen top male leaders INSULT, DISREGARD and DISRESPECT womanhood using our favourite culprits – religion and culture. Womanhood is in deep trouble in this country! Our daughters are not even safe. A 12-year-old girl can be kidnapped, inculcated into a religion and married off to an EMIR and nothing will happen. If the entire Nigerian male population do not want to be branded as over sexualized beasts who are on a rampage to destroy women, they had better start speaking up and see female rights as human rights.

C14 argues that religion and culture enable the disregard for women's identity. In her opinion, 'womanhood is in trouble', specifically, 'our girls' are not safe. This is another example of how the severity of gender inequality is explicated by drawing on 'our girls' who are constructed as vulnerable. By citing the example of a 14-year-old girl kidnapped and forcefully married off to an Emir, C14 draws on real life occurrences of girl-child marriages reported on Nigerian female blogs. For instance, in October 2016, the Emir of Katsina, Alhaji Abdulmumuni Usman, married a 14-year-old girl. Similarly, Senator Ahmed Yerima of Zamfara State, in 2010, married a 13-year-old girl. However, owing to their power and influence, the Emir and Senator got away with such acts (Omokri, 2016). Therefore, by drawing on an example with the Emir, C14 highlights the problem of such cultural practices (that devalue women's identity) as emanating from authority and leadership, which legitimises the system of dominance and cultural disrespect for women's identities. In summary, C14 positions cultural practices as a threat to the security, educational empowerment, and possibly the future economic independence of the girl-child.

6.1.4 Discussion of Findings

In the above sections, I have primarily discussed the ways in which the subjects of gender inequality are connected across three topic areas: ‘policy-making and cultural change’, ‘socioeconomic status, education, and cultural roles’, and ‘policy-making and the cultural position of the girl-child’. The analysis showed that the Internet allows instances of gender inequality, such as the non-implementation of the GEO Bill, the domestication of women, the marriage of girl children, and so on, to thrive side by side. This combination of cultural and economic forms of inequality contrasts with the forms of gender discrimination tackled by African women since post-independence, which predominantly focused on redistributive forms of inequality, such as socio-political, economic and health-related forms of discrimination (see Chapter 1)¹³¹. Despite this transformation, the analysis shows the tendency for blog discourses to present redistribution as a more valid and credible standpoint to fight against gender inequality as opposed to cultural change. This is the case where, for instance, areas such as labour force participation, educational access and property ownership (within the context of the GEO Bill) are cited to emphasise the (significant) potential effect of gender inequality.

This goes in line with the focus of postcolonial African feminism that emerged in 1990s, which acknowledged the politics of recognition (hence, ‘sexual’ politics) as vital, but positioned the struggle for redistribution as more important, dealing with issues concerning survival and livelihood (Mikell, 1997; Steady, 1986). Hence, the African feminism of that era, focused on tackling so called ‘bread and butter’ issues such as poverty reduction, economic, and health related forms of gender inequality (Mikell, 1997, p.4). As seen from the analysis of discourse, these ‘bread and butter’ ideals are still upheld in women’s discourses on gender in/equality today. Nevertheless, as shown in the discussion that follows, the visibility of redistributive politics alongside a growing battle for a cultural change makes it less easy to isolate the two concepts in the struggle for gender equality in Nigeria.

6.2 Redistribution and Recognition in the Fight against Gender Equality

The analysis of blog comments and posts reveals a correlational relationship between the topics of redistribution and cultural change. This relationship is such that redistributive policies, whether intended or not, end up having cultural effects (Fraser,

¹³¹ For example, Lado (1992), Ozo Eson (2008) and Raimi and Adeleke (2008).

1996). Similarly, cultural practices prove to have implications on the redistribution of resources. Consequently, redistribution, particularly as it relates to policy-making, sometimes unravels the economic dimensions of what is normally considered a cultural issue (Fraser, 2008). For instance, as discussed in this chapter, President Buhari's remarks about his wife belonging to the kitchen is interpreted as the reason why Nigerian legislators did not pass the GEO Bill. In essence, the President's remark is believed to endorse patriarchal dominance in an already biased democratic setting. Hence, even though there are Nigerian women in political positions, they are unable to speak up against cultural subjugation because of the need to secure their economic statuses.

Conversely, a perspective on recognition brings into focus the cultural dimensions of what is normally considered an economic issue (Fraser 2008). This is the case when, for instance and as discussed in this chapter, C24 interprets gender equality as mainly a redistributive one, hence, explaining why she was not hired for a job she applied for. Here, because C24 attributes the reason for her economic marginalisation to the cultural devaluation of female identity, she unravels the cultural aspects of a seemingly economic issue. In like manner, the rejection of the GEO Bill was based on the perception that it infringes on cultural norms. Therefore, freedom of economic movement and activity is interpreted by dominant culture¹³² as freedom to become independent and adopt culturally deviant practices such as becoming 'lesbians and prostitutes'. Similarly, girls' access to education is interpreted¹³³ as going against traditional child marriage practices.

Further, a position against cultural practices is presupposed as one that goes against economic and political inequality and vice versa (Fraser 2008). It is, therefore, clear that the politics of redistribution and cultural change are interconnected and separating them weakens the struggle for gender equality (Fraser, 1996). This is reflected in my analysis, namely that looking up to redistribution as the answer to tackling male dominance is unproductive. For instance, whereas the expectation among African scholars (e.g. Kwesiga, 2002; Mpofu and Rabe, 2017) is that gender inequality will be tackled by women becoming educated and taking up political roles, education and political positions have proved to be insufficient in the struggle for gender equality. Hence, female politicians, even though educated and employed, are often unprepared or

¹³² As exemplified by the Nigerian Senate's arguments on rejecting the GEO Bill discussed in Section 2.6.

¹³³ As exemplified by Senator Yerima's resistance to the law on marriage rights. See: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/25/nigeria-senator-accused-child-bride>

unwilling to condemn cultural practices that marginalise women. This is because of their psychological dependence on the male folk ingrained in cultural practices, as well as the fear of losing their economic statuses. It is, therefore, not surprising that while there has been historical evidence of the Nigerian government responding (even though inadequately) to the fight for redistribution of resources by Nigerian women¹³⁴, battles for recognition, mostly erupting in the twenty-first century, prove challenging.

In addition, the intertwining of the politics of redistribution and recognition in contemporary Nigeria relates (to an extent) to Fraser's (2005) assessment of the political landscape in America and Europe (starting in the 1990s), where even though the socio-economic root of feminist movements is reflective of redistribution, identity politics threatened to replace the issue of redistribution on the political agenda. However, Fraser (2005, p.300) argued that 'the tendency for recognition to eclipse distribution is worldwide¹³⁵...with third world nations attempting to keep up with the 'post-socialist'' climate by tilting towards identity politics. Nevertheless, while this assertion might hold true in some African countries, it may not in others. This is because the 'third-world' reflects a heterogeneous category, consisting of diverse countries, operating at different developmental stages, and differing, not only in the content of women's movements but also in the structure (of redistribution being eclipsed by recognition) that Fraser outlines. For example, while South Africa, as argued by scholars like Gouws (2016), is more inclined to the discourse of recognition than redistribution in the contemporary 'struggle for gender equality', one cannot presuppose the same for countries like Nigeria. This is because, for one out of other possible reasons, South Africa has a democratically inclusive government in relation to women's participation, while the distribution of economic resources between men and women in Nigeria is poor and has not improved despite passing through three distinct political eras¹³⁶.

Therefore, as outlined by Fraser (2005), when the fight for women's suffrage was won in the 1940s in America and Europe, women moved on to the fight for the redistribution of equal resources and having attained that goal 'considerably' by the late 1990s, they moved on to the issue of identity politics. This raises questions to be examined by future researchers on the historical trajectory of women's struggle, how one

¹³⁴ For instance, as discussed in Section 2.3, the National Gender Policy, which was aimed at tackling redistributive issues, such as employment, education and political decision-making, was implemented in 2006.

¹³⁵ Reflective of 'copying' the lifestyle of the neo-liberal West.

¹³⁶ As discussed in Section 2.3.

form of justice (which is considered most important at a given historical time) is likely to be attained before moving on to the next, and what this means in the quest for gender equality. This can also be seen in the case of African feminism which did not discredit the fight for gender difference (or identity politics) when it was established in the 1990s but considered it less of a priority at the given time because there were ‘more important’ battles (of redistributive justice) to win¹³⁷. With Nigerian women still overwhelmed by inequalities of redistribution, the blog discourses of Nigerian women have shown that the fight for redistribution and cultural change mirror each other, providing a correlational interaction.

Hence, the way forward becomes a two-pronged approach: one that caters for the ‘objective’ (economic parity) and ‘intersubjective’ (cultural change) conditions of gender inequality (Fraser, 1996, p.31). Having established that culture and the economy are intertwined, this approach must be one that establishes economic parity and at the same time promotes cultural change. The approach I suggest in this research is similar to Fraser’s (1996); it is one that treats redistribution and cultural change as two different analytical perspectives (rather than separate spheres) that can be applied to any social domain. This approach makes ‘visible and criticisable both the cultural subtexts of apparently economic processes and the economic subtexts of apparently cultural practices’ (Fraser, 1996, p.45). This proposed approach must assess forms of inequality from two different angles, that of redistribution and that of recognition without, however, reducing either one of these perspectives to the other (Fraser and Honneth, 2003, p.35). Hence, the fight for equality by Nigerian women must assess if the subject of gender inequality in focus works to undermine or ensure both the objective and intersubjective conditions of participatory parity. This approach acknowledges that not all inequalities of recognition can be solved indirectly through redistribution. Nor can all disparities of redistribution be corrected indirectly through recognition (Fraser, 1996).

Nevertheless, the pursuit of gender equality in Nigeria should start with a fight that is predominantly centred on redistributive policies (being the better-tolerated form of gender inequality). Hence, although the analysis of this chapter shows that some Nigerian women on blogs perceive the GEO Bill as tackling mostly redistributive issues, such as socio-economic and political inequality, Senator Biodun Olujimi who presented the Bill in the Nigerian National Assembly was reported to have done so from a cultural

¹³⁷ Elaborated in Section 2.4.

perspective¹³⁸, citing ‘equality in marriage and divorce settlements’ as the predominant focus of the Bill (Unuigbo, 2016). This perspective, which presents the Bill as infringing on traditional marriage practices (that uphold male dominance) probably contributed to its rejection.

However, taking a redistributive approach in the struggle for gender equality in Nigeria needs to be accompanied with an ulterior aim, that is, to achieve recognition in the ‘long run’. This is because the more redistributive policies are enacted, the more the chances for cultural roles to be impacted. In addition, cultural change can be achieved within the framework of redistribution, where certain cultural practices can be proved to infringe on women, and indeed girls, survival, and livelihood. Following public reactions to the rejection of the GEO Bill, the Nigerian Senate decided reconsider revisiting and amending the Bill. Even though the nature of the amendment was not made clear, the Bill was reported to have been amended (on 29 September 2016) and passed the first reading¹³⁹ at the Nigerian Senate. Despite such ‘amendments’, this presents a glimmer of hope for women in the country and shows that policies which are inclined to redistribution have a tendency to be condoned.

At the same time, the approach I propose (looking into gender inequality through redistribution) goes against Fraser and Honneth’s (2003) proposal that recognition is fought as a matter of justice. Fraser and Honneth’s conception of justice is hinged on the parity of participation where ‘justice requires social arrangements that permit members of society to interact with one another as peers’ (2003, p.36). According to Fraser and Honneth, the institutionalised cultural patterns of interpretation and evaluation need to be tackled first in order to ensure equal opportunity for achieving social esteem. This perspective is valid particularly in the Western world where the fight for recognition of difference has been accommodated as a valid form of justice, and systems/institutions of culture value such as the family, schools, libraries, and so on are made to change cultural perceptions that are rooted in gender inequality. However, the case is different in Nigeria. As seen from the analysis of blog discourse, policies of redistributive nature are turned down based on the ‘possibility’ they might become a threat to cultural practices. Hence,

¹³⁸ This is discussed further within the context of representation of gender equality in Chapter 8.

¹³⁹ The legislative process usually consists of three distinct stages of Bill hearing. The GEO Bill, has therefore, passed the second stage of hearing and awaiting the third. The fourth stage is where the President signs the Bill into law. According to the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (2018), there are currently (as on the 16th of July 2018) 2,349 Bills awaiting the various stages of reading/hearing in the eighth National Assembly of Nigeria.

approaching cultural change as a matter of justice does not look promising. Fraser's conception, therefore, overlooks the role that context plays in determining how gender inequality should be confronted.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter sought to tackle the research question 'do the discourses on Nigerian female blogs reveal certain patterns in relation to how the subjects of gender inequality are linked?' (RQ1a). The findings showed that the subjects of gender marginalisation are reflective of redistribution and cultural change, defined by a symbiotic and correlational relationship. This implies that gender equality will hardly be achieved when African women prioritise issues of redistribution over cultural change. As such, owing to the contextual peculiarities of Nigeria, policy makers and women activists need to strategically advocate for gender equality from a redistributive standpoint, while anticipating and embracing the (inevitable) resultant effects of recognition. This is because it has been established that the key to the attainment of gender parity is hinged on a fight that combines both issues of redistribution and recognition (Fraser and Honneth, 2003).

By defining the relationship between cultural and economic forms of gender inequality, this study tackles an under-researched area¹⁴⁰ and enriches the body of literature on gender activism (e.g. Keller, 2012; Harris, 2008; Mendes, 2015). As discussed in Section 3.3, this also makes the study one of the first to explore the practical connection between the cultural and 'economic' politics of gender inequality in an 'online discursive context'. The world is witnessing the growing use of the Internet for gendered practices defined by cultural, economic and political forms of discrimination and this research provides empirical insight into the relationship between these subjects, highlighting how they define meaning making processes and gender discrimination.

Having examined how the subjects of gender inequality are related in discourse, the next chapter presents the discourses of women who support gender inequality, highlighting how such alternative discourses and discourse fragmentation complicate the understanding of gender in/equality among Nigerian female blog users.

¹⁴⁰ As identified by Fraser and Honneth (2003).

CHAPTER 7: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVE ARGUMENTS ON GENDER EQUALITY

This chapter analyses discourses in relation to the second research question (i.e., RQ2a) which seeks to unravel the knowledge, attitudes and ideological beliefs that mark women's gender equality discourse. While gender inequality in Africa is often presupposed as a struggle between patriarchal institutions and women, I take an 'anti-authority'¹⁴¹ approach in this research by unravelling the tensions inherent in women's discourses, and highlighting the role played by some women in sustaining patriarchal institutions thereby positioning women at the centre of their own marginalisation. This approach involves examining the discursive structures and strategies used by Nigerian female blog users that legitimise gender inequality.

Section 7.1 analyses the themes found in the blog discourses against gender equality. Arguments and justifications in such discourses appear to be highly folkloric, religious, and sometimes reflecting gender differences akin to 'biological essentialism'¹⁴². Section 7.2 digs deeper by analysing discourse structures, such as the properties of text that play a role in the modes of communication (van Dijk, 1993). Therefore, some of the discourse dimensions analysed in this chapter include 'argumentation', 'rhetorical figures', 'lexical style' and 'story-telling' so as to unravel the ideology of women articulating such discourses, namely the perceived dominated group (van Dijk, 1933, p.264). Ideology in the context of this research (hence, in social media language) 'includes the ways in which individuals or groups/identities represent themselves or are represented by others' (Chiluwa, 2012, p.222).

My aim, therefore, is to interrogate how some vocabulary, grammatical and semantic structures, as well as story structures and general topics in blog comments and posts convey ideological positions and biases that encourage the subjugation of Nigerian women. In essence, the analysis will unpack the ways in which subordination is reinforced by and through language. Van Dijk draws attention to the fact that 'dominated groups require a form of ideology as the basis for their resistance' (2005, p.25). Hence, I

¹⁴¹ Foucault's (1980) anti-authority approach studies inequality from the point of resistance rather than dominance. In this instance, the study of Nigerian women as a 'marginalised' group represents such anti-authority or anti-dominance struggles.

¹⁴² In brief, the belief that an individual's personality is innate and driven by 'human nature' as opposed to socio-cultural factors.

seek to examine whether some Nigerian women on blogs support gender inequality, how they construct themselves, and what positive representations of their objectives are articulated in their discourses.

Although this chapter is primarily focused on analysing the discourses of women who support gender inequality, I conclude by highlighting the tensions inherent in blog discourses, hence, also capturing the perspectives of women who fight for gender equality. This helps to provide an understanding of how the support for gender inequality is received by other Nigerian women on blogs and the perceived implication of such tensions on the effectiveness of the struggle for gender equality.

7.1 Categories of Alternative/Anti-equality Discourse

As stated in the introduction of this chapter, the alternative discourses analysed in this chapter are of three categories: those reflecting on biological difference, resisting ‘equality’ and drawing on cultural and religious practices to resist gender equality¹⁴³.

In addition, the discourse of biological difference was featured the least¹⁴⁴ among the three types of discourses analysed. However, it is not easy to provide clear numbers of comments or posts that reflect specific types of discourses because, as will be seen in the analysis later in the chapter, the content of certain comments or posts can intersect across discourse categories. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the discourse of culture and cultural practices was the most popular among the analysed discourses. Comments and the post drawing on cultural and non-ethnic religious practices as the basis for women’s subjugation could be said to be more than double those on biological difference and resistance to equality combined.

In what follows, I commence my analysis with the discourses of biological difference, which shed light on how cultural ideologies are related to arguments about equality and biological sex differences.

¹⁴³ It is important to note that out of the 135 posts sampled, only 17 unique posts could be categorised as reflecting the personal opinion of Nigerian women. Only 4 of these 17 posts reflect alternative discourses, with the remaining 13 reflecting the opinion of women in support of gender equality. Two of the posts holding alternative discourses were cited in Chapter 7 and one is cited in this chapter.

¹⁴⁴ Out of the 405 comments sampled, 129 comments were categorised as supporting women’s subjugation. Within this category, discourses on ‘biological functions’, ‘biological difference’, or ‘nature’ are reflected in 9 comments from which 3 are analysed in this chapter (see Chapter 4 for data selection process).

7.1.1 Discourse of Biological difference

Some of the analysed discourses rationalised gender inequality based on arguments that reinforce biological difference. These arguments are very similar to the ideologies challenged by the 1970s Women's Liberation Movement, which included differences in character between men and women¹⁴⁵ underpinned by biological sex differences (Connell, 1995). It also reflects the persistent scientific debates of the twenty-first century, which attribute social behaviours to genetic factors (Hasinoff, 2009). This involves validating certain emotional techniques that maintain traditional gender roles by suggesting that gender behaviours are genetically predetermined (Hasinoff, 2009). For example, commenting on the GEO Bill, C15 states:

C15. I don't know why women want this equality thing. As a female business owner, I'd never pay a man and woman that do the same job the same salary. Most times, men can undertake more, they don't have menstrual cramps and slow down on their work load, they don't get pregnant or have to beg to pick their kids from school. Women have to get used to being women.

C15 highlights the biological functions of women such as 'getting pregnant' or having a 'menstrual cramp' as factors that limit women's ability to compete with men. However, C15 further associates these biological functions to 'culturally assigned roles' which are probably influenced by perceived biological gender differences. Although it is not clear whether C15 speaks hypothetically or from real occurrences about the gendered responsibility of collecting kids from school, she highlights a significant gender role (ideology) where possibly, because men as a sex are often believed to work 'very hard', the assignment of collecting the kids from school is left to women who are seen to have less demanding jobs with flexibility enabling them to collect the kids from school.

C15's interpretation of gender equality is possibly influenced by her experience as a business owner and the opinion she has formed about such experiences or events. Hence, by personalising and contextualising her argument, C15 uses (hypothetical) occurrences such as collecting the kids from school or having a menstrual cramp as a vantage point from which to argue for economically based gender inequality. Therefore, C15 reproduces arguments of sexual differences and links them to biology, thereby

¹⁴⁵ For example, intellect, emotions attitude, and so on.

implying that gender equality goes against women's biological functions that make them the 'weaker sex' socio-economically. This relates to how socio-biology provides the scientific rationalisation of male dominance in capitalism by encouraging the validation of gender difference on the basis of preconceived (that are biology-related) ideas on how to maximise profit (Hasinoff, 2009).

In like manner, while contributing to the gender equality discourse, C16 and C17 state:

C16. No matter how much your husband loves you, he can never be pregnant for you. We should be careful how we upturn nature cos there are consequences.

C17. Shame on anyone who thinks they can pervert nature's standing principles because of a lousy university degree.

While C16 presupposes that gender equality is about achieving some form of 'sameness' in terms of biological function, she also distinguishes biological roles by emphasising how it is impossible for such roles to be interchanged between sexes. Perceived biological differences which are sometimes interpreted as 'disadvantages' (e.g. getting pregnant or having a menstrual cramp) are cited by C15 to legitimate gender difference and persuade women to accept cultural and stereotypical norms as driven by so-called biological 'facts'. These stereotypical perceptions also present women as biologically weak, and therefore, better suited to the domestic realm where they can cope with 'less rigorous' demands. In addition, C17 suggests that education ('University degree') is to blame for inciting the fight for gender equality by empowering Nigerian women on blogs to feel that they 'know way more than men'. Hence, C17 insinuates that in some cases, education can be harmful because it creates doubt about gender roles instituted by nature.

Hence, the arguments of C16 and C17 imply that the biological functions of the body symbolise 'nature', and gender equality is thereby a threat to the 'natural order' of things for which there are consequences. The type of 'consequences' for 'upturning nature' or 'perverting nature's standing principles' might, therefore, be shrouded in C16 and C17's beliefs about the nature of existence. By implication, C16 and C17 suggest that arguing for gender equality goes against 'nature'. This rhetoric of 'going against nature' is reflective of the challenges of the twentieth century feminist movement, which, owing to its resistance to the biological essentialism of womanhood, was also tagged as 'coming

up against nature’ and therefore, labelled a futile movement (Connell, 2013; Mendes, 2011; Mendes, 2015).

Further, blog readers such as C18 highlight differences in personality traits between the male and female gender:

C18. In Africa, we believe that women are sentimental and men are more detailed and strong. Even though I am a women’s rights activist, I still believe in the place of a woman and the man. The man is supposed to be a step ahead of the women; you can never take that away.

C18’s idea that women are emotional or sentimental and men are tough or stronger than women are reflective of personality traits, which are usually drawn from biological differences between sexes (Connell, 2013). Connell (2013) traces such behavioural gender distinctions to the survival necessities that had shaped the early stages of human evolution. For instance, Bwakali (2001) argues that in Africa, men went into the wild to hunt and fight making them aggressive, authoritative, rational, polygamous, and so on. On the other hand, women who gave birth to babies stayed at home and were considered to be nurturing, passive, monogamous, emotional, and so on.

These different roles are further emphasised by C19 while commenting on President Buhari’s remark about his wife belonging to the kitchen:

C19. Buhari should have exercised some form of decorum when answering questions because he should know his words will always be held against him. However, Aisha’s party can be in the kitchen, ensuring that the president and his guests are well fed. In his living room, ensuring that the President and his guests are well entertained. In the other room, ensuring that the President is sexually satisfied and his hormones are in sync with his senses so that when he makes rational decisions concerning Nigeria, he won’t be coming from a place of emotional and psychological starvation. As a woman, cooking, entertaining and sexing your spouse should be paramount. Doesn’t necessarily mean you can’t handle other affairs. That is part of what makes a real woman very formidable.

C19 highlights the President’s hormones or male testosterone as having the attribute for rational decision-making in the public domain, while the President’s wife is

confined to the private sphere of domestic duties, being the female sphere of influence. C19 positions the role of the woman as determined by the needs of the man, where taking care of the man's needs is considered 'paramount' or the woman's ultimate goal. In order to possibly reassure women that attending to the needs of men does not make them inferior but actually 'very formidable', C19 follows her argument with a disclaimer: 'doesn't mean that you can't handle other affairs'. C19 also highlights the different roles expected of the woman in different parts of the home as it relates to the man's needs. Hence, the woman in the kitchen cooks for the man, in the bedroom the woman caters for the man's sexual needs and in the living room, she attends to the man's guests.

By carrying out these domestic roles, C19 argues that the woman is not only doing a service to her husband, but the nation at large, thereby putting the national security and safety of the nation in the hands of the wife who must satisfy her husband. As noted by Mendes (2015, p.232), this draws attention to the perception that 'men are biochemically driven by their mating instincts', and therefore, should be 'absolved of the responsibility of their behaviour'. C19's attempt at reproducing gender role differences, therefore, exemplifies the widely known phrase: 'behind every successful man there is a woman'. Alternatively, as C20 simply puts it: 'A wise woman builds her home'.

These techniques of persuasion used by C19 and C20 which portray domestic roles as a 'formidable' position or one that reflects 'wisdom' are aimed at convincing women to see domestic roles as positions of power as opposed to inferior statuses. This brings to mind the spatiality of power and how preconceived notions of the space occupied by power (e.g. the public domain) are being contested or redefined as with the case of C19 to include normatively understood 'non-power' positions, such as the domestic realm. At the same time, the feats, as well as the failures of the man in the public domain are often attributed to how the woman manages her home. Therefore, propositional words are used to qualify women who are inclined to domestic roles, such as 'wise' 'formidable', 'a real woman', and so on.

7.1.2 Discourse Resisting Equality

In an attempt to legitimise arguments in favour of gender inequality, the discourses of Nigerian women on blogs were also hinged on issues of 'equality'. Similar to the analysis in the previous section, in most cases, the word 'gender equality' seemed to be interpreted as 'sameness' in terms of biological gender functions. This discourse resisting equality, therefore, highlights women's support for gender discrimination as

hinged on the perception of the word ‘equality’. Commenting within this category, C21 and C22 state:

C21. The issue [the Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill] should be about respect, not equality. We should respect each other no matter what the person’s gender is.

C22. I believe in gender equity, not gender equality. Women should be treated fairly by men instead of asking to be the same as men. We are asking for too much abeg¹⁴⁶.

C21 and C22 isolate respect and equity from the notion of gender equality. Such intolerance for the word ‘equality’ and its discursive isolation from the fight to achieve the socio-economic rights of women is a visible rhetoric in the discourses of Nigerian female blog users¹⁴⁷. Therefore, C22 believes that women should fight for gender equity (fairness) as opposed to gender equality (‘same as men’). In this regard, asking to be the ‘same as men’ (equality) as conceived by C22 is probably not practical or reflecting a situation where women are ‘asking for too much’. On the other hand, C22 possibly conceives ‘fairness’ (equity) as a situation where women can advocate for their claims (of equality) in a subtler manner by appealing to the moral or ethical sensibilities of patriarchal institutions. In like manner, C21 argues that women should fight for respect and not equality. By so doing, both C21 and C22, like many Nigerian women on blogs fighting against gender equality, fail to recognise that gender equity or respect goes hand-in-hand with gender equality. In the study of inequalities, therefore, respect and fairness are categorised within the moral philosophy of recognition theory, which advocates for the equal dignity of all human beings (Iser, 2013).

However, such regard for the equal dignity of human beings cannot be achieved without the structures of gender inequality being tackled. Even where scholars such as Axel Honneth (1992, p.xi) argue that gender fairness and respect should be approached as a matter of ‘moral obligation’ or ‘self-realisation’, the conditions needed for such ‘human flourishing’ (moral obligations of fairness and respect) are of social and economic makeup. Hence, the reason behind the intolerance of the word ‘equality’ as highlighted by C22 is because it is perceived as connoting sameness with men. This

¹⁴⁶ ‘Abeg’ means ‘please’ in broken English.

¹⁴⁷ As seen in the analysis of the previous section, equality is often interpreted literally in terms of biological functions of gender and therefore, it is deemed misplaced in the fight against gender discrimination.

sameness is often perceived in areas of biological functioning (as discussed in the previous section) as well as in cultural roles. This interpretation of gender equality is responsible for the dismissive tone in discussions of the rejection of the GEO Bill (by the Nigerian Senate) like in the following individual comments:

C23. There are more pressing issues to be discussed than something as stupid as gender equality.

C24. I think the major cause of this baseless argument [the support for gender equality] is that most of us can now afford to attend universities.

C25. Let's concentrate on getting jobs for the unemployed and make the government pay salaries on time and also make sure there is electricity supply [written in response to C23's comment].

C26. Please, I applaud the Nigerian Senate for this [the rejection of the Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill]. Please channel your energy in stopping child marriage, domestic violence, etc. These are the major problems, not gender equality.

Specifically, C23 believes that there are more urgent issues that should be given priority as opposed to policies of gender equality, and even though she is not specific about the policies or issues of priority, we get a sense of this ideological hierarchy from other blog users. This tactic of dismissing certain issues of gender inequality as less important in comparison with others is reflective of the history of feminist activism as recounted by Mendes (2015). Mendes (2015, p.232) asserts that this 'hierarchical ranking of women's oppression' is usually reflective of individuals' misunderstanding of what a cause seeks to achieve.

Further, C24 believes that education is to blame for enlightening women to be able to question practices that marginalise them, while C25 believes developmental issues such as economic marginalisation and infrastructural development (electricity supply) should not be tackled on the basis of gender but on general structures of inequality. Hence, C25 dismisses the consideration of gender in the distribution of economic goods, services, and resources, as well as in the development of infrastructure. C26's comment also

isolates issues such as child marriage and domestic violence from gender equality, implying that child marriage and domestic violence can be addressed without advocating for gender equality.

However, it can be argued that the relationship between gender equality and child marriage in Nigeria is quite dissimilar. It is expected that the more gender equality is achieved, hence, the more girls go to school to become empowered and socio-economically independent, the fewer girls will be married off at an early age, portraying a negative linear relationship. However, the more women are empowered to go to school to become socio-economically independent, the more cases of domestic violence become apparent, portraying a positive linear relationship. This salient relationship between domestic violence and gender empowerment is shown in the report of the Nigeria Health Demographic Survey (2013). According to the report, educated women (mostly having a University degree) experience more cases of domestic violence, mostly owing to disputes relating to gender equality or gender roles than rural women who are more inclined to accepting forms of gender discrimination in marriage. Hence, while from the report, it can be argued that domestic violence can be lessened where structures of gender equality are discarded, the same cannot be presupposed in the case of child marriage, according to the opinion of C26.

7.1.3 Discourse of Culture

Discourses that reinforce gender inequality also hinged on African cultural practices. In this regard, African culture involves the traditional beliefs and practices of African people, which include various ethnic and non-ethnic religions that are practiced in Africa. Hence, traditional African religion is reflective of ethnic religion while non-ethnic religion is such that is practiced across national borders such as Christianity and Islam.

In drawing on the stipulations of traditional African culture as the basis for limiting women's freedom of expression, a group of women - the Adamawa League of Women Empowerment - criticised the wife of the Nigerian President, Aisha Buhari, for publicly criticising her husband's leadership style in a BBC interview in October 2016:

P3. ...we unanimously condemn Mrs. Aisha Buhari's BBC interview because it is ill-timed, counterproductive and was done in bad taste. Consequently, Mrs.

Aisha Buhari's action negates the spirit of Pula'aku¹⁴⁸, modesty and decorum which are virtues of fulbe (Fulani) tribe. Mrs. Buhari has set a bad precedent in the presidency as none of the wives of former presidents had ever made negative comments about their husbands publicly.

The group Adamawa League of Women Empowerment notes that Aisha, being a Fulani woman, had violated the Fulani culture and abandoned the tradition of modesty of the Fulanis by openly criticising her husband. In this instance, the cultural practice of modesty, which requires 'women to be seen and not heard', is the basis from which the subjugation of women is enforced. Also, by emphasising that the wife of the President is the first to criticise her husband publicly, the Adamawa League of Women Empowerment ignores the (possible) validity of the information contained in Aisha Buhari's interview and focuses on the role they believe she currently plays, which is that of a rebel who has destabilised the status quo.

It is also expected that the Adamawa League of Women Empowerment should be focused on empowering women (in being assertive, as in the case of Aisha Buhari), as the name of the group suggests, rather than hamper women to freely express themselves. This calls into question the activities of such women's groups, and adds credence to the assertion made by African scholars such as Ajayi (2007) about the ineffectiveness of female offline groups in fighting against gender inequality. It also relates to the case of the female Senator, Binta Masi Garba, discussed in the previous chapter, who despite occupying a legislative position and being the head of the Senate Committee on Women Affairs, argues that her domestic responsibilities come before her legislative duties. Again, this contradiction between female politicians or influential groups and the exercise of the roles expected of such political and influential positions is mostly rooted in the belief that some forms of gender equality (e.g. socio-economic equality) are better than others (e.g. cultural change) as discussed in the previous chapter.

Commenting on the same subject matter, **C27** states: 'I hope all the people supporting and praising Aisha will beg Buhari if he decides to send her back to her fathers' house.' C27 highlights the practice of sending a disobedient wife back to her

¹⁴⁸ Pula'aku is a code of conduct among the Fulbe tribe of the Nigerian Fulanis. It prescribes respectful interactions among kin and is suggestive of marriage arrangements, where the man leads, which the Fulbe see as preserving their integrity.

parent's house in African culture. Marriage is regarded as one of the most common and most important social functions in the African culture and traditional marital rights such as the payment of bride price¹⁴⁹ are integrated into all forms of marriages practiced (church, mosque, court or traditional marriages). Hence, the woman, having been acquired as a property, stands the 'risk' of being returned to her parents when the marriage does not work. C27, therefore, highlights such a cultural practice to remind and caution women about the implication of supporting a woman who 'disrespects' her husband. The act of sending a woman back to her parents' house is, therefore, believed to be shameful for the woman involved, who is tagged a failure for not being able to execute her 'primary responsibility' of keeping the home.

Further, in commenting on the GEO Bill, C28 states:

C28. Pls, let women just know their place. God knows why he put the man as head of the home. No doubt, women can contest for political positions and be allowed to rule. But we need to stop using words like equality, cos there is no way men and women can ever be equal. Besides Man came first to the world.

For C28, gender equality 'challenges' the position of men in the society and this goes against her religious beliefs which place the man ahead of the woman. Therefore, C28's argument is probably hinged on the idea that equality cannot thrive based on the belief that man was created before the woman as presented in the Bible. C28 also argues that while women should be allowed to take certain leadership positions, the word 'equality'¹⁵⁰ should not be used in relation to issues that concern female empowerment. In addition, C29 and C30 show their support for gender inequality by stating:

C29. Gender equality is nothing but an ideology of the mind. Its actualization is a mirage. African culture is patriarchal in nature, and so also is religion.

C30. Evil Bill.... It is totally unChristian; unIslamic and unAfrican

¹⁴⁹ In this case the husband pays the wife's family.

¹⁵⁰ This also relates to the use of the word 'feminism' which, as witnessed from the research data, is often treated as a dirty word.

C29 and C30 open up another dimension of discourse, one that distinguishes, yet relates culture to (non-ethnic) religion. C29 highlights African culture and non-ethnic religion as being patriarchal, which makes the actualisation of gender equality impossible. Similarly, C30 holds the belief that the GEO Bill is evil because it goes against the predominant belief systems in Africa, which cut across ethnic and non-ethnic religions. This tendency to separate and at the same time link the stipulations of traditional African culture to that of Christianity and Islam is surprisingly common in the discourses of Nigerian female blog users. This can also be seen in the remark made in C31:

C31. You people want to introduce the same thing that destroyed the marriage institution in America to Nigeria. Thank you, senators, for rejecting it. Its UnAfrican. If you don't like it, relocate to America and Europe. We don't want such nonsense here. Is it everything you see in the Western world that you bring here? Man is the head of the woman.... period. God says it in his word in 1 Corinthians 11:3.

Because gender equality is often interpreted as empowering women to take over men's cultural roles, it is perceived as a ploy to attack the institution of marriage by encouraging divorce. Similarly, Mendes (2011) points out how discourses on equality rights in the New York Times use language that idealise the family structure by emphasising the woman's role in sustaining and maintaining the family structure. However, little attention is paid to men's role in sustaining or contributing to such an idealised family structure. In addition, C31 labels gender equality as going against traditional African principles of gender hierarchy, as well as that of non-ethnic religion (Christianity). In addition, it is interesting that while C31 discredits gender equality on the basis that it is an alien phenomenon, copied from the West, she contradicts her argument by quoting the Bible, a document introduced to Africa by the West through colonialism. C32 also adds:

C32. I heartily applaud the Nigerian Senate for upholding the tenets of morality, ethics, and Africanism by rejecting the American cursed way of life. As well articulated by the distinguished senators, human rights are enshrined in the constitution and available for all. Any bill that seeks to give women full rights with men is unBiblical and UnQuranic. Anyone that is not satisfied with the

African way of life (conservation and morality) can go to Europe or America where anyone can live how they like in the name of so-called liberalism.

C32 positions African culture as synonymous to ‘morality’ and ‘ethical behaviour’, while she defines gender equality (which is believed to be a Western product) as ‘a cursed way of life’. C32, therefore, implies that gender equality is a state of defiance that attracts some form of repercussion defined by cultural beliefs. In a similar tone to C31, C32 also links African culture and religion in the same argument by stating that the Bill is UnAfrican as well as Unbiblical and Qur’anic. In addition, the idea that women who are not comfortable with gender inequality should move to the West is also a common rhetoric that shows a real intolerance for thinking along the lines of gender equality.

C32 also argues that the GEO Bill is irrelevant because general human rights are already advocated for by the Nigerian Constitution. This angle of argumentation is, however, an attempt commonly used to draw attention away from the inequalities faced by marginalized groups in the country. For instance, Taire (2013) reveals how Senator Ahmed Yerima, representing Zamfara State Constituency, capitalised on the ambiguity of the Nigerian Constitution in 2013 to validate his marriage to a 14-year-old girl. The Constitution states in number 29 sub-section ‘b’ that ‘any woman who is married shall be deemed to be of full age’. While being of ‘full age’ is presupposed as ‘18’, Senator Yerima and his supporters argued that ‘full age’ should be defined by cultural considerations as opposed to the secular legislation. Similarly, Ezeifeka and Osakwe’s (2013) analysis of the Nigerian Constitution reveals how its language literally puts women out of the picture. The use of gender-specific pronouns such as ‘he’, ‘him’, or ‘himself’, with no single use of feminine pronoun reference, dominates the Constitution and the only time the woman is mentioned is in relation to marriage in section 29b where it is stated that ‘any woman who is married shall be deemed to be of full age’. This issue of dominance through language has also been the subject of feminist discourse, which argues that ‘women are given negative semantic space in language, while men are more linguistically and socially favoured’ (Cameron, 1998, p.93).

Therefore, even though basic human rights are advocated by the Nigerian Constitution, as argued by C32, such rights are captured in ambiguous and generic language that is mostly in favour of men. Hence, specific legislations such as the GEO Bill aim to tackle the unique challenges faced by Nigerian women as a specific

marginalised group, thus being opposed to laws (such as the human rights of the Nigerian Constitution) that are implemented on pre-existing (generic) structures of inequality in the country.

7.2 Techniques, Tools and Strategies of Discourse Development

Following the analysis of the three categories of blog discourses supporting the subjugation of Nigerian women, this section offers an analysis of the discursive tools used for the construction and delivery of such discourses. Such discursive tools outline the forms of argumentation evident in discourse, the lexicons conveniently used to reinforce gender inequality, and the figures of speech, as well as the narratives recruited to make arguments sound more credible or ‘factual’. However, unlike ‘argumentation’ and ‘lexical styles’, rhetorical figures and story-telling were mainly evident, and therefore, drawn from discourses that were pertinent to the discourse categories of ‘culture’ and ‘resistance to equality’ rather than to that of biological ‘difference’.

7.2.1 Argumentation

As seen from my analysis so far, discourse legitimization is often hinged on the justification that gender equality is a deviation from what is ‘natural’, ‘cultural’ and ‘religious’. Connell (1995) argues that the rhetoric of ‘nature’ and ‘biology’ are the basis of the ideology of biological essentialism that focuses on the idea that there are natural base-hormones, brains, or genes that produce significant mental differences between men and women, explaining social differences. Connell (1995) comes to the conclusion that when one examines the general body of research, the evident conclusion is that there are very limited actual psychological differences between men and women. Hence, despite these almost non-existent psychological differences in gendered scientific research, the persistent idea that there is a fixed biological basis for social differences is because such beliefs enable the status quo and appear fair, natural and inevitable (Connell, 1995).

In my analysis, blog users such as C15 argue from a eugenic or essentialist perspective by citing the biological functions of women, such as getting pregnant and having menstrual cramps, as ‘natural’ deficiencies that justify certain forms of gender inequality, while men’s supposed inability to think clearly unless they have regular sex is not seen as a deficiency. However, the rhetoric of ‘nature’ that is predominant in the discourses of blog users (e.g. in C16 and C17) has less to do with the so-called scientific gender research (or biological functions of gender), as in the case of biological

essentialism, rather, it is reflective of what is considered normatively acceptable within the confines of African culture¹⁵¹ and non-ethnic religion. This explains the emphasis of blog users on the ‘repercussions’ for ‘upturning nature’ or ‘deviating from nature’s principles’. Acker (1987) argues that the argument in favour of ‘nature’ is sometimes achieved by quoting biblical creation stories where the woman was formed from the man’s rib in Genesis chapter 1 verse 26, thereby enabling men to see women as a subset of themselves rather than equals. This is validated by C33 who states: ‘there is nothing like gender equality. God created men above women and told the women to be submissive to their husbands’.

The connection between cultural and religious practices is evident and sometimes difficult to isolate when tracing the ideological basis for certain behavioural practices as seen in this analysis. The analysis shows that Nigerian women on blogs often synthesise cultural practices with religious beliefs within the same argument on issues of gender inequality. Such discourses reflect a syncretism of belief systems, where gender equality is believed to be ‘unAfrican’ and at the same time ‘unChristian’ or ‘unIslamic’. Hence, religion (both ethnic and non-ethnic) is reflective and part of the cultural practices of the African people, and sometimes forms the ideological basis on which women argue about the subject of gender equality.

Also, traditional African cultural practices are in most cases a product of the stipulations of traditional African religion, which is mostly orally transmitted across generations and is focused on harmonising the natural world to a supernatural dimension through divinations, diverse forms of sacrifice, libation practices, and so on (Mbiti, 1990). However, it must be noted that traditional African religion is diverse and varying with respect to the cultural and historical relations of different geographical locations within the African continent. Hence, it is interesting to see how Nigerian female bloggers bring together forms of cultural practices and non-ethnic religions in legitimising the subjugation of women. This goes against scholars (e.g. Salami, 2012; Acker, 1987; Lan, 1985; and Summers, 1999) who believe that either traditional ‘African culture’¹⁵², or non-ethnic religion, is responsible for reinforcing gender inequality as opposed to a possible

¹⁵¹ African culture, as discussed in this chapter, is mostly as it relates to the transformation of indigenous cultural practices after the 1800s (hence, after the Jihad wars and Colonisation).

¹⁵² Traditional African culture is made up of religious practices and this further complicates such isolation of culture from religion.

syncretism of belief systems (comprising of both ‘cultural’ and religious practices) being the ideological basis for promoting gender inequality.

In summary, the argumentations of biological difference, resistance to equality and cultural practices, even though thematised distinctly, reflect a significant interconnection. As reflected in the analysis, the discourses of resisting equality are mostly interpreted by Nigerian women on blogs in the area of biological ‘difference’, where gender equality is sometimes believed to be ‘unachievable’, being an ambition to be ‘the same as men’, particularly in areas of biological function. Cultural practices, which are reflective of non-ethnic religion also play a dominant role in how women conceive ideas about gender in/equality (e.g. P3). However, when biological sex differences are mentioned as the basis for female subjugation, they are often spoken of, as a product of creationism or cultural practices, as opposed to the developments of scientific research, which outline certain cognitive or physiological differences in gender performance.

7.2.2 Rhetorical Schemes

An evident discursive strategy for the reproduction of gender inequality in discourses is through the use of ‘denials’ about the existence of gender inequality. This can be seen in the case of C29 discussed earlier who argues that ‘gender equality is nothing but an ideology of the mind and its actualisation, a mirage’. For C29, the world revolves around significant cultural and religious practices that make it impossible for gender equality to be actualised. Similarly, as quoted previously, C33 argues that ‘there is nothing like gender equality, God created men above women, and told the women to be submissive to their husbands’. In these discourses, the invalidation of gender equality is hinged on belief systems embedded in cultural and religious practices. Further, America and Europe are presented metaphorically as symbolising gender equality and offering examples of the ‘negative’ effects of adopting the practice of gender equality. This can be seen in C32 discussed earlier, which argues that gender inequality is reflective of ‘the American cursed way of life’. Similarly, C34 adds:

C34. All these gender equality rubbish is what destroyed the Western world today, so many divorces everywhere, raising children out of wedlock because husband and wife are struggling on who's the head and who's tail. Yes, I'm a woman but I don't support that rubbish, that's why we still have a good family system today in

Africa. Our women who embraced this so-called gender equality when they travelled to the US, they found it difficult to keep a home, hence, all these men shooting their wives and divorces owing to domestic disputes.

In a similar ‘hyperbolic’ tone to C32, C34 argues that gender equality has ‘destroyed the Western world’. Such use of the term ‘destroy’ exaggerates the state of affairs by connoting chaos, doom or painting a scenario of emergency. By so doing, C34 reveals the conception that a stable society, which is one that preserves a traditional family system by frowning on divorce or having children out of wedlock. In a bid to further legitimise her argument, C34 draws on recent occurrences in the international media where Nigerian women were reported to have been killed by their husbands in the US, mostly owing to domestic disputes (Nnabugwu, 2016). C34, therefore, blames the threat on women’s lives on their inability ‘to keep a home’ as opposed to the horrible misdeeds of their husbands. Moto (2009) identifies how it is a common practice in African culture for women to be blamed for almost every misfortune; from rape to domestic violence, to lack of child-bearing and so on.

C31, C32, and C34 also suggest ‘metaphorical’ representations of gender inequality as synonymous with Africanism and of gender equality as a synonym of Americanism. It is also clear that the ideological basis for their conclusions is informed by the interpretation of gender equality from a marriage perspective. This perspective is influenced by the perception that gender equality is about empowering women to take over men’s jobs or other culturally assigned positions, thereby distorting the hierarchical organisation where the man is believed to be ahead of the woman. Such distortions are also believed to cause disputes that end in divorce. Hence, C31, C32, and C34 express positions that try to maintain the status quo, which is based on normative principles foregrounded in arguments that seek to preserve cultural practices, with culture being a reflection of a syncretism of belief systems.

Also, as regards pitching Africanism against Americanism, C32 states that ‘Anyone that is not satisfied with the African way of life (conservation and morality) can go to Europe or America where anyone can live how they like in the name of so-called liberalism’. Hence, ‘conservatism’ and ‘morality’ are represented as ‘the good life’ provided by Africanism, which is opposed to the liberalism of Americanism interpreted as a ‘cursed’ or ‘evil’ way of life. Therefore, the ideological strategies of self-interest are marked by recruiting discourse structures that emphasise ‘our’ positive actions and those

that define the negative actions of the ‘other’ side of the argument. In addition, the claim of the ‘good life’ provided by Africanism, which ensures the stability of marriage, is only good because it caters for the needs of men. This is reflective of African cultural practices, such as polygamy or the naked dancing of maidens¹⁵³, which delegitimise the so-called claim of ‘morality’ or ‘conservatism’ used as a stance against gender equality by some Nigerian women on blogs.

7.2.3 Lexical Styles

Lexical styles reflect ideological expressions evident in the choice of specific words, terms or phrases used in discourse for the purpose of persuasion. The lexical style of discourse can be seen in propositional statements, which Stalnaker (1998) defines as ‘assertions’, which add certain content to the representation of the context, a proposal which the hearer might refuse or accept. Chilwa (2012) also adds that discourses of proposition usually contain grammatical terms that make an argument sound more forceful, severe or mitigated. For instance, from the post and comments sampled¹⁵⁴, it can be seen that women who hold opinions against gender equality are sometimes labelled using lexicons such as ‘ignorant’, ‘kitchen-wives’, ‘second-class’, ‘agents-of-patriarchy’ and so on, while women who fight for gender equality are addressed as ‘a disgrace’, ‘upturning nature’, ‘challenging God’, ‘feminists’ (e.g. C16, C17 and C31) and so on. Gender equality is also evaluated negatively and defined by attributes, such as ‘baseless’, ‘stupid’, ‘less important’, ‘alien’, ‘evil’ (e.g. C23, C24, and C30) and so on. Further examples can be seen in C35 and C36:

C35. This Bill is alien to our culture. Let’s stop being hypocritical. We say no to gayism, lesbianism, and related vices on the grounds of religion and culture. Yet we see nothing wrong with #GenderEquality¹⁵⁵.

¹⁵³ Falola (2013) narrates how African culture is marked by the public naked dancing of maidens (mostly baring their breasts) in the market square (in Yoruba culture) as a spiritual ritual.

¹⁵⁴ In this case, the analysed discourses are in reference to the comments and posts that form the sample of data (which includes comments and posts that are quoted and not in the analysis). Hence, because this chapter mainly focuses on the discourses of women who support gender inequality, the examples presented give an overall picture of the value judgements passed on the other side of the argument, that is, of women who support gender equality.

¹⁵⁵ Although C35 uses the hashtag ‘Gender Equality’, this is quite unique and has not been seen in the discourses sampled.

C36. Oyinbo borrowed culture, forgotten we are Africans, our mothers in the olden days never fought for equal rights with their husbands and they all had and are still having a fulfilled marriage. Even God put men above women. Nonsense Bill.

C35 calls the GEO Bill ‘alien’ to the African culture and argues in relation to the signing of the anti-gay Bill by the Nigerian President in 2013. The former President, Goodluck Jonathan, signed the anti-gay Bill to allow the criminalisation of same-sex relationships containing a penalty of up to 14 years in prison (Onuah, 2014). Therefore, since the anti-gay Bill was signed on the grounds of religion and culture, C35 believes that the Nigerian Senate should do likewise in the case of gender equality which is also perceived as a threat to cultural and religious practices. C36 also calls gender equality Oyinbo ‘borrowed culture’, which means the white person’s borrowed culture. By using such lexical slang, ‘borrowed’, C36 argues that accepting gender equality implies a neglect of cultural heritage and identity, which are often regarded as a symbol of pride. C36 also positions gender equality as a deviation from historical precedents where women have never been known to challenge patriarchal (indigenous) establishments of dominance, particularly in the fashion of the GEO Bill. Hence, by arguing that our mothers are having a ‘fulfilled’ marriage having accepted gender inequality, C36 uses the word ‘fulfilled’ to position gender equality as producing ‘unfulfilled’ marital relationships.

These value judgments explicated through the use of lexicons are aimed at presenting the notion of gender equality as condemnable to the reader. The position of the women supporting gender inequality is also reflective of lexicons expressed in the ‘reversal of the application of values’ where those who fight to combat inequalities are the ones being accused of distorting societal values (van Dijk's 1993, p.273). Hence, an attack on gender inequality is perceived as an attack on nature or against God. ‘Nature’ and ‘God’ are, therefore, represented as ‘just’, ‘necessary’, ‘typical’ or ‘natural’.

7.2.4 Story-telling

Narratives of personal experiences are reflected in discourses in order to make arguments more convincing. These narratives also provide insight into the sense-making practices of Nigerian women on blogs. For instance, C37 states:

C37. I don't believe in gender equality. I do not believe that God made man and woman to be equal in any way. I believe that in every organised institution, there is always a head and an assistant. It doesn't mean that one should take the other for granted, or disrespect the other. I believe the husband is the head of the home and his wife the assistant. My husband is a pilot, I have flown with him several times and I understand that there is a captain and a co-pilot. They are both responsible for the passenger's lives, but when there is a final decision to make, it is up to the captain to make it. He is more experienced and the one with the responsibility.

C37 begins her argument by declaring her position (i.e. against gender equality) and the reason for adopting such a position (i.e. religion). C37 further draws an analogy with the structure of an 'organised institution', which defines the hierarchical orders of leadership while tacitly relating this leadership structure with the religious perception that the man is the head of the woman in all areas of life. C37's example of the role of the pilot and co-pilot also aligns with the popular metaphorical notion of 'two captains leading a ship'. This phrase is often used within the circumstance of leadership where it is believed that a ship can only have one captain, because having more than one captain can result in having two different destinations, leading to conflict, confusion, and failure (Tredgold, 2015). Hence, fostering the perception that gender equality will disrupt the status quo where men lead the ship by dominating women socio-economically.

Next, C37 draws on a personal experience to emphasise her point about the hierarchical order of gender relations. In her opinion, the 'appropriate' order of such gender relations is such that allows women to share in general leadership positions but only as assistants because in the end, the man is always more 'experienced' than the woman. Such a perception held by C37 is defined by religious beliefs that delineate the hierarchical structure of gender relations. Therefore, C37's story is focused on 'the man's job' who is the protagonist of the narrative rather than the woman who is just there to assist. Gender equality, accordingly, is positioned as a threat to the normative order of things and functioning as a movement that seeks to 'dethrone' men culturally and socio-economically.

In addition, C38 adds:

C38. I have been married for 32 years, whether you like it or not, women were not created to be equal with men. Let the Bible guard you. For instance, my husband in front of people will boss me around. But the same man that behaves like a strong man in front of people in public is my puppet at home, does most of the household chores and he cannot buy a pin without my permission. In the eyes of the world, my husband runs the home, but I do. Wisdom is the principal thing. Be foolish in the eyes of the world and be wise at heart.

Similar to C37, C38 narrates a personal experience from her relationship with her husband, which is reflective of occurrences between the public and private domains. While C38 argues that the conviction to stand against gender equality is based on her religious beliefs, she also advises women on how to be in control in the domestic realm since they are apparently denied the ability to exert control in the public domain. However, the strategy she prescribes assumes that all men are the same, or respond to certain behavioural tactics in the same manner. Finally, she emphasises the predominant ideological belief among Nigerian women blogs, that is, as long as a woman is in control of the private sphere (e.g. ensuring that the man's needs are met), she is really the one in control in the public domain. While being a housewife in some cases is a choice and a valid job or responsibility, this angle of persuasion encourages women to accept gender inequality by becoming uninvolved in the public domain where they have the opportunity to effect transformations, such as in the area of legislation and policies.

In summary, telling such personal stories serves as a persuasive technique that exemplifies a factual resource often interpreted as being 'frank', 'candid' or 'genuine' by allowing the public to access a person's private life.

7.3 Pro-Gender Equality Perceptions

An analysis of the discourses that support the subjugation of women is incomplete without presenting the responses of women who support gender equality and the outcomes of such collective tensions for the gender equality struggle as a whole. Hence, in support of gender equality, Stella Damasus, a popular Nigerian actress, states:

P4. The Nigerian Senate has rejected the Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill at second reading. This is totally unacceptable and if every African woman cannot rise up to fight for their rights and the rights of their daughters, then why should

anyone listen or care? If we cannot scream for the world to know what they are doing to us, then what is the point? If we cannot go to every government representative to show them how unacceptable it is then why should we even talk about it? If every woman who is a mother, wife, sister, aunt, or even neighbour to a senator, governor, minister, etc. cannot speak to them about this, then let us all go to bed. Enough is enough. I am tired of seeing the same people fight for the rights of women and children, risking their lives everyday while others act like they don't care. They act like they don't know what is going on. They would rather post stupid pictures of their designer outfits and their shopping sprees. If we as women who are affected cannot put our differences aside and stand together to fight this, then what is the point?

P4 highlights that the lack of solidarity in women's discourse affects their ability to be heard both locally and internationally. P4 also emphasises how consumerism and materialist cultures have become the priority of Nigerian female Internet users whose online visibility is increasingly centred towards the narcissistic self as opposed to a collective or individual struggle against gender inequality. However, while P4 calls on every woman to take on the responsibility of fighting against gender inequality, she overlooks the ideological belief systems (made up of cultural and religious stipulations) being predominant factors that make these women disinclined to take up such responsibility. C39 and C40 articulate these issues as follows:

C39. Women have been so used to being subdued that they don't even understand the meaning of equal rights. That is why a woman can be raped in Nigeria and be too afraid to voice out her horrible experience. That is why many married women in Nigeria have found their homes in the grave yard because of the shame of coming out of an abusive marriage. That is why in the North a girl-child has no right to decide she wants to go to school when her parents want her married. Women do not know there is something wrong with what is going on within them.

C40. ...women in certain regions of Africa, encourage and insist on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) because it's the right thing to do. This act was created by men to mute and silence the sexual urges of women so that only men will control when a woman has sex. But they have brainwashed women to think it's

the right thing to do and so now, the women do it [FGM] themselves and encourage their daughters etc. That's the same thing happening here. Some of us cannot be saved.

C39 and C40 outline the cultural expectations of womanhood that, for them, have made women to be psychologically dominated and brainwashed by men (or patriarchy). When C39 states 'women have been so used to being subdued that they don't seem to even understand the meaning of equal rights', we see a case where dominant discourses have come to influence socially shared knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies, through their role in the manufacture of mental models (van Dijk, 1993, pp. 258-259). Lazar (2007, p.147) also adds that 'gender ideology is hegemonic in that it often does not appear as domination at all, appearing instead as largely consensual and acceptable to most in a community'.

This encapsulates the reasons for the diverse presuppositions that characterise the discourses of women who fight against gender equality. Some of these presuppositions are also a result of misconceptions or a lack of knowledge about what gender equality means or what it seeks to achieve. For instance, the perception that equality implies 'challenging men or God' as opposed to an attempt to ensure equal access to resources for men and women. Also, the idea that gender equality is targeted towards married couples is a dominant presupposition that relates gender equality to issues of equality in marriage. In addition, the perception of the term 'equality', as it concerns gender by Nigerian women on blogs, can be likened to the classical liberal notions of equality and freedom which are centred on an 'abstract universalism' and 'sameness' (Lazar, 2007, p.153). As Lazar points out, the downside of this perception is that since the yard stick of being 'the same as men' is such that is already set by men, 'instead of a radical shift in the gender order, women are required to fit into prevailing androcentric structures' (Lazar, 2007, p.153).

Further, owing to the fragmentation in women's discourses of gender in/equality, it is no surprise to see the discourses of women fighting for gender equality marked by bitterness, as seen in the case of **C41**: 'Forget that gender equality bill, because it's a woman that will go behind closed doors to make sure it doesn't work. Nigerian women - being each other's enemies since 1800.' In addition, while commenting on President Buhari's remarks about his wife belonging to the kitchen, **C42** adds: 'What's her place? In the kitchen and bedroom? Well, women are patriarchy's fiercest foot soldiers.'

C41 and C42 present a very real picture of the problems inherent in the struggle for gender equality, which starts with women themselves. Their dispirited tone is influenced by the belief that gender equality may not be attained because of women's role in reinforcing patriarchy. This has been witnessed in the analysis of this and the previous chapter, where women encourage their (own) confinement to the domestic sphere based on cultural, religious or biological factors. Also, where C40 argues that 'a woman will go behind closed doors' to ensure the GEO Bill does not work, she is partly right going by the analysis in the previous chapter which featured a post (P1) from a Nigerian female legislator who seemed interested in reinforcing the subjugation of womanhood 'publicly' as opposed to fighting it. 'Behind closed doors' in this instance, could also possibly reflect private meetings attended by influential Nigerian women that require consolidating policies on behalf of 'ordinary' women. However, it is believed that such Nigerian female politicians are more interested in retaining their political positions that they tend to succumb to male domination (see Chapter 6).

In charting the way forward amidst the tensions in the discourses of Nigerian female bloggers, C43 argues: 'The first step to freedom is the realisation that you are not free.' This perspective (which is similar to C41 and C42) draws attention again to the socio-cognitive dimension of dominance by emphasising that some Nigerian women do not recognise they are being discriminated against. C43 is also a reminder that the definition of freedom can be both contextual and subjective depending on the ideological influences of the society (which include belief systems of culture and religion). Hence, unless Nigerian women come to the realisation that it is alright for the social arrangements of culture to change, gender inequality will persist. Nevertheless, the growing tensions inherent in the online discourses of Nigerian women on blogs prove that there is a disruption in the otherwise seamless and normative disposition of gender ideology (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999).

7.4 Discussion of findings

This chapter undertook a sociolinguistic analysis of discourse and showed that the discursive structures used to support gender discrimination on blogs reflect the ideological opinions and attitudes of Nigerian women online. Specifically, my analysis has shown that the discursive tools used in de-legitimising gender equality, particularly in relation to the discourses of biological difference and anti-equality, are similar to those used against global feminist movements in the past and in some cases, the present. For

instance, studies have shown that narratives of biological essentialism are presented as 'fixed' and 'natural', while 'equality' is often interpreted as meaning 'the same as men' (Hasinoff, 2009; Lazar, 2007; Mendes, 2015). This shows to a large extent that the discourses of Nigerian women online who encourage gender inequality are a replication of anti-feminist movements of the 1970s.

Aside from these relationships, my analysis also shows women's fight for gender equality as the outcome of wider historical developments. It portrays the juxtaposition of indigenous African culture and Western or non-ethnic religion, as the online discourse of Nigerian women showcases a post-colonial effect. This portrays that Nigerian female blog users are still in touch with indigenous cultural practices, while at the same time, drawing on religious teachings introduced through colonialism or other non-ethnic influences. This link is reflected in a syncretism of beliefs that complicates the underlying basis of women's support for gender inequality. Goredema (2010, p.38), in her assessment of African feminism, emphasises this syncretism as defining the experience of women in Africa, which involves 'negotiating a dual existence of Western knowledge and values together with African authenticity and cultural values'.

In addition, contrary to the opinion that dominant groups (mostly exemplified by the Nigerian male population or the government) rarely acknowledge the endless inequalities of gender, the analysis in this chapter has shown that, at the same time, some women have little understanding, or refuse to acknowledge the many ways they (women) are being discriminated in everyday life, or do not accept to call them 'inequalities'. The opinions of women who do not support gender equality are, therefore, seen at 'the macro-level (large social processes of the society) as a function of underlying norms and values, that is, within the framework of dominant ideologies, which consolidate patriarchal institutions' (van Dijk, 1993, p. 272-273). In this case, the opinions held by the women fighting against gender equality reflect those of some female and male legislators in the Nigerian Senate, as well as those of a dominant section of the public.

Further, as seen from the analysis, the notion that Nigerian women online are disunited in the struggle against gender equality is emphasised in discourse through the use of rhetoric such as 'going behind each other's backs', 'being each other's enemies', 'being patriarchy's fiercest foot soldiers', and so on. This fragmentation, therefore, challenges the conception of the word 'women' as a homogenous category when dealing with issues of gender inequality and draws attention to the 'woman' as a key player in her own marginalisation. By unravelling rival ideological approaches within the pre-

conceived monolithic female counter-publics that obfuscate or rationalise unequal gender relations, I revisit the omission of scholars, such as Fraser (1990), to pay attention to oppositional groups within the counterpublic structure that oppose the ‘dominant’ counter-publics. While scholars (Fraser, 1990; Kellner, 2000) identify the plurality of the ‘counterpublics’, they rarely consider the tensions within the counterpublics, tensions that could birth the counter-counterpublics.

My analysis has also shown that even among women who support gender equality; there are those who are selective in their endorsement of the cause, therefore, those who support certain forms of inequality more or less than others. Again, this challenges the oversimplification of the fight against gender inequality and the category often termed ‘marginalised women’ as comprised of individuals who are against ‘all’ (e.g. inequalities of redistribution and recognition) forms of gender inequality. In summary, this means that within every broadly conceived counterpublic there is a micro counterpublic, and possibly, the more popular a social movement becomes, the more likely is to be marked by multiple counterpublics. As seen from this the analysis, the heterogeneity of the counterpublic is key in identifying peculiar traits and nuances that help one to understand and define resistance to inequality.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter set out to answer the RQ2a ‘What discourses exist in the female blogosphere that provide an alternative to discourses in support of gender equality and how are such discourse positions legitimised through language use?’ The analysis showed the existence of alternative discourses of Nigerian women online in relation to the support of gender inequality, which can be identified as folkloric and religious and which draw on arguments of ‘biological essentialism’. I have also shown that discursive tools, which include ‘argumentation’, ‘rhetorical figures’, ‘lexical style’ and ‘story-telling’ play a role in the modes of communication of Nigerian female bloggers. These discursive tools unravel the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of Nigerian female bloggers, re-enforcing folkloric and religious beliefs as the basis for the support of female subjugation.

The analysis digs deeper into the communicative language of marginalised groups and the tensions in their discourses. As discussed in Chapter 3, this goes against the predominant portrayal of ‘women’ as a homogeneous marginalised category, which pays little attention to possible alternative viewpoints within gender discourses (e.g. Knadler, 2001; Onadeko, 2010). In this regard, this chapter makes an original contribution to the

African and global literary fields of online gender research by examining not only how Nigerian women online conceive and articulate issues that concern their marginalisation, but also the tensions present within their discourses. As shown, these tensions reveal ideological viewpoints (mostly characterised by the acceptance of or resistance to the concept of gender equality) that define gender marginalisation in the Nigerian context. Significantly, the tensions in discourse highlight how conceptualisations of culture and religion broadly constitute what gender in/equality means in the Nigerian/African context.

CHAPTER 8: REPRESENTATION IN WOMEN'S DISCOURSE OF GENDER IN/EQUALITY

'It is now apparent that no claim for justice can avoid presupposing some notion of representation' (Fraser, 2008, p.84).

In this chapter, I focus on the third research question (RQ3a) which examines the cases of gender discrimination that tend to be prioritised in the 'gender in/equality' discourse of Nigerian blog authors and readers. I draw on Fraser's (2005, 2008) theorisation of representation which is centred on the politics of belonging by defining 'who' gets to speak as well as 'who' does not in discourses of gender in/equality. I further draw on Moscovici's (1972) and Hall's (1997) theorisation to study the discursive dimension of representation by highlighting how Nigerian women online interpret and represent gender in/equality in blog discussions.

By drawing on certain posts and comments made by female bloggers on the rejection of the GEO Bill¹⁵⁶ in 2016, I assess how specific images and categories of gender in/equality rather than others come into the interpretations of Nigerian women online. I argue that broad regional and generational divides characterise Internet communication in Nigeria as women on blogs mostly belong to the younger generation and typically possess (or are in the process of securing) a higher (e.g. University) educational qualification. The analysis shows that women on blogs tend to come from the southern Nigeria rather than the North. I argue that such regional distinctions in discourse reflect broader categorisations of 'otherness' in trans-national discourses of gender in/equality, as discussed in Chapter 7.

As regards the representations of gender in/equality in discourse, I argue that such representations have a dual function and are used, particularly by Nigerian female blog readers, to either defend or resist particular constructions of reality. This means that they are used to challenge or sustain blog author conceptualisations of gender in/equality. This makes female blog readers rather active consumers of blog content, thereby serving as a system of 'checks and balances' to blog author reportage. Hence, a significant finding in

¹⁵⁶ The justification for this chapter's focus on the GEO Bill presented in Section 8.3.

the analysis of blog comments is that blog readers use blogs as a primary source of news as they sometimes correct or challenge blog authors when, in their opinion, blog authors get the ‘news’ wrong. Finally, on the subject of discourse inclusivity, my analysis shows that female bloggers, as well as the GEO Bill (2011¹⁵⁷) itself overlook certain forms of gender inequality concerning the recognition of women’s identity. While there seems to be the inclusivity of certain forms of marginalisation faced by the girl-child in blog discourses, the inequalities faced by other categories of the offline majority, such as the elderly or rural women are rarely discussed. I argue that this tendency to focus more on the inequalities of the girl-child has possibly been influenced by popularised global discourses on the girl-child marriage debate of 2013¹⁵⁸ and the Boko Haram kidnappings of 2014 discussed in Section 2.5.

I commence in section 8.1 by relating the use of Fraser’s (2005) representation theory, which applies to the activities of transnational feminists, to the Nigerian contemporary female blogosphere. In this regard, I show that the politics of representation can be applied to discourses that occur online, and in an arguably ‘Westphalian’ context. This is followed in section 8.2 by an assessment of the identity of Nigerian blog users by drawing from web analytic sites such as Alexa.com, as well as the discourses of blog readers. In section 8.3, I justify this chapter’s focus on the GEO Bill. Further, I examine the topics of gender inequality discussed by blog readers and the representational dynamics used by blog authors to interpret and label gender in/equality to their readers in sections 8.3.1 and 8.3.2. Following that, section 8.4 examines the GEO Bill to understand how the presentation of gender in/equality relates to the representational logic of blog authors and readers on gender in/equality. Finally, section 8.5 reflects on inclusivity in blog discussions and on how blog users integrate the forms of discrimination experienced by the offline majority.

8.1 Representation in the Nigerian context

I find it useful to open this chapter with a justification of applying Fraser’s (2005, 2008) concept of representation, seeing that she positions representation as a transnational

¹⁵⁷ Although the GEO Bill was presented before the Nigerian Senate in 2016, the document was drafted since 2011. This means that the GEO Bill was possibly awaiting reading in the Nigerian Senate for a few years. As highlighted in Section 2.6, the process of Bill reading, as witnessed by the GEO Bill itself is slow. Also, as on the 16th of July 2018, there were 2,349 Bills at different stages of Bill reading/hearing in the Nigerian Senate (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, 2018).

¹⁵⁸ This child marriage debate is exemplified by the comment of C14 discussed in Chapter 6 on Senator Yerima who married a thirteen-year-old girl.

activity, which is carried out by global feminists. As discussed in Chapter 3, Fraser (2008, 2005) argues that there has been a shift in the state-territorial framing of the discourse of redistribution and recognition, which is aided by technology and globalisation. This has led to an increase in the transnational flow of discourses exemplified by shared global threats, such as ‘the spread of AIDS, international terrorism, and superpower unilateralism’ (Fraser, 2005, p.304). Fraser also argues that feminists within this era regard their chances of attaining equality as depending ‘at least as much on processes that trespass the borders’ of nation states (2005, p.304). Fraser (2008) identifies the politics of representation as such that takes place among feminist movements within transnational political organisations, such as the European Union, United Nations Agencies and World Social Forums. These feminist movements ensure that redistributive policies are integrated with gender-sensitive policies of recognition.

However, while Fraser (2008) identifies the key players of representation as international feminist organisations, I argue that the politics of representation, which is characterised by questions of misframing (e.g. who participates in the discourse of in/equality?), is relevant to the gender in/equality discourse on the Nigerian female blogosphere. This is because issues concerning the politics of participation are valid in assessing the online platform, which is defined by misrepresentations or divides which exclude certain individuals whose voice should be heard. Fraser also argues that the third phase of feminist struggle (representation) provides the platform for the discourses of redistribution and recognition to thrive side by side in order to challenge ‘the full range of gender injustices in today’s globalised world’ (2005, p.299). This can also be seen from the analysis of Chapter 6, where the Internet provides the platform for the interlinked inequalities of redistribution and recognition to be challenged by Nigerian female bloggers. Hence, while representation is reflective of the transnational discourses of gender inequality, it can also reflect gender in/equality topics within a ‘national-frame’ of discourse on the Internet, as well as the politics of inclusion that such discourse participation generates.

8.2 Discourse and the Identity of Nigerian Female Blog Readers

As discussed in the introduction of the thesis, despite the fact that the estimated number of Nigerian female blog readers surpasses that of men, Nigerian women are constrained by factors such as (computer) literacy, which limits their ability to be online. Therefore, Alexa.com’s (2018) ‘profile of visitors on Nigerian blogs’ describes such

online users as mostly possessing a University degree. The perception that women who communicate on blogs mostly hold a University degree is even held by some female blog users as reflected in discourses. This can be seen in the cases of C17 and C24 discussed in Chapter 7 who referred to blog users' ability to possess a University degree as being responsible for their support for gender equality. Similarly, references made to the educational qualifications of blog users can be seen in the comments of C44 and C45 who respond to an anti-gender equality post featuring a Nigerian (male) radio personality who described gender equality as an attempt of the so-called Nigerian 'educated women' to fight and overthrow men:

C44. We went to University, we graduated, we have knowledge. Nobody here is saying 'let us riot'. All we are saying is women should be given equal opportunity to work as men.

C45.... should we be mindless drones who go to University, obtain our master's degree, get a job, work for a while after which we have fulfilled our duty to humanity? We have shown our mothers that we have truly gone where they have not gone and so unlike them, we will push our dreams and ambitions through to get results.

In the extract, C45 responds to C44's comment, and by using the pronoun 'we' in reference to possessing a University degree, C44 and C45 refer to other female blog users as an 'imagined collective' that is defined by shared educational achievements. This suggests, whether true or not, that Nigerian women online tend to perceive each other as belonging to the same social class having attained some level of University degree or qualification. In addition, C45 does not only mention possessing a Bachelor's degree as the definitive trait of women who are online but also refers to a form of continued education (Masters degree). This raises the question whether C45 perceives herself as well as other blog readers who possess a Master's degree as belonging to a 'super privileged' class in contrast to women who possess only a Bachelor's degree. Further, C45 adds that by gaining a University qualification, they (female blogs readers) have achieved what their mothers' generation could not and would, therefore, strive to further their ambitions, possibly unlike their mothers who have accepted to be subjugated by confining themselves to the home. This highlights a generational divide where women involved in

online discourses on gender in/equality are not only of a certain educational class but also belong to the younger generation. C36, analysed in Chapter 7, also highlights this divide: ‘our mothers in the olden days never fought for equal rights with their husbands and they all had, and are still having a fulfilled marriage’. Aside from the fact that the older generation of women might be computer illiterate, this paints a picture of such women as conforming to discriminating cultural practices, rather than resisting them.

This generational divide is also captured by Alexa.com (2018) which shows that Nigerian blog visitors mostly fall within the age range of 18 to 40. Similarly, scholars such as Schuster (2013), Harris (2008) and Keller (2012), identify that new media enables young women to participate in discussions on gender issues, although they also exclude people who do not use them, and therefore, contribute to a generational divide among women who fight against gender inequalities. This is not surprising because digital literacy has been argued to be higher among younger people (Gibbons, 2007). Also, owing to the fact that most of the information shared on blogs is only available when women visit such blog sites, discourses of gender in/equality online unintentionally exclude women (both young and old) who do not engage in online communities. In the case of Nigeria, this means that such divides are evident not only between the older and younger generations, but also in urban/rural dichotomies, as well as the North-South division discussed in Chapter 2. The urban/rural dichotomy can be traced to the lack of development in the rural areas of Nigeria, which is illustrated by developmental issues, such as the lack of electricity and low literacy rates. This means that women who live in rural areas may be faced with more challenges that affect online participation than women who enjoy better infrastructural facilities in the urban areas. C46 highlights this rural/urban digital divide in her response to a blog post on the GEO Bill:

C46. When they pass the bill who will help the rural woman fight? They will still be oppressed. Women need to, first of all, stand up as one, find a particular clause in the law that is against us and actively fight it. A victory in one will lead to victories in others.

C46 draws attention to the vulnerable position of rural women who are often left out of developmental projects in the country (Akinwotun, 2007). C46, therefore, questions the applicability of the GEO Bill to tackle the oppressions faced by women in the rural communities. C46 also calls for inclusivity by suggesting that women need to

‘stand up as one’ in the fight against discrimination. By so doing, C46 highlights the significant divide between urban women who are more likely to be online than rural women who are predominantly offline.

In addition, owing to cultural practices (such as child marriage, purdah, lack of girl education, and so on) that affect development in northern Nigeria, fewer women from the northern region (in comparison to the South) are believed to be online. A report compiled by Premium Times (2016) shows northern Nigeria as having the worst girl-child education report. The northern states are also believed to have the worst cases of child/adolescent marriage rates in the country. This effectively means that fewer women from the northern region of the country are educated enough to participate in online discourses. In addition, in the research sample analysed, references are made to regional distinctions of the North and South of Nigeria in a manner that has consequences on the representation of women online. C47 and C48 individually respond to a post about a Sultan from northern Nigeria who said Muslims would not accept gender equality because it violates the Islamic law, which guarantees men a greater share of any inheritance:

C47. This [the gender equality discourse] is a tussle between the more liberal Southern Nigeria and conservative North. Bills [the GEO] like this will always stir controversy. Nigeria is such a complex marriage of two parts with different ideals and that will forever be our struggle. The liberals in the South are championing a feminist agenda on the Internet, while some women up North are barely even allowed to work or go outdoors.

C48. The earlier we divide [Nigeria] the better for us. Southern Muslims who can't cope with our way of life [reflective of Gender Equality] here [in the South] should migrate to the North and vice versa. They keep using religion to slow down our developmental pace. Haba! Every time Islam says this, Koran says this. Kilode? Lord Lugard may you continue to rest in pieces. You just brought two different regions that have nothing in common together for selfish interest.

C47 and C48 interpret the gender equality discourse on blogs as ‘a tussle between individuals from the more liberal southern region of Nigeria and those from the conservative North’. As discussed in Chapter 2, the two regions of the North and South

protectorates were amalgamated in 1914 by Lord Lugard who was the governor of both protectorates and was responsible for the unification so as to form the colony called Nigeria. This amalgamation is believed to have been influenced by economic, rather than political factors and has been met by resistant movements from Southern Nigeria, mostly after independence. This is majorly what led to the Nigerian Civil War, which was an attempt by the Igbos (a southern tribe) to secede from the country (Adichie, 2006).

C47 and C48 draw on the cultural differences between the North and the South, which are believed to be connected to the unequal development of the two regions. As discussed in Section 2.1, in comparison to the South, the northern part of the country, which is mostly dominated by the Muslim population, is saddled with issues of illiteracy and religious practices (such as *purdah*) that limit women's participation in the public domain. C47 draws on such limitations when commenting about women not being allowed to work or go outdoors. C48, therefore, presupposes that the Quran is responsible for limiting 'development' in Nigeria through its resistance to gender equality. However, the analysis presented in Chapters 5 and 6 has also shown that Biblical teachings are drawn by female bloggers to delegitimise gender equality. This shows that religion is used in the overall sense to continue gender injustice or used as the reason to promote it.

In addition, the presupposition by C47 that the southern region of Nigeria is more 'liberal', championing the cause for gender equality or feminism, while the North is conservative and supports gender inequality, is a reflection of trans-national binary categorisations discussed in Chapter 7, which identifies Africa as conservative and America as liberal. C48's remark that those who 'can't cope with the way of life [reflective of gender equality] in the South should migrate to the North' is also a replication of the discourses that call for those who are not happy with the so-called Nigerian conservatism to 'relocate' to America, as seen from C32 in the last chapter. This shows that the discourse of 'otherness' is replicated across both 'macro' and 'micro' contexts of inequalities.

Accordingly, while C47 implies that southern Nigeria is pro-gender equality while the northern region is not, C48 reveals the heterogeneity of such dichotomised positions (North and South) by referring to the Muslims in the southern region and the Christians in the North. This shows that, although the North is categorised as being predominantly Muslim, there are individuals of other religions who reside there, and the same goes in the case of the Muslims who reside in the predominant Christian South. Nevertheless, aside from the heterogeneity of the northern and southern regions of Nigeria, web

analytics shows that it is more likely for women from the southern part of Nigeria to be online than women who come from the North. This can be seen from the top 6 Nigerian female bloggers on Alexa.com and the top 30 female bloggers on the Nigerian blog awards website, which come from the southern states of Nigeria. This suggests that when we talk about Nigerian blog users, particularly blog authors, we are talking predominantly about women who come from the southern states. Hence, perspectives on blogging (or online use) that focus on the North/South divide is a research area for future scholars to pursue.

In addition, in the offline political domain, most of the female politicians at the forefront of championing the cause of gender equality are from the South. These southern politicians include Senator Biodun Olujimi from Ekiti state who introduced the GEO Bill, former Minister for Solid Minerals, Obiageli Ekwesili from Anambra state who created the Bring Back Our Girls Campaign, and so on. However, the only northern female Senator from Adamawa State in the North to publicly react on gender equality is Binta Masi Garba who argued against the GEO Bill stating that her domestic responsibilities precede her political role. This shows that on both online and offline platforms, women from the northern region seem to be less inclined (or in some cases opportune) to resist practices of gender inequality than women from the South.

Having established that broad participatory issues, such as urban/rural, North/South and young/old generational divides play a significant role in determining who gets to speak on the Nigerian female blogosphere, I now consider the gender inequality agenda on blogs; hence, what forms of inequality are represented in discourse and what forms are possibly not?

8.3 The Gender Inequality Agenda in Blog Discourses

This section discusses the representation of topics on gender inequality on Nigerian female blogs. The concept of 'gender equality', that is, the discussions surrounding what it means or seeks to achieve (as discussed on Nigerian female blogs) was popularised by the rejection of the GEO Bill. I am particularly interested in understanding what gender equality as a concept means to Nigerian women online, in isolation from discussions that spring up from specific occurrences (reported by blog authors) that express discrimination against women. For instance, Nigerian women online have been seen discussing topics of gender discrimination, such as girl kidnapping, negative widowhood practices, as well as the domestication of womanhood, as a way to

respond to ‘single’ cases of gender discrimination reported on female blogs. Nevertheless, here I seek to understand which specific topics of gender discrimination come to the mind of women when they are presented with the concept of ‘gender equality’; which discourses they deem worthy, credible or valid, and which ones are tossed aside or possibly seen as not significant enough. Hence, while ‘individual’ cases of gender discrimination reported by blog authors allow Nigerian women on blogs to talk about discrimination, when they are presented with an ‘umbrella term’, such as that of ‘gender equality’, it is interesting to explore which of these ‘individual’ cases (which are probably captured in the GEO Bill) are highlighted in blog discourses and which ones are not.

The GEO Bill (2011) was the first comprehensive¹⁵⁹ women’s policy document drafted in Nigerian history. My study of gender discrimination topics on blogs shows that it was after the GEO Bill was presented that the term ‘gender equality’ became a widely recognised and discussed concept in relation to the fight against women’s marginalisation in Nigeria. Therefore, the GEO Bill provides the vantage point from which to study the representation of gender inequality in blog discourses because it is (supposedly) the ‘blueprint’ and houses the diverse forms of inequalities faced by Nigerian women in contemporary times. Through focusing on the Bill, the analysis will enable a better understanding of the extent to which Nigerian women on blogs were (and are) informed about the concept of gender equality and how they have come to make meaning of what gender equality represents in the country. I am also able to assess the representational mechanisms that are played out in blog discussions and how these relate to the representation of women’s interests in the GEO Bill itself.

8.3.1 Gender Inequality in Blog Comments

In analysing blog discourses, it became clear that certain types or groups of gender inequality topics were iterated in blog discussions, while other topics seemed to be ignored or overlooked. Indicatively, some forms of gender inequality are highlighted in the discussions of C49, C50, and C51 which respond to a question asked by C49:

¹⁵⁹ It incorporates forms of discrimination that tackle issues of redistribution and recognition. This is in contrast to the preceding National Gender Policy (discussed in Chapter 2) that focused on redistributive rights, such as education, economic and political forms of inequality.

C49. I'm sorry but I don't understand. What was the Gender Equality Bill supposed to do and contribute to us [women] please? Can someone enlighten me without insulting me? thanks ☺

C50. Basically, the Bill is to make it a law for women and men to be treated and paid equally at work, and etc.

C51. The Bill also protects women in case of divorce. For example, your hubby's people cannot just kick you out and steal your kids. It's a very important bill.

C49, 50 and 51 reveal a dialogue, where C49's open declaration of her limited knowledge of the Bill unravels the personal interpretation of other blog users on aspects of the Bill, which they possibly consider 'significant'. C50 points to socio-economic equality which is often used as an example to explicate the relevance of gender equality among Nigerian female bloggers as seen in Chapter 7. Socio-economic inequality is also presented in the GEO Bill which requires that 'in the case of employment (or other economic sphere) in the public or private, a minimum of 35% of all offices, positions, or appointments is reserved for women' (Article 6b (ii), p 7). While 35% is arguably not a representation of 'socio-economic equality', this 'inadequate' percentage does not seem to be interrogated by blog readers. C51 also highlights the cultural practice of throwing women out of their marital homes (mostly by in-laws), which is a popular practice in the event of the husband's death where the woman is thrown out of the home without any financial settlement or rights to the custody of her children (Jonathan and Inedu, 2013).

Regarding C51, the GEO Bill only considers the rights of female divorcees where they are given the right to choose or retain citizenship and identity as well as to have the choice to retain their maiden names after separation (Article 14a). The Bill also grants women who are divorced equal rights to confer their citizenship on their children. Therefore, it does not consider child custody issues; neither does it protect the woman from in-law abuse as perceived by C51. On the other hand, the GEO Bill focuses on the rights of widows by asserting that they become the automatic guardians of their children in the event of the husband's demise. It also gives a widow 'the right to the equitable share of her husband's inheritance and gives her the right to continue to live in the matrimonial house' (Article 7 (iii), (iv), (v), (vi), p.7). Hence, the GEO Bill addresses the rights of widows but it does not address the needs of women who are divorced or

separated in this regard. Considering the discourses presented in Chapter 7, this possibly suggests that the discrimination faced by widows is considered more legitimate in some ways than those of women who are divorced owing to the fact that divorce is considered an infringement on the cultural and religious doctrines of marriage.

Further, in discussing the rights of divorced women, C51 cites an example with C49's in-laws, possibly assuming that she is either married or aspires to be married given the cultural expectations of womanhood in Nigeria. This also draws attention to the tendency for blog users to interpret gender equality from a marriage perspective, which will be elaborated later in this chapter. Other topics of gender inequality drawn from discourses can be seen in the individual comments below:

C52. According to the Women Affairs site, the Bill seeks to eliminate all forms of discrimination on the basis of sex and gender in private and public spaces, affirms women's rights to equal opportunities to realize their full potential and provide protection for their bodily integrity and human dignity. You can check womenaffairs.gov.ng for more details.

C53. Do you know that up until this day in many parts of Nigeria a woman is not allowed to inherit property from her father like her male siblings? As a married woman in order to get a passport you must get a letter of consent or a signature from your husband but no man is required to do such. Up until today, many landlords will not rent a home to single women! When married women go to report domestic abuse in the police station they are told it is a domestic matter so they should go back home and behave! These are some of the many ways in which women face discrimination day in day out in Nigeria.

C54. There are several female-specific issues in Nigeria to be tackled: girl child marriage particularly in the North [of Nigeria], girl kidnapping (e.g. Boko Haram¹⁶⁰), rape, adequate maternity leaves etc,

¹⁶⁰ A terrorist sect in North-East Nigeria.

C55. I suppose it is the word ‘equality’ that bothers some people but I am sure that you would agree that child marriages, forced marriages, and situations where a woman is impoverished by her in-laws because her husband is dead, does not benefit anybody, least of all women. I am also sure you would agree that every girl has the right to education and that women were not placed on this earth solely to birth children. These issues which informed this Bill, are way beyond the dynamics of individual marriages.

C52 quotes the ‘goal’ of the GEO Bill presented on the Nigerian Women Affairs website as follows: ‘the Bill seeks to eliminate all forms of discrimination on the basis of sex and gender in private and public spaces, affirms women’s rights to equal opportunities to realize their full potential and provide protection for their bodily integrity and human dignity’. However, probably realising the ambiguity of the outlined ‘goal’, C52 additionally provides a link to the Women Affairs website where blog users can retrieve more information on the GEO Bill.

We also see that C53, C54 and C55 highlight other forms of gender inequality experienced by Nigerian women, such as under-age marriage, lack of girl-child education, rape, the lack of maternity leave, the lack of women’s freedom of mobility and economic activity, denial of family inheritance, traveling only with a husband’s consent, and the lack of legislative backing for domestic violence. The issue of female inheritance highlighted in C53 aligns with the GEO Bill, which states that ‘women and men shall have the right to inherit, in equitable shares, their parents’ properties’ (Article 7 (vii), p.7). In addition, the Bill advocates for women’s freedom of movement and economic activities, which potentially tackles the discrimination faced by women in areas where they desire to rent properties (Article 13a, b, c, p.15). Similarly, this freedom of movement and economic activity might affect the practice that requires women to get a letter of consent from their spouses in order to apply for an international passport document by granting them the liberty to travel. The issue of domestic abuse, in turn, is captured in the GEO Bill, which states:

All forms of violence against women are prohibited, whether the violence takes place in private, family or public sphere, including unwanted or forced sex, or traditional, religious or cultural practices harmful to the health, well-being and integrity of the woman. All forms of violence against elderly women including

sexual abuse, and discrimination based on age are prohibited. All forms of violence against women with a disability including sexual abuse, and discrimination based on disability are prohibited (Article 18b and c, p.19).

It can be seen from the above excerpt that the GEO Bill not only focuses on domestic violence as expressed by female blog users and authors (as seen later in the analysis) but also refers to diverse forms of violence within the public and private spheres. The GEO Bill refers to ‘trafficking in women and children, abuse and exploitation of women and children in any manner or way, and medical experiments on women without their informed consent, or on children without the informed consent of their parents or legal guardian’ (Article 18e, p.19). On the other hand, rather than incorporating the forms of violence that affect the elderly, disabled, unmarried women or the girl child, the focus of the Bill on violence is mostly from within a marriage or domestic framework and through the use of rhetoric such as ‘domestic violence’ or ‘spousal abuse’. This lack of focus in the Bill on the inequalities faced by elderly and disabled women reflects the misrepresentation of the gender equality discourse on the female blogosphere, where the needs of the invisible and vulnerable populations are overlooked or deprioritised.

C54 also draws her attention to cases of girl child marriage, which the GEO Bill tackles by ensuring that the minimum age of marriage for women should be 18 years (Article 19b, p.20). In addition, the GEO Bill advocates for marriage to be only performed with the consent of the man and the woman involved, aiming to tackle practices where girls are forcefully married off, in some cases even through kidnapping. Thus, C54 highlights the kidnapping of over 200 secondary school girls by Boko Haram in Chibok in 2014, which would be a punishable offense by law, if the GEO Bill were enacted. Similarly, C55 highlights girl child education, which the GEO Bill tackles by ensuring that primary school enrolment mechanisms are put in place to achieve parity in the enrolment and retention of boys and girls (Article 6 (vi), p.6).

However, the GEO Bill does not seem to have clear provisions on rape as might be implied from C54’s comment above. The Bill rather states on this issue:

The Government shall protect the reproductive rights of women to terminate a pregnancy in cases of sexual assault, rape, incest, and where the continued pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health of the mother or the life of the mother or the foetus (Article 12c, pp. 12-13).

This is to say that the GEO Bill does not provide legislation that punishes the perpetrators of rape, rather the Bill focuses on granting women the choice of terminating the pregnancy (only) if it is considered to ‘endanger the mental or physical health of the mother or foetus’. It is also interesting that blog readers do not seem to have picked up on this position taken by the GEO Bill. C54 further highlights issues of maternity leave which the GEO Bill tackles by ensuring that every private organisation or government agency enforces ‘maternity leave with pay or with comparable social benefits and without loss of former employment’ (Article 11a, (i), p.13). In summary, the blog discourses of Nigerian women on gender inequality seem to draw on topics such as: economic inequality, the lack of divorce settlements, negative widowhood practices, girl-child marriage, girl-child kidnapping and forced marriage, the lack of education for the girl child, rape, domestic violence, women’s lack of freedom of movement, gender issues of family inheritance, and maternity leave. Even though these range of topics reflect quite diverse cases of gender inequality, clearly missing are issues that focus on the recognition of women’s identities, which is believed to be a significant aspect of the contemporary global feminist discourse (Fraser, 2005). These ‘omissions’ pertaining to the recognition of gender identity will be discussed later in the chapter. Nevertheless, the interpretation of these forms of inequalities by some Nigerian women (on blogs) seems to deviate from that of the GEO Bill from which they claim to cite. As discussed, contrary to the perception of female blog users, the provisions on rape in the GEO Bill do not seek to punish the perpetrators but only allow the victim of rape to have an abortion where it is deemed ‘needful’ by the law.

Further, the dominant belief held by bloggers that the GEO Bill tackles socio-economic equality may not be true as it ensures that only 35% of office or electable positions are reserved for women. In addition, the rights of women in cases of divorce, such as the custody of children or inheritance, are not tackled by the Bill, which focuses on the needs of widows in these areas. Similarly, spousal domestic violence, which is reiterated in the discourses of female blog readers is not captured in isolation by the Bill which also covers other forms of gender-based violence that affect unmarried women and the girl-child (e.g. women trafficking and child abuse). While these discourses show that Nigerian women on blogs have formed interpretations about gender inequality, it also reveals how their conceptions of the forms (or aspects) of gender inequality (which they

believe are) tackled by the GEO Bill deviates from those represented in the GEO Bill itself.

The topics often discussed by women on blogs also highlight the significant tendency for Nigerian female blog readers to interpret gender equality from a marriage perspective. This can be seen from the discourses analysed in Chapters 5 and 6. However, the questions that arise from this discussion are: what has made this kind of understanding of gender inequality topics come into the interpretation of Nigerian women on blogs? Hence, what forms of representational mechanisms have been used by blog authors (as primary information sources) to introduce the GEO Bill to blog readers, and how does the focus of these representations (of blog authors and readers) align with those in the GEO Bill which seeks to curb gender discrimination?

Jodelet (1991) argues that ‘representations are images that condense manifold meanings that allow people to interpret what is happening; categories which serve to classify circumstances, phenomena, and individuals with whom we deal’ (cited in Howarth, 2006, p.67). This brings into focus the role that blog authors play in interpreting or classifying the concepts related to gender in/equality for blog readers to understand. Hence, in what follows, I examine the posts of female blog authors, particularly those declaring the breaking news of the rejection of the GEO Bill, which also required them to provide some background and enlighten their blog readers about what gender equality means or seeks to achieve. This enables the assessment of how blog authors make sense of the GEO Bill’s objectives and how this influences the meaning-making practices of Nigerian female blog readers on gender in/equality.

8.3.2 Representations of Gender In/Equality in Blog Posts

Looking at the screen capture from Stella Dimokokorkus blog that announces the breaking news on the rejection of the GEO Bill, it can be seen how this post aligns with the interpretation of some Nigerian blog users on what gender equality represents.

Figure 8.1: Screen Capture of SDK Blog Post



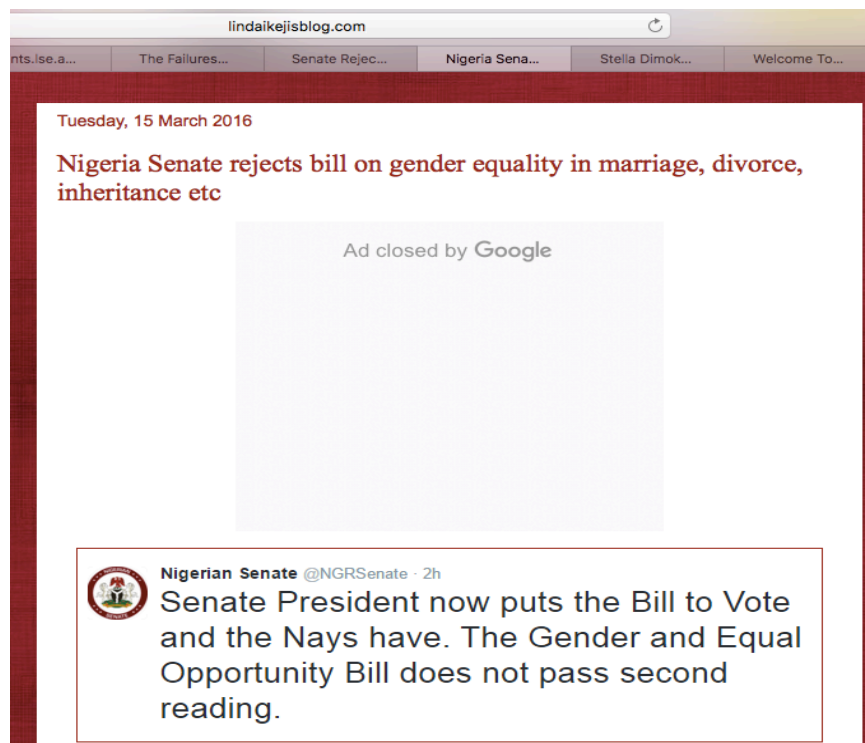
The title of this post reduces gender equality as promoted by the GEO Bill to issues that concern married women, thereby exempting unmarried women or the girl child from the GEO Bill's agenda. This emphasis on marriage is also seen in the blog author's post under the above caption, which attempts to explain what the GEO Bill seeks to achieve:

P.5 The Bill was presented by Abiodun Olujimi, representing Ekiti South during the Senate's plenary session. According to Mrs. Olujimi, the Bill would seek equal rights for women in marriage, education and the work place. She said if the Bill was passed, a widow in Nigeria would automatically become the custodian of her children in the event of the death of her husband, and would also inherit his property.

As seen in the text, P5's elaboration of the GEO Bill draws on Senator Olujimi's remarks on the Senate floor, which outline the forms of gender inequality to be tackled, such as inequality in marriage, lack of education and work-place discrimination. Listing 'equality in marriage' as the first objective could be interpreted as an attempt to prioritise objectives, which are perceived as 'more significant' in the fight against gender inequality. It is, therefore, not surprising that P5 uses the caption 'equality in marriage' to introduce the Bill to her blog readers. There is a predominant assertion of the rights of married women in the post which goes on to list issues of equality in marriage, such as

widowhood inheritance rights and child custody rights. These interpretations have possibly contributed to the perception of blog readers that the GEO Bill's primary objective is 'equality in marriage'. Similarly, Linda Ikeji blog broke the news about the rejection of the GEO Bill through the following post, which can be seen from the screen capture:

Figure 8.2: Screen Capture of Linda Ikeji Blog Post



Again, the title of the post suggests that the Bill was mainly created to solve marital issues of inequality and divorce. Linda Ikeji follows this post with an explanation of what the Bill seeks to achieve, stating:

P.6 Members of the Nigerian Senate today March 15th, voted against the Gender Equality in Marriage Bill, which was being sponsored by Senator Biodun Olujimi. The Bill amongst other things was designed to address women's freedom of movement, female economic activity, girls' access to education, equal rights for women in marriage, divorce, property/land ownership and inheritance, appropriate measures against gender discrimination in political and public life and prohibitions of violence to women.

It can be seen above that P6 goes further to label the GEO Bill as the ‘Gender Equality in Marriage Bill’, which makes the itemised ‘girls’ access to education’ looking like a contradiction for a Bill designated to solve marital forms of inequality. Though other blogs, such as Bella Naija and Ladun Liadi, captioned their stories on the rejection of the GEO Bill in a non-marriage oriented way, the content that followed such captions still focused heavily on marriage related forms of gender inequality. For instance, Bella Naija blog stated ‘Senate Rejects the Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill at Second Reading’. However, the text of the post that explained what the GEO Bill seeks to achieve is identical to Linda Ikeji blog, suggesting that the information retrieved by such blog authors was possibly copied from a similar source.

Ladun Liadi blog also introduces the GEO Bill using the title: ‘Nigerian Senate Throws out Gender Equality Bill’. The statement followed this: **P7**. ‘The Senate has rejected a bill seeking to empower women politically and economically, as well as grant them equal opportunities with men in diverse human endeavours’. Such vague declaration, however, does not provide blog users with specific information on the areas of gender inequality tackled by the Bill. Other blogs, such as Misspetitie Nigeria and Laila’s blog, just seemed to carry follow-up stories on the rejection of the Bill, probably expecting their blog readers to have caught up on the story from other online sources. Hence, there were no direct stories on these blogs that explained the concept of gender equality, such as the other blogs (e.g. Linda Ikeji, Bella Naija, and so on) that had posts introducing the GEO Bill and what it sought to achieve. Misspetitie Nigeria blog and Laila’s blog only had posts centred on the perceptions or reactions of individuals to the GEO Bill or on the concept of gender equality. This lack of ‘adequate’ representation suggests that blog readers are not properly informed about the concept of gender equality or the GEO Bill, and this has implications on the ‘collective’ participation of women in the struggle against gender discrimination.

From the analysis, it becomes clear that the representational dynamics used to label gender in/equality by blog authors draws more on marriage-related issues than other forms of gender inequality that affect unmarried women or the girl-child. This representational logic influences that of Nigerian female blog readers whose information source is mainly the content published by blog authors. Nevertheless, there are some blog readers who challenge blog authors’ representations of gender inequality as well as other blog readers’. Indicative is the case of C55 who argued that the ‘issues which informed this Bill, are way beyond the dynamics of individual marriages’. In the following

comment, C56 challenges a blog user who interpreted the Bill as an attempt by women to claim a share of their husband's wealth in the event of a divorce. Similarly, C57 and C58 challenge female blog readers who seem to have accepted the representation of gender equality as a concept that relates to marriage alone.

C56. Did you even read the bill? Do you know how “equal pay” is evaluated? There are many issues behind this bill other than women trying to get their legal entitlement in a justified divorce. Research those questions and restructure your vitriol towards the senators who opposed the bill.

C57. I don't understand how so many people think gender equality has to do with marriage alone. The issue here is about equal provision and protection in the eyes of the law. For example, not depriving women of the right to inherit property in the event of her mother /father/husband's death. Provision of medical facilities for women. The right of female children to stay in school protected by law. Protection from violence, unwanted marriage etc.

C58. From the way most of us are sounding, I am convinced you guys didn't read the Bill. You simply went to town with media sensation. You would have discovered that it is not just about marriage equality. This is the link, please read and further comment. placng.org/new/upload/SB37C613.pdf

The above examples of representation show the ability of some blog users to reject the representations of blog authors, as well as the possibility for other blog users to sustain or defend the version of reality represented by blog authors (Jodelet, 1991). This shows that blog readers are sometimes active online participants who provide alternative viewpoints that add diversity to the content of blog discussions. In this regard, blog readers could be said to act as a fourth estate to blog authors' reporting.

It is indeed evident from the discourses analysed that 'many' women (as described by C57) seem to interpret gender equality as a marriage-related concept and this has implications on how Nigerian women online construct their reality. For example, in the discourses analysed in the previous chapter (e.g. C28, C31, C33 and C34), the interpretation of women's discrimination from a (sole) marriage perspective seemed to play a significant role in how female blog users respond to the fight for gender equality.

Where gender equality is perceived as gender equality in marriage, it is perceived as a ploy to attack cultural norms and values and to distort established belief systems of culture and religion. Hence, such labelling of gender equality from a marriage perspective by blog authors could have possibly contributed to the resentment of the GEO Bill which is perceived by some women as advocating for the disruption of cherished cultural practices which thrive in certain forms of gender inequality.

C58 also challenges other blog users' representations of the Bill, which she argues might have been drawn from the media (particularly blogs). C58 additionally provides a link for blog users to access the GEO Bill, which is a visible trend in the discourses of the blog readers sampled in this study. However, there is no identifiable record of blog authors providing links to the GEO Bill, neither do they seem to engage in debates or answer blog-reader questions on gender equality. This relates to the discussions in Chapter 5, which show the general lack of communicative exchange between blog authors and readers across the six blogs sampled in the study. Nevertheless, some blog readers have challenged the 'misrepresentations' and silence of blog authors on issues of gender equality as advocated by the GEO Bill:

C59. On my own part, I am a feminist and a proponent of gender equity and total discarding of any form of cultural bias in all institutions but one important thing we seem to miss is, how come we don't have access to the full/detailed content of the Bill from Linda? I believe if we have explicit access to the full content of this Bill, we can make more meaningful contributions devoid of personal sentiments and infantile grouse.

C59 questions Linda Ikeji, the author of Linda Ikeji blog, about the unavailability of the full content of the GEO Bill or a link to where it can be accessed rather than the summary provided by the blog author. C59 also draws attention to the possibility for misinterpretations without a full picture of the inequalities addressed by the Bill. This highlights the possibility that the blog authors themselves may not have read the Bill and retrieved the information as published from other news sources.

In addition, C60 challenges another blog author (Stella Dimokokorkus) and her representation of the Bill:

C60. As a female journalist SDK [Stella Dimokokorkus], it is your responsibility to inform your readers accurately about the contents of the Bill. People [blog readers] are just talking based on nothing. They've never seen the Bill and have no idea what it says. So how then do you respond to those who are opposing it and how do you win them over?? Since the news broke we've all been googling SDK blog and coming here to read the story. How about googling the 'gender and equal opportunities bill' and see for yourself what exactly it says???

C60 highlights the failure of the blog author (SDK) to provide information on the GEO Bill to her readers and believes that blog readers are opposing the Bill (hence, gender equality) based on the lack of information on it and due to the blog author failing in carrying out her journalistic responsibility of informing her readers. C60 also draws attention to the significance of female blogs such as SDK as primary news sources for women by stating: 'since the news broke we've been googling SDK blog and coming here to read the story'. However, such high anticipation has been met with disappointment for C60 and possibly other blog users who expected to see a detailed breakdown of the forms of inequality advocated by the GEO Bill. C60 concludes by suggesting that SDK should make a Google search on the Bill to improve her knowledge for the benefit of her blog readers. By so doing, C60 insinuates that the blog author is unaware of the contents of the Bill and probably retrieved her information from other news sites, instead of carrying out a first-hand investigation of the GEO Bill herself. This also suggests that blog readers expect blog authors to be experts on the subjects that they report on in a similar way that society holds journalists accountable for the news stories they report.

8.4 Representations in the GEO Bill

Having assessed blog authors' and readers' representations of gender in/equality as advocated by the GEO Bill, it is important to examine the extent to which the focus of these representations (of blog authors and readers) align with those in the GEO Bill itself, which seeks to curb gender discrimination in the country. I, therefore, scrutinise in this section the GEO Bill to see how the representations of blog authors are similar to or deviate from the representations of gender inequality made in the Bill. This will shed light on the forms of gender inequality that have been projected as well as overlooked or ignored by media outlets (such as blogs). It will also highlight forms of gender inequality that have been raised in discourse by blog users but are not represented in the GEO Bill.

Finally, it will enable a better understanding of the diverse forms of inequalities captured by the GEO Bill, which is believed to be a comprehensive document that deals with the entire range of inequalities faced by Nigerian women.

The GEO Bill was structured into three major parts. The first part addresses the diverse forms of gender inequalities faced by Nigerian women. The second part focuses on the duties of the Equal Opportunities Commission, which is expected to monitor and supervise the implementation of the Bill, while the third part seeks to enforce the National Gender Policy by outlining penalties for defaulters. The first part of the Bill deals with diverse forms of gender inequalities which include: the modification of socio-cultural practices, elimination of discrimination in political and public life, in education, in employment, on grounds of marital status, in the field of health, on socio-economic grounds, right to choose indigeneship and identity, the rights of persons in rural communities, the rights in matters relating to marriage and family relations, prohibition of violence against women, provisions relating to marriage and matrimonial causes.

As seen in the discussions of blog readers and the posts of blog authors in this chapter as well as in Chapters 5 and 6, the areas of gender equality advocated by the GEO Bill are largely drawn from legislations on the elimination of discrimination in political and public life (e.g. C51); in the field of education (e.g. C55); in employment (e.g. C50); on the grounds of marital status (e.g. C52); in socio-economic grounds (e.g. C50); in rights relating to marriage and family relations (e.g. C53); in discrimination in health (e.g. C54); in prohibition of violence against women (e.g. C53); and in provisions relating to marriage and matrimonial causes (e.g. C52). However, ‘whole’ sections of the GEO Bill on gender inequality seem to be overlooked by blog readers and authors, such as: ‘the modification of socio-cultural practices’ and the ‘right to choose indigeneship and identity’. Specifically, as regards women’s indigeneship and identity, the Bill states:

Women and men shall be granted equal rights to acquire, confer, change or retain their indigeneship, and in particular, shall ensure that neither marriage, divorce nor widowhood shall deny a woman the right to choose or retain her citizenship and identity and she shall have the choice, without hindrances, limitations, disadvantages or conditions, to retain her maiden name. Women shall have equal rights with men to confer their citizenship on their children (Article 14a, p.16).

This section of the GEO Bill deals with the recognition of women's identity, their ability to choose their citizenship and identity, which in many ways goes against traditional African culture. For instance, in some Nigerian traditions, a widow is passed down to her husband's brother owing to the belief that she is a part of the properties acquired by her dead husband (Jonathan and Inedu, 2013). The excerpt of the GEO Bill also infringes on other cultural practices that make it an abomination for a widow to remarry or for a married woman to retain her maiden name (Jonathan and Inedu, 2013).

Similarly, the section of the Bill on the modification of socio-cultural practices has been completely overlooked in blog discourses. In this regard, the Bill states:

Every organ or agency of government, public or private institution, commercial or corporate body, community, or other social entity, including educational institutions shall have the responsibility to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of gender stereotyping, prejudices, and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes, or the roles for men and women, and to this end:...(Article 6, p. 7)

The sub-sections of the GEO Bill go on to itemise the modifications that shall be made to every private and educational institution, which includes adopting the teaching methods and curricula that promote the equality of all sexes 'in all circumstances and for all purposes', including the choice of career and the participation of all gender in the activities of schools or institutions (Article 6 (i), p.7). This is followed by the modification of socio-cultural practices in the family unit, which states:

The family as a unit of society shall ensure that values, practices or other forms of rearing of children, ward and young people in the family and community, or other forms of socialization, is not discriminatory, and promotes a proper understanding of maternity as a social function and the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children (Article 6 (ii), p.7).

Looking at this section of the GEO Bill, it is interesting to see that it focuses on the recognition of gendered identity, (i.e. forms of cultural disrespect) both in the public

and private domains of the society. Hence, the institutions of culture value, such as family and schools, are addressed. However, this part of the GEO Bill seems to be blindsided by media outlets and female blogs who choose to predominantly represent the cultural aspects of the Bill in connection to spousal relations in marriage, which has contributed to women's resistance against the Bill. Aside from this presentation of the Bill from a marriage perspective, which often discredits it, in line with the analysis of Chapter 7, blog readers tend to focus and support the Bill based on the aspects that they believe reflect 'survival' issues. Hence, cases of gender inequality discussed within the context of the Bill, such as the kidnap of over 200 girls in Chibok (discussed in Chapter 2) are brought up by blog users to explicate the severity of gender inequality. This shows that issues of cultural disrespect, such as the domestication of womanhood, are possibly discussed because they are the breaking news stories of the day, but are not ascribed the same value as other 'survival-based' topics of gender equality discussed within the broader gender in/equality discourse. It is also interesting that out of the 12 broad themes/sections on gender equality dealt with by the GEO Bill, two broad sections (the modification of socio-cultural practices and the right to choose indigeneship) that deal with gender identity and cultural change in the GEO Bill are not reflected in the discourses of female blog authors and readers.

Again, this is not surprising since, as witnessed in the analysis of Chapters 6 and 7, there seems to be a resistance to issues of gender identity or cultural change among women who support or are against gender equality. The issues that are believed to concern women's survival and livelihood, such as socio-economic equality, educational parity, domestic violence, negative widowhood practices, and so on are mostly iterated in blog discourses by women who support gender equality to explicate its need while they neglect issues of gender identity, gender stereotypes or 'perceived' cultural change. Also, where gender equality is perceived as 'equality in marriage' (by women who are for or against gender equality), it is mostly considered an 'abomination' by women who are against gender equality and it is often deprioritised in comparison other forms of gender equality (that deal with survival issues) by women who support gender equality. The following discussions between a Nigerian female blog reader who resides abroad and another female blog reader who is based in Nigeria reiterate these issues:

C61. Even though I don't currently live in Nigeria, I must say our women have become nonchalant. I don't know how a society that boasts of Funmi Kuti who in

1949, led a female protest against the Alake of Egbaland, which subsequently led to his abdication has now become so docile and entirely useless towards female affairs.

C62. When a majority of the populace is plagued by a lack of bread, how do you expect us to fight “first-world” problems like ‘gender equality?’ Any form of mass action that does not contribute to an increase of money in pockets is dead on arrival.

C63 Do you think poor people in Nigeria care about this crap [gender equality]? Do you think even the rich give a hoot about gender equality? You think Nigerians have time to waste pining over non-survival rights like you guys do in diaspora? How many Nigerians can even afford data [Internet subscription]? Hey! I’m all for equal rights that help us survive but your comment about Nigerian women being docile is apathetic and lacking empathy.

C61, 62 and 63 reflect a conversation. C61 is a visitor on Bella Naija blog whose further comments on blog posts show that she grew up in Nigeria but currently lives in the US. In response to the rejection of the GEO Bill, C61 argues that Nigerian women of the present generation have become ‘docile’ owing to their ‘inaction’ on gender-related issues. C61 further draws on the female protest led by Funmilayo Ransome Kuti (discussed in Chapter 2) to show how Nigerian women in the past fought against socio-economic inequality. However, her comment is met by resistance from blog users such as C62 who believe that Nigerian women are faced with survival issues of livelihood that deprioritises gender equality. Hence, it is not clear if C62 is against gender equality, but it is clear that she perceives gender equality as a ‘first-world’ problem, which should not be the primary focus of female marginalisation. C62 (just like many other Nigerian female blog users) possibly conceives gender equality as ‘equality in marriage-related issues’ as opposed to a cause that encompasses issues of economic hardships that Nigerian women encounter. C62 also draws attention to the monetisation of protest movements in Nigeria, which reveals how removed protesters can be from the causes which they claim to advocate since they only turn up for the monetary reward, that is, to ensure their survival.

In a similar tone, C63 highlights the hardships faced by Nigerian women while arguing that gender equality is a non-survival issue to some Nigerian women. C63 also

highlights the divides existing in the online space by questioning the number of Nigerian women who can afford to be online, that is, to be able to discuss issues of gender discrimination. Hence, C63 emphasises that both the poor and the rich do not care about ‘gender inequality’, which she also possibly interprets as ‘equality in marriage’. Therefore, as discussed earlier in the chapter, the significant issue here seems to be the interpretation of gender equality (from a marriage perspective) as an infringement on the country’s cultural order as opposed to a cause that tackles issues of economic ‘survival’, which C62 and C63 deem significant.

8.5 Inclusivity in Blog Discourse

As identified in section 8.2, Nigerian female blog actors are mostly University degree holders (or possibly within the higher education system), mostly between the ages of 18 and 40, who live in urban areas and are likely to come from the southern part of the country. Alexa.com (2018) also shows the browsing location of blog users as predominantly work places and educational institutions. This shows that this group of women tend to be better off socio-economically than the majority of the Nigerian female population. For instance, C63 implies the privileged position of the women who are online owing to their ability to afford Internet subscription. Also, aside from the regional digital divide of the North and South of Nigeria, as seen from global social movements such as feminism, the traits that define the online representation of Nigerian women is not peculiar. For instance, for many decades, the gap between mainstream feminists and ordinary American women is said to have grown wider and deeper (Crispin, 2017). Crispin (2017) argues that feminism has mostly been represented by sophisticated women who live within certain urban circles and rarely do much to tackle the struggles of women who are poor, from the rural areas or the working class. As discussed in section 8.2, scholars (Harris, 2008; Keller, 2012; Schuster, 2013) have also identified generational divides that leave the older generation out of the online feminist discourses of younger women in the twenty-first century. This challenges the broader relevance and importance of the issues of gender in/equality that are mostly discussed by Nigerian women on blogs as well as the ones that are not, and poses the question whether the ‘privileged’ women online capture the inequalities of the offline majority.

In analysing the online discourses of Nigerian women on gender equality, I argue that the plight of women/girls in the northern region of the country is often brought up in discourses to legitimise women’s suffering and make a case for gender equality.

Particularly, cases of girl child marriage, the lack of girl-child education, the lack of freedom of mobility for women, the Boko Haram kidnappings and so on are reflective of 'survival threatening' issues that are often presented in the blog discourses of Nigerian women. The northern region in itself encompasses rural areas and so some forms of gender discrimination faced in the North intersect with the inequalities experienced in the southern rural areas.

'Rural women' as a category was not popularly discussed in the blog discourse except in the case of C46 that questions the applicability of gender equality to rural women. Therefore, C46's question as to 'who will fight for rural women when the Bill is implemented' is left unanswered. Although declarations are made toward the end of the GEO Bill that apply all legislations proposed to women living in rural communities, the Bill does not make specific detailed provisions (e.g. by itemising) for the inequalities experienced by rural women (Article 16a and b, pp.17-18). This lack of specificity of the forms of discrimination experienced by rural women means that their struggle is overlooked. While it is true that the forms of inequality experienced by women in the urban and rural areas intersect, there are no clear specifications in discourse to show that certain forms of inequality are experienced by rural women who are regionally disadvantaged. This is important because the analysis of this research has shown that the specific inequalities faced by the girl child, such as kidnapping and forced marriage are iterated in discourse to draw attention to their (the girl child) suffering. Hence, where stories that capture the specific inequalities suffered by rural women, such as widowhood maltreatment, lack of freedom of movement and economic activity, and so on, are iterated within the gender in/equality discourse, their peculiar challenges are highlighted and attention is drawn to their suffering as an invisible vulnerable category.

In addition, although elderly women are mentioned in the blog users' discourses, it mostly reflects their positions in conforming to traditional African practices rather than the specific inequalities elderly women face owing to their vulnerabilities. Similarly, there seems to be no visible discussions on the forms of discrimination that disabled women face in blog discourses. Hence, the inequalities experienced by the offline majority are mostly visible in blog discourses in areas that relate to the inequalities of the girl-child, rather than of women in the rural areas, the older generation of women or disabled women. This is probably influenced by the images of girl kidnapping and forced marriage, climaxed by the abduction of the over 200 Chibok girls by Boko Haram in 2014

which has dominated media (both local and some international) platforms for more than three years.

Finally, even though the GEO Bill captures a wide range of discriminations faced by women, the extent to which it takes into cognisance the inequalities suffered by invisible and vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, disabled and rural women, is questionable. For instance, as discussed in section 8.4, the interests of disabled and elderly women are mostly addressed in relation to violence. This means that other areas where disabled or elderly women are likely to face discrimination are left un-tackled. Also, owing to the lack of specificity in the forms of discrimination suffered by rural women in the Bill; it is not surprising that a significant cultural practice that discriminates women in some rural areas, such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is omitted by the GEO Bill. FGM still happens in some parts of Nigeria and has been raised by a female blog reader (C40), as discussed in Chapter 7. C40 laments about the role women play in enforcing FGM in Nigeria today. However, from the discourses analysed, one can confirm that FGM was not a common topic of discussion among female bloggers within the context of the discussions on gender in/equality. This raises questions about the perception of FGM in comparison to the forms of gender inequality often prioritised in discourse as pertaining to ‘survival’¹⁶¹.

8.6 Discussion of Findings

This chapter set out to explore which areas/topics of gender inequality are prioritised on Nigerian female blogs. Thus, it sought to interrogate the nature of representation relating to cases of gender in/equality in discourses, as well as the extent to which such discourses capture the inequalities faced by the offline majority. The findings showed that certain forms of gender inequality concerning the recognition of women’s identity, such as how women are perceived or valued culturally, tend to be overlooked in female bloggers’ discourse. This matches the tendency of African feminist scholarship¹⁶² to disregard identity and cultural politics based on the belief that they do not concern important issues that impact ‘survival’ and ‘livelihood’. As discussed in

¹⁶¹ Although the former President of Nigeria Goodluck Jonathan passed a legislation banning the practice of FGM on the 5th of May 2015, a report by The Guardian (2016) shows that the awareness of the law banning FGM is low, which means that there is a gap between the passing and enforcement of the law against FGM. Hence, States like Osun had the highest FGM prevalence of 76.6 % in 2016 and about 20 million girls were reported to have undergone FGM in Nigeria in 2016.

¹⁶² As discussed in Chapter 2, post-colonial African feminist scholarship, which focused on socio-economic and health related forms of inequality tagged as pertaining to survival and livelihood.

Chapter 3, this is also shown in studies conducted in parts of Africa and the Middle-East, which have demonstrated the tendency for the public to frown or disregard a fight for equality that affects culturally established or traditional gender roles in the society (Al-rawi, 2014; Tohidi, 2016)

In addition, while there seems to be inclusivity of certain forms of marginalisation faced by the girl-child in the blog discourses of Nigerian women, the inequalities faced by other categories of the offline majority, such as the elderly or rural women, are rarely discussed. I argue that this tendency to focus more on the inequalities of the girl-child has possibly been influenced by popularised global discourses on the girl-child marriage debate of 2013 and the Boko Haram kidnappings of girls-children in 2014. This also draws attention to the possibility that the (global and national) media have played a role in setting the agenda for trending topics on women's in/equality in Nigeria.

The findings of this chapter also reflect and build upon theorisations that cut across feminist studies, cultural studies and social psychology. Within social psychology, they reflect the work of Moscovici (1972) and scholars (e.g. Howarth, 2006; Jodelet, 1991) who discuss the role of social representations in enabling communication to take place among individuals 'by providing a code for social exchange, classifying and naming various aspects of their world' (Moscovici, 1973, p.xiii). My analysis shows that representations of gender discrimination on Nigerian female blogs stimulate conversations that reveal ideological conceptions of what gender in/equality is 'intersubjectively' agreed or disagreed to be (Howarth, 2006). For instance, as discussed in this chapter, the interpretation of 'gender equality' as 'gender equality in marriage' can be traced to Senator Olujimi's presentation of the GEO Bill on the Senate floor which was publicised by media outlets, such as female blogs. In a bid to explicate the significance of the GEO Bill to the Nigerian Senate, Senator Olujimi labelled the GEO Bill as tackling equal rights in marriage, divorce, widowhood inheritance, and so on (Unuigbo, 2016). As found in the analysis, this representation of gender equality has come to be reflected in the representational logic of some Nigerian blog users (both authors and readers). Specifically, it is evident in how blog users make meaning of gender equality and how they respond to it. Hence, the tendency of female bloggers to interpret gender equality from a marriage perspective shows that gender equality is perceived as: first, a phenomenon that excludes certain groups of women, such as the unmarried and the girl-child; and second, (particularly among groups that support gender inequality) a concept

that infringes on cultural and religious doctrines which uphold certain forms of gender inequality in marriage.

This shows that representation mediates between social structures and the meaning-making processes of individuals (Jodelet, 1991; Moscovici, 1972). Therefore, for many Nigerian women on blogs, gender equality becomes a metaphor of ‘non-survival rights’ or ‘first-world’ problems, which ‘should not’ be prioritised above ‘survival’ issues such as socio-economic inequality. As seen from the analysis, this perception poses limitations on women’s support for gender equality. More intriguing is that out of the twelve sections on gender inequality covered by the GEO Bill, only three sections¹⁶³ cover marriage-related issues. This calls into question the interpretation of the GEO Bill and, therefore, gender inequality as a concept that mostly deals with marriage related issues, while drawing attention to the role of social representations in the construction of reality (Moscovici, 1972).

The analysis also shows the effect of representation in sustaining male dominance in Nigeria. For instance, the Bill was represented in mainstream media and on female blogs as a policy document that caters for women’s equality with men, which turned out to be false. My close analysis of the Bill in this chapter shows that in areas of socio-economic equality and political participation, the Bill only provides for women’s participation by 35%. This means that Nigerian women on blogs have subscribed to a fight that does not give them the required ‘justice’ but sustains patriarchal dominance and maintains their limited democratic participation¹⁶⁴.

Further, the findings reflect Hall’s (1997) theorisation on representations within cultural studies, which highlights communicative events as encompassing some form of change and resistance. Hence, ‘meaning’ is not ‘finally fixed’ but stimulates social and psychological change (Hall, 1997, p. 22). As regards the representation of gender equality in discourse, I argue that such representations have a dual function, being used, particularly by Nigerian female blog readers, to either defend or resist particular constructions of reality. This shows the tendency for representations to be dynamic, create tensions, and be oppositional, especially in a globalised world (Lewis, 1994). Hence, even

¹⁶³ Elimination of discrimination on the grounds of marital status; rights in matters relating to marriage and family relations; and provisions relating to marriage and matrimonial causes.

¹⁶⁴ Part of my goal has been to draw on the findings of my analysis to challenge Nigerian women’s conception of gender equality through publishing articles on Nigerian female blogs that address some of these misconceptions. For example, see: https://www.Bella_Naija.com/2017/10/diretnan-bot-equity-culture-misconceptions-gender-equality-nigeria/, https://www.Bella_Naija.com/2017/10/diretnan-bot-africans-celebrate-international-day-girl-child/

though blog readers tend to depend on blogs as primary information sources, many are ‘active’ consumers of blog content, holding blog authors accountable for the news they report. As discussed earlier, this relates blog readers to the role of the fourth estate, checking on blog author reportage. This supports the argument of gender studies about the role of new media technologies in enabling women to contest meanings or representations of gender discrimination (Callaghan and Lazard, 2012; Knadler, 2001; Yusof, 2009).

In addition, the analysis has shown that the politics of representation is defined by the actors of online discourse as well as the forms of textual information (gender inequality topics) they produce. Global feminist studies have identified that women who are online tend to be those who are mostly educated and belong to the younger generation (Keller, 2012; Schuster, 2013; Skalli, 2014). Similarly, I have identified that Nigerian female bloggers are mostly of the younger generation and typically possess or (are in the process of securing) a University qualification. In addition to age and education, my analysis shows that women on blogs tend to come from a specific geographical region of Nigeria. Hence, women from the southern part of the country are seen to be more represented in blog discussions than women from the northern regions. This relates to the North-South divide in Nigeria (presented in Chapter 2), which shows the impact of cultural, among other challenges on women’s livelihood. These challenges could also have an impact on northern women’s ability to be online. Fraser (2008) defines the issues that determine the boundaries of inclusion in gender discourses, as misframing¹⁶⁵. In relation to discourses on Nigerian female blogs, such issues include illiteracy, geographical positioning and age, raising questions about the inclusivity of the online sphere and the role of digital divides. Hence, when we talk about women on blogs, are we really talking about women (mostly) from the southern part of Nigeria who reside in the urban areas? This is a significant issue to be investigated by future researchers who could also examine why women from the South are not online. Additionally, they could consider if such women discuss gender in/equality through alternative spaces.

Consequently, it is important to note that the goal of this chapter was not to establish how issues of misframing, such as geographical location, age and education explain the discourses of gender in/equality. However, it sought to map out the issues that determine (a) who speaks online, as well as (b) what is being said (by blog authors and

¹⁶⁵ Discussed in Chapter 3.

readers) in relation to such issues of misframing as regard the topic of gender discrimination. Hence, as regards age, the analysis showed that the opinion held by blog users is that the older generation mostly conforms with, rather than resists, the forms of gender discrimination they experience. This relates to Ajayi's (2007) argument that even though certain political groups dominated by older women exist offline in Nigeria, they are rarely focused on the fight for gender equality but on other forms of political lobbying¹⁶⁶. However, irrespective of this generational divide, there seems to be no blog discussion by the 'younger' generation of women (who support gender equality) about changing the outlook of the older generation of women (who tend to support for female subjugation). In addition, even though the inequalities that older women face as a vulnerable category (such as violence against the elderly) is reflected in the GEO Bill, this topic is hardly reflected in the blog discourses of women. Nevertheless, Schuster's (2013, p.11) study on young women's use of social media for feminist activism shows that online activism is believed to affect intergenerational communication¹⁶⁷ in a way that has negative outcomes for feminist movements. This raises questions about Nigerian female blog activism and the effect that the generational divide therein could have on women's collaboration for activism. Future research could also investigate if the effectiveness of the fight for gender equality is challenged by the lack of collaboration between younger women online and older women who are mostly offline.

Further, it is interesting to reflect on how female blog users define themselves as well as others (who they probably have not met) on the online platform. The perception that blog users share common attributes, such as possessing a University and/or a Master's degree, seems to be held among blog users in how they address each other. A University degree is often mentioned as a symbol of status and achievement. For example, C63 argues that women are more enlightened and equipped to resist cultural practices that enslave them when they have achieved educational qualifications that their mothers could not. This position aligns with that of African researchers who perceive education as key in liberating women from marginalisation (e.g. Holmarsdottir, Nomlomo, Farag, and Desai, 2012; Male and Wodon, 2018). However, the analysis of Chapter 7 showed that education is sometimes limited in empowering women to fight against inequality. Hence,

¹⁶⁶ Such as election campaigns and attending political fund raising (Ajayi, 2007).

¹⁶⁷ Hence, the exclusion of older women from online participation.

women who are educated and even hold key political positions fail to challenge forms of gender discrimination, especially as it relates to cultural change.

Finally, the analysis depicts that identity formation is an integral part of female blog discussions. For instance, it highlights the conception of female bloggers that the southern part of Nigeria is more 'liberal', championing the cause for gender equality or feminism, while the North is conservative and supporting gender inequality. This reflects the trans-national binary categorisations discussed in Chapter 7 which identify Africa as conservative and America as liberal and shows how the discourse of 'otherness' is replicated across both 'macro' and 'micro' contexts of inequalities. This can possibly be traced to the fact that 'otherness' is a function of identity-formation, and identity is a source of meaning which evolves from people's need to define themselves and others by describing a certain sense of belonging (Castells, 2001). Hence, the replication of such discourses of otherness at various levels (macro and micro levels of inequality) is born out of the 'inherent' need to define individual or collective identities through forms of representation.

8.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the representations of gender discrimination topics on Nigerian female blogs and assessed their effects on the attainment of gender equality. By so doing, I have conceptualised the relationship between the representation of gender inequality in the GEO Bill/female blogs and the social and communicative practices of Nigerian women online. In other words, I showed that the representation of gender equality in the GEO Bill and the blog reporting of gender discrimination impact on how blog users make sense of gender marginalisation. This research has, therefore, addressed the fundamental critique of representation theory as not being critical enough¹⁶⁸ (Howarth, 2006; Potter and Edwards, 1999; Wagner, 1998) and contributes to the body of literature aimed at tackling this critique (Duveen, 2001; Farr and Marková, 1995; Howarth, 2002; Joffe, 2002).

Additionally, by 'articulating'¹⁶⁹ analytical approaches to representations from the fields of social psychology, feminist, and cultural studies, I have explored the politics

¹⁶⁸ The study of social representations has been criticised for merely describing a social phenomenon, rather than aiming to transform it by showing the effect of social representation on individual behaviour (Howarth, 2006).

¹⁶⁹ Hall (1997) describes 'articulation' as the practice of engaging different theoretical frameworks in order to move beyond the limits of using one theory on its own.

of representations that mark the participation of the actors of online discussions on gender inequality. I have also examined how the social representations of gender discrimination affects the conception, communicative and social practices of such online actors, and discussed the subjective interpretations and tensions that comprise the representations of gender in/equality. By incorporating perspectives from multiple theorisations (hence, Fraser's participatory representation and Moscovici's and Hall's (social) representations), I have been able to transcend the limits of drawing from a sole theory, providing a rigorous understanding of the representations of gender in/equality on female blogs.

Having established that broad misrepresentations that include: urban/rural, North/South and young/old generational divides play a significant role in determining who gets to speak on the Nigerian female blogosphere, an important question tackled in this research is whether the topics of gender in/equality discussed on Nigerian female blogs have contributed to or have limited the visibility of the forms of gender discrimination faced by the women who are offline. Hence, whose inequality is represented online and whose is possibly not? While in this chapter I focus on the discursive aspects of this question, the next chapter, which reports on interviews will provide more insight into blog authors' motivation for blogging about gender in/equality, as well as examine the inclusiveness of the offline majority in their blogging practice.

CHAPTER 9: BLOG AUTHORS' KNOWLEDGE OF, ATTITUDES TO AND BELIEFS ON GENDER EQUALITY

This chapter analyses results from in-depth interviews with eight blog authors: Laila of Laila's blog; Aderonke of Bella Naija blog; Emeh of Misspetite Nigeria blog; Shola of Woman.ng blog; Lateefah of That1960chick blog; Tosin of Olorisupergal blog; Vivian of Viviangist blog; and a blogger who asked to be anonymous and consented to be represented by the pseudonym 'Susan' in the study. The aim of this chapter is to provide additional insights to the findings and discussions from blog reader comments and posts in Chapter 6-8. It informs the following research questions, which are a subset of the questions that guided my analysis of blog posts and comments: **RQ1b:** How do Nigerian female blog authors perceive (discussions on) cultural roles in relation to gender inequality? **RQ2b:** How are alternative discourses on gender equality perceived by blog authors? **RQ3b:** How do Nigerian female blog authors understand their role in relation to the absent female majority offline?

I open the chapter by referring to the key findings of the previous analysis chapters so as to link the blog discourses on culture change, divergent discourses, and representational dynamics presented in the previous analysis chapters to the blog authors' ideas presented in the interviews. Next, I analyse some key points made by blog authors to understand their conceptions and sense-making practices relating to gender in/equality. This leads to a discussion of the relationship between cultural roles and gender equality, highlighting the role of culture in blog authors' selection, generation, and dissemination of blog content on gender discrimination. Further, I look at geographical space in relation to the cultural context in which blog authors are situated. I conclude the chapter by discussing how blog authors' blogging practices on gender discrimination have contributed to the visibility of women who are offline, and the important role of blog readers in generating blog content (on gender discrimination) for blog author reportage.

A key argument developed in this chapter is that the use of non-personal blogging styles, such as 'filter' and 'notebook', is a technique used by blog authors to manage their personal opinions in the public domain, as well as an attempt to appeal to a masculine audience in the patriarchal Nigerian society. I also argue that despite the fact that blog authors consider their role in relation to the offline majority as that of 'creating awareness', this is hampered by the regard for (patriarchal) norms which have a bearing

on the breadth and depth of their reporting on gender discrimination. In addition, in assessing the basis for transnational mobility, the interviews showed that the gendered identity of Nigerian female blog authors tends to relate to everyday life and place. I, therefore, conclude that the cultural influence of the geographical space occupied by blog authors often contributes to how they interpret and respond to topics of redistribution and those of culture change. Finally, I argue that gender equality is often represented as an economic cause situated in the ‘public domain’ of the Nigerian context, while feminism exemplifies a fight that distorts the cultural hierarchy of gender in the ‘private domain’.

As seen in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, most of the blog content published in female-run Nigerian blogs provide little information about female bloggers’ understanding or perceptions of the debates surrounding gender equality. This is because most Nigerian female blog authors use filter and notebook styles of blogging as opposed to personal blogging techniques, which allow for more detailed self-expression. Therefore, this chapter uses in-depth interviews to unravel the ideological conceptions that influence blog author selection, production, and representation of gender-related content on blogs. This will allow the research to unpack the relationship between blog author and blog reader conceptions of gender in/equality and what this means in the struggle against gender discrimination in Nigeria. This chapter also provides a deeper, empirically driven analysis to help explain the choice of blog content by blog authors.

While adhering to the research questions of study, the organisation of this chapter and the topics/themes used as section headings have emerged from the interview data to enable a bottom-up approach to significant themes for analysis and discussion. Thus, the themes discussed in this chapter include the conception of gender equality, blog authors’ viewpoints on alternative discourses and the inclusivity of the offline majority in blogging practices (see Appendix E for the interview topic guide).

9.1 Bloggers’ Conceptions of Gender Equality: Gender Equality vs. Feminism

In Chapter 8, I analysed blog posts that revealed conceptualisations of gender equality and the lack of adequately informed or the existence of misinformed blog authors with respect to the concept of gender equality. Hence, the analysis identified a rather widespread perception among blog authors that gender equality is mostly marriage-related.

Although in the interviews there was no direct reference to ‘gender equality’ as ‘gender equality in marriage’, the interviewed blog authors exhibited a sense of caution

and carefulness around the subject of gender equality. Most of the interviewed bloggers emphasised that gender equality is a tricky subject that tends to get people riled up. For instance, Lateefah said that most times, when gender equality is discussed online, discussions end in ‘name-calling’¹⁷⁰: it just ends in all forms of ugliness. When people hear the phrase “‘gender equality’”, particularly men, they think women are coming for what they have. However, gender equality just means “‘pay us the same’”. For Shola, there is a predominant conflicting interpretation of gender equality. She cites an example where some women on her blog said they believe in equal pay but not in gender equality.

As discussed in Chapter 6, the tendency to isolate certain forms of gender discrimination in the struggle for gender equality not only reflects a misunderstanding of what the cause intends to achieve but also points to the theoretical conceptions¹⁷¹ of this study. Importantly, it shows the tendency for political and economic equality to be isolated from issues that question cultural behaviours, such as family, housework, sexuality, and reproduction. Hence, the interviews support the discourses analysed in Chapters 5-7 and make it evident that for females blogging about and endorsing gender equality, gender equality concerns fighting against socio-economic inequality, educational disparity, gender-related violence and other ‘survival-type’ issues that women in the country face. At the same time, when gender equality is rejected, Nigerian women on blogs appear to be dismissive because they perceive gender equality as challenging cultural behaviours of family, sexuality, housework and reproduction¹⁷².

In the context of the interviews specifically, feminism is approached by the interviewed bloggers as a form of cultural deviance, while gender equality is associated with redistributive ideals, ensuring women’s economic survival and livelihood. For instance, in explaining what gender equality means, Laila of Laila’s blog stated that there is a difference between gender equality and feminism. In Laila’s assessment, gender equality is about addressing wage disparity between women and men. Laila, therefore, argued that gender equality has no bearing in the ‘home’: ‘The man is the head of the home, he is ahead of the woman and she should respect him’. Further, she stated that feminism does not regard the man as the head of the home by expecting that men and women are equal as regards cultural roles. In this instance, gender equality represents an economic cause, situated in the ‘public domain’, while feminism exemplifies a fight that

¹⁷⁰ Forms of verbal abuse.

¹⁷¹ Reflective of the relationship between redistribution and recognition discussed in Chapter 6.

¹⁷² For examples, see: C28, C30, C31 and C32 in Chapter 7.

distorts the cultural hierarchy of gender in the private domain. In addition, Emeh of Misspetite Nigeria stated:

I think gender equality makes it possible for women to have the same chances in terms of employment and education as men. However, I feel that a lot of people tend to relate gender equality to feminism. I am not too keen on the word feminism because to be honest, I don't know too much about the term. Gender equality is just simple to me, it seeks for women to have equal access to jobs and schools as men.

Though Emeh claims not to know enough about feminism, her interpretation of gender equality tacitly reflects her ideological perception of feminism, which aligns with that of Laila; the idea that feminism has less to do with the fight for redistributive forms of inequality, such as socio-economic inequality or educational disparity. Feminism, for bloggers such as Laila, has come to represent in isolation the fight for cultural change in areas of family, sexuality, reproduction and housework. It relates to the second (and arguably the contemporary) phase of the feminist movement in the West identified by Fraser (2005), which exemplifies neoliberalism and the expansion of the boundaries of contestation beyond socio-economic redistribution so as to involve issues that question cultural behaviours, such as 'housework, sexuality, gender identity and reproduction' (Fraser, 2005, p.298). As reflected in the discourses analysed in Chapters 5-7, the act of challenging how women are perceived culturally is interpreted as an attempt to destabilise the social position occupied by men, and therefore, is ultimately labelled as a cause against men. This can be deemed responsible for the tendency of the Nigerian blog authors to isolate feminism from gender equality.

However, while the majority of blog authors expressed their ideas about what gender equality means (albeit sometimes a 'misconstrued' one), Tosin of Olorisupergirl blog opted not to comment when asked about the term 'gender equality' by stating:

This gender equality thing, I don't have a say. I have no comment now, maybe later. A lot of women have been misquoted and called feminists when they made comments on gender equality. Three years ago, some women made comments online supporting feminism and suffered a lot of backlash from the public. I need to properly understand gender equality before I comment on it,

because gender equality has been related to feminism. A lot of bloggers are careful not to associate with something that will affect their site traffic. In addition, I feel gender equality has not been properly explained for women to understand and feel comfortable to say they believe in it.

Tosin's decision not to comment on gender equality is interesting considering that at the start of the interview, she said her major objective for blogging was to project women's problems, such as domestic violence, rape, and kidnapping to the public domain. Hence, Tosin gave an example of how her blog was responsible for uncovering a case of sexual harassment on a teenage girl by a male teacher in a renowned Nigerian secondary school. Tosin argued that her motivation for reporting stories of women's discrimination was to create awareness having witnessed many victims of rape who had been psychologically damaged and confined to a culture of silence. However, it is interesting that in the above extract she does not connect rape, sexual harassment or certain cases of domestic violence to gender inequality. Alternatively, it is possible that Tosin sees a connection but, as she stated, she thinks that bloggers need to be careful how they align with causes such as gender equality because of the tendency to lose blog visitors.

Tosin's perspective also aligns with those of Susan and Vivian, which focus on the repercussions of discussing certain gender topics on blogs. Susan talked about being careful with one's opinion on gender equality in order not to become a (negative) viral topic. In this respect, I would relate Susan's decision to remain anonymous as a system of managing how she is perceived in relation to discussions on gender equality. In like manner, Vivian said that the Nigerian society, overall, is not that friendly towards the idea of gender equality, and thus, she underlined the need to report issues of gender discrimination 'from a neutral position in order not to offend some people'. When asked what she meant by 'neutral', Vivian added, 'to just present the story as it is, but not to argue in favour or against. Just create awareness; that is all'.

These positions of the interviewed blog authors show their tendency to prioritise blog content based on the perceived interests of the general population as opposed to how important it is in the fight against gender discrimination. They also demonstrate the existence of a form of self-censorship, with the bloggers aiming to be acceptable and compliant with the dominant culture. The idea of posting blog content from a 'neutral' position also sheds light on the blogging style adopted by most Nigerian female bloggers,

as discussed in Chapter 9. The use of non-personal blogging styles such as filter and notebook might be reflective of a conscious technique to manage their personal opinions in the public domain, while maintaining site traffic and appealing to a masculine audience in a patriarchal society.

9.2 Culture and Gender Equality

As discussed in the previous section, the blog authors outlined the cultural risks associated with the blog reporting of gender equality. In addition, discussions during the interviews showed that the blog authors seem to be mostly comfortable discussing issues of gender discrimination without getting down to its root causes. For instance, Lateefah pointed to very interesting cultural dimensions of economic inequality, but focused on questioning the devaluation of women's identity without talking about the possible causes of such behaviour:

One of my friends who works at a microfinance bank is paid less than her male colleagues, and when she asked her boss about it, he said that it is because she is a single woman and because she is single, she will have some men giving her money. What kind of rationale is that? I don't get it, like what is their business with her personal life? How can one make such an assumption?

This example relates to the one narrated by a female blog reader in Chapter 6 who arguably was turned down from a job because she was female. Here, we see a possible reason why gender is used as a vantage point from which to deny women socio-economic equality. This is hinged on the cultural perception that women tend to depend on men for their livelihood, and therefore, the need to reward them less. As regards this example, Lateefah dwells on questioning and judging the societal structures of inequality without progressing into the possible underlying reasons for female discrimination. This tendency to dwell on cases of gender discrimination without questioning the role of culture in reinforcing gender inequality was predominant in the interviews. For instance, Vivian talked about how her car was bashed by a man who refused to have a conversation with her, but asked for her husband's phone number to discuss damage and repairs. As elaborated by Vivian, this is because of the belief that women ride cars bought by men and so are not the real owners of a car. In addition, aside from the clear disregard for her gender, the assumption about her marital status says a lot about the cultural expectations

in the Nigerian society. Nevertheless, Vivian was more focused on the disrespect she faced as opposed to what (hence, the cultural practices) might have influenced such disrespect. Hence, her inability to connect her personal experience to the larger socio-cultural structures of inequality in Nigeria reflects a deviation from a key point of feminism, which is to connect the personal to the political.

In addition, Lateefah narrated a story of a young girl who stole a phone from a supermarket and was accosted by a bunch of men who stripped her naked and started touching her inappropriately in private areas while someone made a recording of the occurrence¹⁷³. Lateefah, states about that incident:

The video just made me sick and made me wonder why this only happens to women. You don't hear about a bunch of guys jumping on a male thief and stripping him naked. I feel like some Nigerians are sick and perverted and they just take out their issues on helpless women.

Hence, Lateefah defines men's tendency to capitalise on women's vulnerability as a function of their perversion, rather than a possible consequence of the cultural devaluation of women's identity. Out of the eight interviewed bloggers, Aderonke was the only blogger who was primarily focused on the reasons behind gender inequality and, particularly, why devaluation of women's identity was persistent in Nigeria. Thus, regarding the dominant perception of Nigerian women as dependent on men and marriage, she argued:

If you find a woman who does not have a job, she is hoping that a man will come along, marry her and take care of her needs, if you find a woman doing a small-scale business, she is telling herself, I hope someone will come and marry me so I can reach my full potential. If you find a woman who is overachieving and doing well for herself, somewhere at the back of her mind she is also hoping that her successes will land her in the arms of a man.

¹⁷³ Lateefah indicated that this was a prominent gender discrimination story reported on her blog, having generated 'huge' traffic.

Aderonke described the Nigerian woman as perpetually thriving in the ideological state of ‘until someone marries me’. In her opinion, this is the basis for gender inequality in Nigeria, where even when women are successful, they constantly have to iterate that ‘they are successful but still cook for their husbands or keep it sexy’ or ‘they are successful but still carry out their house chores’. Aderonke added that women are not at the forefront of fighting for gender equality because it has been socially internalised in them that they are inferior to men. Aderonke identified religion as an important catalyst of gender inequality in Nigeria and she stated that ‘Nigerians have managed to Nigerianise-Christianity and Nigerianise-Islam. Religious houses are more focused on telling women how to secure and keep a man than vice versa’. The fusion of culture and religion in the idea of ‘Nigerianising Christianity’ and ‘Nigerianising Islam’ highlights the findings from the analysis of blog comments in Chapter 7, which showed that the underlying basis for Nigerian women justifying gender inequality is complicated by a syncretism of belief systems (hence, a syncretism of culture and religion). By drawing on these issues, Aderonke revealed a need to challenge the so-called risks associated with the fight for gender equality rather than simply acknowledging them, as done by other bloggers.

9.3 Geographical Space and Gendered Identity

As discussed in Chapter 4, one of the selection criteria for interview participants was that the blog authors were Nigerians residing in Nigeria. This was to help capture the contextual challenges embodied in the blogging practices of Nigerian women.

As discussed in Section 4.4, I decided to retain Aderonke who currently resides in Canada considering that she moved abroad only recently (two years ago) and still blogs about Nigerian-related news. Aderonke also has a substantial blogging history from within Nigeria, hence, from 2010 when she started blogging on Bella Naija in Nigeria, to 2016 when she relocated to Canada. On why she left Nigeria, she said it was the general frustration ‘of living in a very chauvinistic society’ where she felt undervalued and her views on women’s discrimination were poorly received. Having friends who were based in Canada, Aderonke felt encouraged to migrate. Although Aderonke was blogging about Nigerian news from Canada at the time of the interview, I considered she would still provide contextual insights into gender equality having blogged actively in Nigeria for

six years (2010-2016¹⁷⁴). Additionally, having blogged from both Nigeria and Canada, I considered she might actually enhance my understanding of how transnational mobility possibly affected her identity, and how this related to her ongoing blog reporting on gender equality in Nigeria and in comparison, to the other bloggers currently residing in Nigeria.

Aderonke recounted that, while she was in Nigeria, it became a daily practice at morning devotions¹⁷⁵ for her mother to ask family members to pray for her to secure a husband:

I became fed up. I felt being a woman was too challenging as my brothers lived without any of the pressures I was dealing with. I was already reading some feminist books like Chimamanda's works and I wanted to use Bella Naija as a platform for feminist discussions but I wasn't that confident, I was worried about what people will think and how they might react. Moving to Canada, I have learned a lot more about women's rights and I am more passionate and confident to change the way Nigerian women think.

Aderonke described her migration as an escape from the normative gender controls faced at home. Moving away from home provided an inner feeling of being free to express herself. This relates to the new era of identity politics in the United States, which involves moving away from the politics of resistance and confrontation and closer to the cultural politics of inclusion (Duggan 2002). Collins' (2009, p.465) study on gay tourism in Manila, Philippines, reflected on this trend, where gay expatriates admitted that their decision to migrate to Europe and America was an attempt to escape from 'heteronormative' regulations at home. In like manner, moving away from Nigeria enabled Aderonke to live in a freer transnational space, providing a 'better experience' that would boost her self-confidence to blog about gender issues more openly. This highlights the possible relationship between space, the construction of identity, and the cultural production of non-gender normative discourses.

As argued by McDowell (2003, p.12), 'the mapping of place or location onto gender identities has been a key part of the establishment and maintenance of women's

¹⁷⁴ As presented in Section 4.4, Aderonke started reporting on Bella Naija in 2010.

¹⁷⁵ Daily Christian prayer sessions that are typically held in the morning.

position and is reflected in both the materiality and the symbolic representation of women's lives'. In this case, specifically, we see the effect of space/place on the content/subject of gender equality discussed by Aderonke. Being far from home is conceived as limiting the repercussions of non-normative gender behaviour and stimulates Aderonke to challenge further and more openly cultural issues of gender equality in her home country, Nigeria. On the other hand, challenging the role of culture in women's discrimination seems to be unpopular among the other interviewed blog authors who reside in Nigeria. Maybe this discrepancy can be understood better if one considers Aderonke's statement that before she migrated she was not likely to discuss topics that questioned culture in relation to gender equality due to the fear of being labelled as a feminist. As such, Aderonke sees women and indeed many bloggers currently within Nigeria as living in a similar state of fear.

Emeh, who blogs from within Nigeria, adds credence to this point by stating: 'you can feel free to preach feminism if you are someone like Chimamanda Adichie. If you are that successful or you are living outside Nigeria where there are no family members and in-laws to trouble you'. Emeh talks about Chimamanda Adichie who is a renowned Nigeria feminist whose literary focus has been on cultural change in Africa. Emeh argues that Chimamanda is able to publicly discuss feminism because she is not a Nigeria resident. Being 'far away', presumably living in a Western country, such as Canada, the USA or a European country, is believed to stimulate freer conversations on gender equality.

However, an additional factor might be the prevalent agendas in Canadian feminist discourse, which might have a bearing on Aderonke's conception and blog reportage on gender in/equality. For instance, Aderonke states that 'here in Canada, issues like equal pay between sexes have been mostly tackled, but in Nigeria, we are still at the basic level of fighting gender equality, we haven't even started to see women as human beings'. Hence, Aderonke's tendency to discuss cultural change might also be influenced by the topics that are prevalent in the gender struggles taking place in her current Western geographical environment, namely topics attuned more to identity politics than to socio-economic equality. It is, however, important to note that this does not imply that bloggers have to travel outside Nigeria in order to be enabled to discuss topics of cultural change, or feminism. What the interviews have pointed to is the influence of the culture of the geographical space in which blog authors are situated on how they interpret and respond to topics of redistribution and those of culture change.

9.4 Blog Authors' Viewpoints on Alternative Discourses

The forms of alternative viewpoints identified by blog authors mostly align with those of blog readers identified in Chapter 7, which concern issues of religion, culture, resistance to equality and biological difference. Although biological difference was at times mentioned as the basis for female subjugation by blog authors, issues of culture and resistance to equality were more predominant. This is probably because, as seen in the blog analysis of Chapter 7, issues of culture and resistance to equality are more prominent in blog reader discourses than issues of biological difference. As discussed in Chapter 7, belief systems reflective of cultural and religious practices are often conceived as sacred, and resultantly there is the tendency to hold strong views about any idea that threatens to infringe them.

In this regard, Aderonke identified that women on blogs often draw on religious teachings, 'on the man being the head of the home', as the basis to support female subjugation. Shola talked about misconceptions of what equality means, and how 'some women are quick to think it means to behave like or transform into a man which does not make sense because women are different from men biologically'. Vivian also talked about Nigerian women being 'culturally indoctrinated' to feel inferior to men, hence the tendency to support and feel deserving of discrimination. Shola also stated that there is a tendency for alternative discourse positions to be complicated when some blog readers say they do not support gender equality but go on to claim support for socio-economic inequality or educational gender disparity. This also relates to Tosin, who was not keen on discussing gender equality but told elaborate stories on her fight against the sexual harassment of young girls and other issues of gender violence. As discussed in Chapter 7, Tosin's behaviour reflects a lack of knowledge on what gender equality means or what it seeks to achieve.

While all eight interviewed blog authors felt that alternative discourses had the potential to impact on the attainment of gender equality in Nigeria and explained why many Nigerian women are not keen to support gender equality, they refrained from being critical of such women. For instance, when asked about the perception of women who do not support gender equality, Aderonke stated, 'I can't blame them because I was once like them. It is hard to go against the norm. I know many other bloggers, who are not comfortable saying too much about gender equality because of the society'. Shola contributes to this position by stating: 'Nigerian women, and indeed many bloggers are very much aware of the benefits of gender equality but they are conflicted by what they

have learned culturally and through religion'. Similarly, Vivian argued that women who openly support female subjugation are worried about the repercussions of their actions, since there are no laws that protect or support women's freedom. Hence, Vivian believes that 'this is why when the Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill was rejected by the Nigerian Senate; very few women came out to protest'. In addition to these points, Tosin's perspective highlighted earlier in the chapter suggests that some Nigerian women lack knowledge on gender equality, and do not feel confident enough to discuss it.

In summary, the tendency to openly challenge women's discrimination is limited in Nigeria because living in a chauvinistic society such as the Nigerian society adds to the pressure of conforming to normative cultural standards of gender. The perception of bloggers on women who do not support gender equality, therefore, reveals a sense of empathy and understanding with the idea of taking an anti-gender equality stance rather than condemning it. In relation to the discussion in the previous section, this is because the position taken by such women is often attributed to the pressures and cultural learnings that come from living within the local environment. The position of empathy taken by the blog authors, therefore, reflects blog readers' alternative discourses where blog author self-censorship sustains or enables the status quo of gender discrimination.

9.5 Blog Authors and the Offline Majority

Blog authors focused more on the Chibok kidnapping as the key example of reporting the discrimination faced by women who are not online. Other forms of discrimination mentioned include widowhood maltreatment, sexual harassment and domestic violence. This confirms the discussion on discourse inclusivity in Chapter 8, which revealed the tendency for blog authors and readers to be more inclined towards discussing inequalities faced by the girl-child as a vulnerable category more than the discrimination experienced by rural or disabled women.

In the interviews, most bloggers identified the Chibok girls kidnapping as an occurrence that they were passionate about owing to the scale of the kidnapping and the vulnerability of the girls. In addition, most bloggers said that their reportage of the Chibok girls kidnapping was intensified by the publicity and hype that the occurrence generated in both local and international media. For instance, Lateefah stated that Michelle Obama's and other American Celebrities' public support to the 'Bring Back Our Girls Campaign' helped to draw attention to the Chibok girls kidnapping and encouraged other Nigerian women and indeed bloggers to demand action from the Nigerian government. This goes

to buttress the argument in Chapter 8 about the role of the media in setting the agenda for gender discrimination topics discussed in the Nigerian female blogosphere.

On what motivates blog authors to report on the inequalities experienced by women offline, most cited ‘to create awareness’ of the forms of discrimination faced by women. As regards the Chibok girls kidnapping, bloggers such as Shola and Aderonke said they were passionate about the occurrence because of the scale of the kidnapping, while others emphasised that the vulnerable position of the girls drove their empathy. As a whole, most bloggers identified that their goal was to make a difference and cause change as women who occupy what could be called a ‘privileged’ position in the Nigerian society.

In the context of discussing the Chibok kidnapping with blog authors, a significant theme seemed to be that of ‘networking’ and ‘community’. Most bloggers stated that the Chibok girls kidnapping helped to strengthen their networks with other blog authors and it involved a lot of news reporting by bloggers. For instance, Emeh recounted that a culture of ‘looking out for each other’ (as blog authors) was developed, particularly during the first year of kidnapping:

I remember how during the first few months of the Chibok girls kidnapping a lot of stories about Shekau and the kidnapped girls were flying around and I reported a story that was circulating that some of the kidnapped girls had been released. Laila quickly sent me a message to say I should take the story down because it was reported to be a fake story.

Emeh added that her relationship with many female bloggers was developed at the time of the Chibok girls kidnapping because ‘many female bloggers’ (readers and authors) ‘had a personal feeling¹⁷⁶’ about the occurrence. In like manner, blog authors such as Susan, Lateefah, and Tosin recounted the sharing of information developed among blog authors during the Chibok girls kidnapping.

Aside from the example of the Chibok kidnapping in the blog reporting of the discriminations faced by women who are offline, blog authors, such as Vivian, Emeh and Tosin, talked about cases of sexual harassment and domestic violence that occurred

¹⁷⁶ This ‘personal feeling’ or empathy of the blog authors was often related to the vulnerability of the girls kidnapped.

offline¹⁷⁷ but were reported on blogs thanks to the assistance of blog readers. This discussion highlighted the role of blog readers in generating content by reporting occurrences of gender discrimination in their local environment. Hence, most blog authors argued that, while the inequalities experienced by women offline can be lost in blog discussions, blog readers have often helped to capture some cases of discrimination experienced by the offline majority by sending their stories for blog author reporting. This is unpacked further in the next section.

9.6 Blog Content Generation as Collaboration between Blog Authors and Readers

As hinted above, the blog authors highlighted the key role played by blog readers in providing information on occurrences of gender discrimination in their local environment. When asked to state the average proportion of stories received by blog readers, most blog authors mentioned an average of approximately 50%, with Emeh even going as high as 70%. This confirms global studies that highlight the reliance of online (news) portals on user generated content for news stories (van Dijck, 2009; Hermida and Thurman, 2008; Thurman, 2008).

For instance, Shola stated:

...sometimes blog visitors send us stories about women who are not online but live in their neighbourhood. Sometimes they (blog readers) take stories that we report online by word of mouth to women around them who become encouraged to tell us their stories. Like with Ese Oruru's kidnapping, when it was reported on blogs, other cases of girl kidnapping in villages began to surface.

Shola's viewpoint shows that information flows between the online and offline space, blurring the lines between the offline and online worlds. Shola draws on the case of Ese Oruru, discussed in Chapter 2. Most cases of girl kidnapping, such as Ese Oruru's, happen in rural areas where sometimes, there is no electricity supply and, therefore, no Internet services. The case of Ese Oruru's kidnapping, among others, shows the tendency for discourses that happen online to reach the offline majority, thereby challenging the conceived rigid dichotomy between the online and offline worlds. Vivian also narrated

¹⁷⁷ In this regard, the offline space reflects the inequalities faced by women who are offline. This includes women in rural areas and younger women.

how women often send stories about domestic abuse, asking her to publish them on her blog in order to be advised by the public. Similarly, Tosin noted that the story on the sexual harassment of the secondary school pupil¹⁷⁸ was sent to her blog by the girl's mother who wanted to create awareness in order to discourage parents from sending their kids to that school.

However, while acknowledging the key role played by blog readers, the blog authors also noted the need to check the authenticity of the stories sent in by blog readers. For instance, Emeh narrates that 'a lady sent a story on how her boyfriend used to physically assault her. After reporting the story, the boyfriend sent me a message denying the incident. He said they were having issues in their relationship and his girlfriend was trying to mess him up. That he has never laid hands on her'. Emeh stated that although the woman insisted on the veracity of her story, she did not provide evidence to support her claim¹⁷⁹ and so she apologised to the 'boyfriend' and took the post down. Similarly, Shola stated in relation to the story on the sexual assault of the teenage secondary school girl discussed earlier in the chapter that the girl's mother, who sent her the story and whom she was in constant communication with, stopped replying to her messages immediately after the case went viral and NGOs started to demand a meeting with the mother of the girl.

These examples demonstrate that blog users can be important informants, yet sensitive or unchecked information can be provided to blog authors, who need to be careful with its handling. However, most bloggers identified techniques of coping with blog readers' unreliability. For instance, Laila said she mostly accepts stories accompanied by videos or pictures as a technique of ensuring credibility. Other bloggers said they would put the story out there irrespective of evidence but would be explicit that the truthfulness and accuracy of the story was not checked, as it was sent by a blog reader.

9.7 Discussion of Findings

The interviews revealed the issues that Nigerian female blog authors viewed as particularly pertinent to women's discrimination in the country and showed that blog authors' perceptions on gender equality, to a large extent, align with those of blog readers, which were discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

¹⁷⁸ Discussed earlier in this chapter.

¹⁷⁹ Emeh gave the example of pictorial evidence.

The areas of gender inequality that six out of the eight blog authors appeared to be concerned with can be classified as redistributive in nature, therefore, encompassing issues that threaten the economic stability/livelihood, or the survival of women, such as employment, rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, and widowhood maltreatment. As iterated in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, this shows that gender equality in Nigeria is legitimised on the grounds of being a redistributive or survival right, which has less to do with cultural change. At the same time, gender equality can be misconstrued and dismissed if perceived as enabling cultural change and, hence, reinforcing feminism. Either way, most blog authors shy away from any cause those positions itself against cultural practices, particularly, traditional marriage practices. This resonates particularly with studies of the Arab context, which emphasise that cultural roles are approached as sensitive topics within gender equality discourses in countries of the Arab world (Al-rawi, 2014; Tohidi, 2016). For example, Tohidi (2016) argued that notions relating to feminism are associated with anti-traditional family values, which buttress the tendency to define feminism from a cultural-infringement perspective in Africa and the Middle East.

Hence, the interviews with blog authors demonstrated that many blog authors perceive gender equality as a redistributive cause, while a fight for cultural change exemplifies feminism. This reveals that in contexts like that of Nigeria gender equality can often be conceived as tackling issues pertaining to survival and livelihood, such as socio-economic equality, educational parity, and so on, while feminism is seen as a quest to destabilise men's dominant social/cultural position (Tohidi 2016). Gender equality, therefore, represents in this case an economic cause, situated in the 'public domain', while feminism exemplifies a fight that distorts the cultural hierarchy of gender in the 'private domain', thereby, 'politicising the personal'.

This implies that feminism is interpreted by most blog authors in terms of the issues of gender equality predominantly tackled by the third-wave of feminism. Feminism is, therefore, defined by some blog authors as a cause that tackles 'secondary' issues that challenge gender representations in areas of sexuality, domestic order, and biological roles. This also means that the contemporary struggle against gender discrimination in Nigeria is more reflective of and responsive towards the prominent issues tackled by the second-wave feminism (defined by redistributive battles of socio-economic equality,

domestic violence, and so on), situated mostly in the Keynesian era¹⁸⁰. As highlighted in Chapter 6, this challenges Fraser's (2005) conception of the third world as essentially keeping up with the contemporary subject of feminism in the West, which is mostly defined by discourses of recognition. This draws attention to the relationship/differences between the political landscape of the second-wave feminism (hence, the Keynesian era) and the current so-called 'democratic' political era in Nigeria. For instance, both political settings are defined by male dominance in prominent areas such as employment and the effect of this inequality on the subject of women's liberation could be something to be picked upon by future researchers.

Further, the interview findings reinforce those of Chapter 7 when the blog author Aderonke describes Nigerian women as having the tendency to 'Nigerianise Christianity' as well as 'Nigerianise Islam'. This points to the fusion of culture and religion, which shows that the underlying basis for the justification of gender inequality by Nigerian women is complicated owing to a syncretism of belief systems (hence, culture and religion).

In the same vein, the interview analysis informs the analysis of discourse inclusivity in Chapter 8 which revealed that both blog authors and readers are inclined towards discussing inequalities faced by the girl-child as a vulnerable category far more than the discrimination experienced by rural or disabled women. While in the interviews the blog authors mentioned other forms of discrimination, such as domestic violence and sexual harassment that occur offline, most blog authors identified the Chibok girls kidnapping as an occurrence they are passionate about owing to the scale of the kidnapping. In relation to the Chibok girls kidnapping, the blog authors stated that their reportage of this issue was further stimulated and intensified by the publicity and hype it generated through both local and international media. This supports the argument in Chapter 8 about the possible role of the media in setting the agenda of the gender discrimination topics brought up on Nigerian female blogs.

Importantly, the interview findings reveal that blog authors exhibit signs of self-censorship in their reporting of gender discrimination stories in a bid to be acceptable and compliant with the dominant culture. Thus, the interviews demonstrate the existence of a

¹⁸⁰ This discussion highlights that both the Keynesian era and the (current) so-called democratic political dispensation in Nigeria are defined by male dominance in prominent areas such as employment. A more detailed study of the characteristics of these political eras could make for interesting future research.

connection between blog content and the blogging technique utilised by blog authors, which leads me to the argument that the use of non-personal blogging styles, such as ‘filter’ and ‘notebook’, is reflective of a conscious attempt of the blog authors to manage their personal opinions in the public domain, as well as to appeal to a masculine audience in a patriarchal society. This reflects the discussion on representations in Section 8.4, which highlights the ways in which communicative practices reflect ideological traits that distort/transform knowledge in service of the dominant cultural order, thereby sustaining inequality (Howarth, 2011). Because the fight for gender equality is challenged where female blog authors feel the need to limit their voice on issues of gender discrimination, the discourses of Nigerian female blog authors need to become more expressive, and where possible oppositional, so as to enable dominant representations to be contested/questioned.

Further, in assessing the basis for transnational mobility, the interviews showed that the gendered identity of Nigerian female blog authors tends to relate to their everyday life and place of experience. I conclude that the cultural influence of the geographical space wherein blog authors are situated contributes to how they interpret and respond to topics of redistribution and those of culture change. This informs gender research, particularly feminist geography scholars (e.g. Bondi and Rose, 2003; Knopp, 1992; Pratt and Hanson, 1994) who have studied how gender identities and communicative practices vary based on their construction through the prisms of ‘space and time’. As seen in the relevant discussion of Section 3.3, some of these studies (e.g. Bondi and Rose, 2003; Cook et. al., 2000; Laws, 1997; Miranne, 2000; Pratt and Hanson, 1994) have addressed locational differences in how gender is constructed and the implication on the politics of redistribution and recognition¹⁸¹.

In addition, the interview findings contribute to the study of the role of the Internet in the offline world, as they show that visibility (online presence) is intricately linked to invisibility (online absence), hence challenging the tendency to isolate the online from the offline world. The interview findings also show that blogging as an activity creates a ripple effect, where discourses on gender discrimination online often translate to affect women offline.

¹⁸¹ For instance, Bondi and Rose (2003, p. 234) assert that feminists who live in urban areas construct gender through the prisms of recognition and misrecognition, in consideration of multiculturalism, as well as the ‘gendered geographies of urban fear’ which stimulate the production and performance of gendered identity.

Further, the interviews show the key role played by blog readers in the production of blog content, bringing new definitions to the idea of online communities. Within feminist studies of women's use of blogs for activism, online communities are defined as a collaboration between blog authors who are perceived as 'active' producers of online content. Most studies either ignore the role of blog readers in blogging (Afful and Ricciardelli, 2015; Frizzo, Bousso, Ichikawa, and De Sá, 2017; Mai and Laine, 2016; Schaffer and Xianlin 2007), or highlight their role as contributors who make comments on posts (Keller, 2012). However, this research shows the primary role played by blog readers, who are not mere consumers of or commentators on the blog authors' reporting but they serve two major functions. First, the function of a fifth estate, checking that blog authors present stories right (as discussed in Section 8.3.), and second, they function as significant information sources for blog authors' reporting. Hence, my conception at the onset of this study that there is a tendency for women who are offline to be 'completely' lost in blog discussions on gender discrimination has not been confirmed. More specifically, the interviews showed that the inequalities faced by the offline majority are captured and relayed by blog readers who feel a sense of responsibility to illuminate occurrences happening in their immediate environment. Although the discussions in Chapter 5, which are supported by Hoffman's (2012) work show the limited interaction between blog authors and readers on the blogging platform, the analysis of the interviews has shown that blog authors and readers exchange information through other messaging systems (e.g. emails).

9.8 Conclusion

The interviews analysis sought to answer the following research questions: **RQ1b:** How do Nigerian female blog authors perceive (discussions on) cultural roles in relation to gender equality? **RQ2b:** How are alternative discourses on gender equality perceived by blog authors? In addition, **RQ3b:** How do Nigerian female blog authors understand their role in relation to the absent female majority offline?

In tackling these questions, I have shown that blog author perceptions of cultural roles align to those of blog readers to a large extent¹⁸². This demonstrates that in the Nigerian context, cultural roles are deprioritised in discussions of gender equality

¹⁸² The statement is not all-inclusive; as Aderonke was the only interviewed blog author that prioritised cultural change over redistributive ones.

compared to redistributive topics, which are perceived as being more critical due to dealing with survival issues. In Chapter 6, I discussed the implications of taking such a position by drawing on Fraser and Honneth's (2003) argument that gender parity can only be attained where the fight for cultural change is prioritised as much as that of redistribution. However, I argue that, owing to peculiarities in the perception and reception of gender equality in the Nigerian polity, a fight for equality in Nigeria should commence from redistribution but strategically fought with recognition as the ulterior aim. Therefore, Nigerian women must be receptive to cultural change, when it becomes the inevitable¹⁸³ outcome of redistributive battles.

The blog authors seem to empathise with women who support gender inequality, citing cultural pressures and expectations from the society as responsible. As seen in the analysis of online discourse, this is probably because the blog authors themselves are not free from such pressures, which affects their blogging practice. Hence, despite the fact that blog authors consider their role as primarily that of 'creating awareness' to the offline majority, this is hampered by their regard for (patriarchal) norms which have a bearing on the breadth and depth of their blog reporting on gender discrimination. While most literature on blog activism tends to focus on how blogging enables individuals to share ideas and express themselves freely¹⁸⁴, this study provides original evidence that bloggers in fact adhere to journalistic norms of neutrality and balance.

¹⁸³ In Section 6.2, I discussed how redistribution and culture change have a symbiotic relationship. Hence, a fight for redistribution often leads to cultural change and vice versa.

¹⁸⁴ For example, Selim, Long and Vignoles (2014), Greenland (2013), Mao (2008), Wada, Clarke and Mortenson (2017), and Yusof (2009).

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

This thesis has presented research on how Nigerian female bloggers conceive gender in/equality and how they respond to it within a larger cultural context that is dominated by patriarchal discourses and practices.

Overall, the process of conducting this research has been an insightful one. I have been exposed to a wide range of scholarly approaches and perspectives. I have also been able to build a network with the blog authors that participated in the research, capitalising on the popularity of their blogging platforms to publish articles on gender in/equality and other gender-related topics¹⁸⁵. As seen from the analysis I carried out in the research, this knowledge (of gender in/equality) is largely lacking even among Nigerian female blog authors themselves. Specifically, my discussion with one of the blog authors interviewed, who made the remark, ‘I feel gender equality has not been properly explained for women to understand and feel comfortable to say they believe in it’¹⁸⁶, inspired me to consider writing on the subject of gender in/equality to improve its knowledge among Nigerian women who author and read blogs.

10.1 Recapitulating Answers to the Research Questions

This study cut across the fields of media studies, feminist studies, linguistics, social psychology and cultural studies in its aim to address the following research questions:

RQ1a: Do discourses on Nigerian female blogs reveal patterns in relation to how the subjects of gender inequality are linked?

RQ1b: How do Nigerian female blog authors perceive (discussions on) cultural roles in relation to gender equality?

RQ2a: What discourses exist in the female blogosphere that provide an alternative to discourses in support of gender equality and how are such discourse positions legitimised through language use?

RQ2b How are alternative discourses on gender equality perceived by blog authors?

¹⁸⁵For example, see at <https://www.BellaNaija.com/2017/10/diretnan-bot-equity-culture-misconceptions-gender-equality-nigeria/>
<https://www.BellaNaija.com/2017/10/diretnan-bot-africans-celebrate-international-day-girl-child/>

¹⁸⁶ See Section 4.5.

RQ3a: Which cases of gender inequality tend to be prioritised on Nigerian female blogs?

RQ3b How do Nigerian female blog authors understand their role in relation to the absent female majority offline?

In answering these questions, I showed that although the subjects of gender discrimination are defined by a correlational interaction, there is the tendency for Nigerian female blog authors and readers to prioritise redistributive issues over cultural ones on the basis that redistributive inequalities relate to women's survival. As discussed in Chapter 6, this has a bearing on the attainment of gender parity.

The alternative blog discourses identified in the analysis can be conceived as folkloric, religious and driven by arguments that relate gender difference to 'biological essentialism'. In addition, the communicative text of Nigerian female blog readers includes discourse properties, such as 'argumentation', 'rhetorical figures', 'lexical style' and 'story-telling'. These properties unravel the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs that reinforce folkloric and religious beliefs as the basis for the support of female subjugation.

Further, blog authors seem to empathise with blog readers who support gender inequality, citing cultural pressures and expectations from the society as responsible. As seen in the analysis of Chapter 9, this is probably because the blog authors themselves are not free from such pressures, which affects their blogging practice on gender in/equality issues.

Finally, while there seems to be the inclusivity of certain forms of marginalisation faced by the girl-child in blog discourse, the inequalities experienced by other categories of the offline majority, such as the elderly or rural women, are rarely discussed on blogs or by blog authors. Nevertheless, although blog authors consider their role as primarily that of 'creating awareness' to the offline majority, this is hampered by their regard for (patriarchal) norms which limits their reporting on gender discrimination.

Having summarised the key insights from the answers to the research questions, I shall now present the contribution of this study, not only to enhance the theory and empirical knowledge in this research area, but also to provide original insights into the policy and practical aspects of the phenomenon under study. I conclude by considering the limitations of the study and offering recommendations for future research avenues.

10.2 New Research Knowledge

Connection between the subjects of gender in/equality: the analysis of blog discourses of Nigerian women revealed a correlational relationship between cultural and ‘economic’¹⁸⁷ forms of gender inequality. By defining this relationship, the study tackles an under-researched area¹⁸⁸ and enriches the body of literature on gender activism (e.g. Keller, 2012; Harris, 2008; Mendes, 2015). This also makes the study one of the first to explore the practical connection between the cultural and ‘economic’ politics of gender inequality in an ‘online discursive context’. The world is witnessing the growing use of the Internet for gendered practices defined by cultural, economic and political forms of discrimination and this research provides empirical insight into the relationship between these subjects, highlighting how they define meaning making processes and gender discrimination.

Alternative discourses: contrary to the opinion that dominant groups (mostly exemplified by the Nigerian male population and the government) have a hard time identifying forms of gender inequality, this research has demonstrated that, at the same time, some women have little understanding, or refuse to acknowledge the many ways in which they (women) are discriminated, and often do not accept to call such instances of discrimination ‘inequalities’. My analysis has also shown that even among women who support gender equality; there are those who are selective in their endorsement of the cause, therefore, those who support certain forms of inequality more or less than others. Again, this challenges the oversimplification of the struggle against gender inequality and the category often termed ‘marginalised women’ as comprised of individuals who are against ‘all’ (e.g. inequalities of redistribution and recognition) forms of gender inequality. However, the tensions identified in female-generated blog discourses highlight how culture and religion broadly conceptualise and frame what gender in/equality means for many women in the Nigerian context.

The study shows that the juxtaposition of indigenous African culture and non-ethnic religion in the blog discourses highlights a post-colonial effect. According to this, Nigerian women on blogs appear to continue being in touch with indigenous cultural practices, while at the same time, drawing on religious teachings introduced through

¹⁸⁷ As stated in Chapter 1 and in line with Fraser and Honneth (2003), the ‘economy’ (reflective of redistribution) in relation to the topic of gender inequality reflects that ‘economy’ encompasses broader class politics that includes political misrepresentation and sometimes educational and gender disparity, as well as health-related forms of inequality.

¹⁸⁸ As identified by Fraser and Honneth (2003).

colonialism or other non-ethnic influences. This link is reflected in a syncretism of beliefs that complicate the underlying basis of women's support for gender inequality. Goredema's (2010, p.38) assessment of African feminism emphasises this syncretism as defining the experience of women in Africa, which involves 'negotiating a dual existence of Western knowledge and values together with African authenticity and cultural values'.

Language in legitimising gender inequality: the analysis revealed that discourse legitimisation is often hinged on the justification that gender equality is a deviation from what is 'natural', 'cultural' and 'religious'. Evident discursive strategies used to reproduce gender inequality in discourse include the use of 'denials' about the existence of gender inequality as well as the use of lexical words or phrases to label women who support gender equality such as 'a disgrace', 'upturning nature', 'challenging God', 'feminists' and so on. In addition, gender equality is evaluated negatively and defined by attributes, such as 'baseless', 'stupid', 'less important', 'alien', 'first-world problem' and so on. These value judgments are aimed at presenting the notion of gender equality as condemnable to the reader. Personal stories are also used as a persuasive technique that exemplify a factual resource often interpreted as being 'frank', 'candid' or 'genuine' in order to make arguments more convincing.

The findings further showed that the discursive tools used in de-legitimising gender equality, particularly in relation to discourses of difference and equality, are similar to those used against global feminist movements in the past and, in some cases, at present. This echoes studies on how narratives of biological essentialism are presented as 'fixed' and 'natural', while 'equality' is often interpreted as meaning 'the same as men' (Hasinoff, 2009; Lazar, 2007; Mendes, 2015).

Identity formation in blog discourse: the study depicted that identity formation is an integral part of the development and articulation of female blog discourse. Specifically, the study highlights that categorisations of blog discourse that identify Africa as conservative and the USA as liberal reflect how the discourse of 'otherness' is replicated across 'macro' and 'micro' contexts of inequality. This can possibly be traced to the fact that 'otherness' is a function of identity-formation, and identity is a source of meaning which evolves on the basis of people's need to define themselves and others by developing a certain sense of belonging (Castells, 2001). Hence, the replication of such discourses on otherness at various levels (macro and micro levels of inequality) is born out of the 'inherent' need to define individual or collective identities through forms of representations. These representations that reflect regional and transnational conceptions

of otherness, shed light on how gender in/equality is understood by Nigerian female blog readers.

Discursive representations of gender in/equality: within the framework of discursive misrepresentation, the findings built upon theorisations that cut across feminist studies, cultural studies and social psychology and showed that representations of gender discrimination on Nigerian female blogs involve conversations that reveal ideological conceptions of what gender in/equality is intersubjectively¹⁸⁹ agreed or disagreed to be (Howarth, 2006). The study revealed that representations of ‘gender equality’ as ‘gender equality in marriage’ have come to affect the representational logic of Nigerian female blog users and have contributed to how they make meaning of gender in/equality as well as to how they respond to it. In this sense, representations mediate between social structures and the meaning-making processes of individuals (Jodelet, 1991; Moscovici, 1972).

In addition, the tendency for Nigerian female bloggers to interpret gender equality from a marriage perspective results in gender equality being perceived as: first, a phenomenon that excludes certain groups of women, such as the unmarried and the girl-child; and second, (particularly among those who support gender inequality) a concept that infringes on cultural and religious doctrines which uphold certain forms of gender inequality in marriage. Therefore, gender equality has become for many Nigerian women (on blogs) a metaphor for ‘non-survival rights’ or ‘first-world’ problems, which ‘should not’ be prioritised above ‘survival’ issues, such as socio-economic inequality. As seen from the analysis in Chapter 7, this perception has led to the fragmentation of the gender in/equality discourse on blogs.

Further, I argue that representations have a dual function for Nigerian female blog readers, used to either defend or resist particular constructions of reality, and that consequently, representations tend to be dynamic, create tensions, and be oppositional. Hence, although blog readers tend to rely on blogs as primary information sources, many are ‘active’ recipients of blog content, often challenging blog author reportage and holding them accountable for the news they report. This also informs gender research that has emphasised the role of new media technologies in enabling women to contest meanings/representations on gender discrimination (e.g. Callaghan and Lazard, 2012; Knadler, 2001; Yusof, 2009).

¹⁸⁹ Reflective of conceptions that are shared among women.

Discourse inclusivity: this study showed that certain forms of marginalisation faced by the girl-child tend to be prioritised over the inequality faced by other categories of the offline majority, such as the elderly or rural women. I argued that this tendency to focus more on the girl-child inequalities has possibly been influenced by popularised global discourses on the girl-child marriage debate of 2013¹⁹⁰ and the Boko Haram kidnappings of girls-children in 2014 discussed in Chapter 2. This also draws attention to the possibility of the (global and national) media to play a role in setting the agenda for trending topics on women's in/equality. It is also interesting that out of the 12 broad themes/sections on gender equality dealt with by the GEO Bill, two broad sections (the modification of socio-cultural practices and the right to choose indigeneship) that deal with gender identity and cultural change in the GEO Bill are not reflected in the discourses of female blog authors and readers. This shows that issues of cultural disrespect, such as the domestication of womanhood, are possibly discussed because they are the breaking news stories of the day, but are not ascribed the same value as other 'survival-based' topics of gender equality discussed within the broader gender in/equality discourse.

Connection between blog content and the blogging technique utilised: importantly, this study revealed that blog authors exhibit self-censorship in their reporting of gender discrimination stories in a bid to be acceptable and compliant with the dominant culture. I, therefore, argue that the use of non-personal blogging styles, such as 'filter' and 'notebook', is reflective of a conscious attempt of the blog authors to manage their personal opinions in the public domain, as well as to appeal to a masculine audience in a patriarchal society such as that of Nigeria. This self-censorship highlights the ways in which communicative practices can operate through ideological drivers that shape or transform knowledge in service of the dominant cultural order, thereby sustaining inequality (Howarth, 2011). Hence, despite the fact that Nigerian female blog authors consider their role in relation to ensuring gender equality as that of 'creating awareness', this is hampered by their regard for (patriarchal) norms which, censors their reportage on gender discrimination. While most literature on blog activism tends to focus on how blogging enables individuals to share ideas and express themselves freely¹⁹¹, this study

¹⁹⁰ The girl-child marriage debate is exemplified by the comment C14 discussed in Chapter 6 on Senator Yerima who married a thirteen-year-old girl. See Section 6.3.

¹⁹¹ For example, Selim, Long and Vignoles (2014), Greenland (2013), Mao (2008), Wada, Clarke and Mortenson (2017), and Yusof (2009).

provides original evidence that Nigerian female bloggers in fact adhere to journalistic norms of neutrality and balance. This relates to Hoffman's (2012) study discussed in Chapter 5, which highlights the tendency for the interactive and communicative potential of blogs to not be fully exploited by some blog authors.

However, the struggle for gender equality is challenged where female blog authors feel the need to limit their voice on issues of gender discrimination, the discourses of Nigerian female blog authors, therefore, needs to become more expressive, and where possible oppositional, so as to enable dominant representations to be contested/questioned.

Gendered identity and space: in assessing the basis for transnational mobility, the study showed that the gendered identity of Nigerian female blog authors tends to relate to everyday life and place. I argued that the cultural influence of the geographical space occupied by blog authors often influences how they interpret and respond to topics of redistribution and those of culture change¹⁹². This contributes to gender research, particularly in relation to feminist geography (e.g. Bondi and Rose, 2003; Knopp, 1992; Pratt and Hanson, 1994) that studies how gender identities and communicative practices vary based on their construction through the lenses of space and time.

The role of the Internet in the offline world: the interviews showed that blogging as an activity creates a ripple effect, where discourses on gender discrimination online can often affect women offline. Adding new insights into the meaning and dynamics of online communities. While feminist studies on women's use of blogs for activism often define online communities as a collaboration between blog authors who are perceived as 'active' producers of online content, most studies either ignore the role of blog readers in blogging (Afful and Ricciardelli, 2015; Frizzo, Bousso, Ichikawa, and De Sá, 2017; Mai and Laine, 2016; Schaffer and Xianlin 2007), or highlight their role as contributors to comments on posts (Keller, 2012). However, this research demonstrated that blog readers serve two major functions: first, they are a fifth estate, as they check that blog authors get the stories right, (as discussed in Chapter 8); second, they serve as significant information sources for blog author-reportage. Hence, my conception from the onset of this study that there is a tendency for women who are offline to be

¹⁹² For instance, the discussion of Section 9.3 showed that some blog authors conceived that being 'far away', presumably living in a Western country, such as Canada, the USA or a European country, is believed to stimulate freer conversations on gender equality.

‘completely’ lost in discussions of women’s discrimination happening online was trivialised. This is because of the tendency for the inequalities faced by the offline majority to be tackled by blog readers who feel a sense of responsibility to illuminate occurrences happening in their immediate offline environment.

As such, although the study established that there is limited discussion between blog authors and readers on Nigerian female blogs, more dialogue is witnessed in blog reader comments. This allows Nigerian female blogs to qualify as some sort of virtual communities where discussions exist between members of a group. As discussed in Chapter 5, Nigerian female blogs also reflect filter and notebook styles, which contrasts personal blogs that women globally are associated with (Keller, 2012). This divergent trend provides an interesting object of investigation for this research and possibly explains why the Nigerian female blogosphere is a viable platform for discourses centred on gender in/equality. In essence, it provides a forum for discussion on ‘general topics’ that affect ‘public livelihood’, as opposed to personal issues or experiences.

10.3 Theoretical Contributions

This study proposes that the pursuit of gender equality in Nigeria should start with a fight that is predominantly centred on redistributive policies (being currently the better-tolerated form of gender inequality). However, taking a redistributive approach needs to be accompanied with an ulterior aim, that is, to achieve recognition in the ‘long run’. This is because the more redistributive policies are enacted, the more the chances for cultural roles to be impacted.

However, the proposed approach (approaching gender inequality through redistribution) goes against Fraser and Honneth’s (2003) proposal that recognition (and indeed redistribution) is fought as a matter of justice. Fraser’s conception of justice is hinged on the parity of participation where ‘justice requires social arrangements that permit members of society to interact with one another as peers’ (Fraser and Honneth, 2003, p. 36). According to Fraser, the institutionalised cultural patterns of interpretation and evaluation need to be tackled first in order to ensure equal opportunity for achieving social esteem. While this perspective is valid, particularly in the Western world where the fight for the recognition of difference has been accommodated as a valid form of justice, and systems of cultural value such as the family, schools, libraries, and so on are made to change cultural perceptions that are rooted in gender inequality, the case is different in

Nigeria. As seen from the analysis of discourse, policies of redistributive nature are turned down based on the ‘possibility’ to become a threat to established cultural practices. Hence, approaching cultural change as a matter of justice does not look promising in the context of Nigeria. Fraser and Honneth’s (2003) conception, therefore, overlooks the role that context plays in determining how gender inequality should be confronted/demanded.

In addition, by adopting Fraser’s (2005, 2008) theorisation on participatory representation, this study shows that representation, traditionally conceived within global feminist studies as a post-Westphalian concept can also be applied to a Westphalian (Nigerian) frame online. In this regard, while Fraser (2008) identifies the key players of representation as international feminist organisations, I argue that the politics of representation, which comprises of questions of misframing (e.g. who participates in the discourse of in/equality?), are relevant to the gender in/equality discourse on the ‘Nigerian’ female ‘blogosphere’. This is because issues concerning the politics of participation are valid in assessing the online platform, which is defined by misrepresentations or divides which exclude certain individuals whose voice should be heard. This highlights the fact that in relation to any non-global structure of deliberation, questions of ‘who’ participates in discourse will always be pertinent depending on the contextual norms being addressed.

Further, blog discourse and rhetoric, such as ‘going behind each other’s backs’, ‘being each other’s enemies’, and ‘being patriarchy’s fiercest foot soldiers’, emphasise the notion that Nigerian women online are disunited in the struggle against gender inequality. This discourse fragmentation challenges the conception of the word ‘women’ as a homogenous category when dealing with issues of gender in/equality and draws attention to the ‘woman’ as a key player in her own marginalisation. Thus, by unravelling rival ideological approaches within the pre-conceived monolithic female counter-publics that obfuscate or rationalise un-equal gender relations, the study complicates celebratory approaches that conceptualise digital spaces as places for women to fight back against sexism¹⁹³. It, therefore, revisits the omission of scholars such as Fraser (1990) to pay attention to oppositional groups within the counterpublic structure that oppose the ‘dominant’ counterpublics. While scholars (Fraser, 1990; Kellner, 2000) identify the plurality of the ‘counterpublics’, they rarely consider the tensions within the counterpublics, tensions that could birth the counter-counterpublics. I, therefore, argue

¹⁹³ For example, Harris, 2008, Keller, 2012 and Mendes, 2015.

that within a broadly conceived counterpublic, there is the possibility for one or more micro counterpublics¹⁹⁴. As seen from the findings of the study, the heterogeneity of counterpublics is key in identifying contrasting traits and varying nuances that help to define and understand resistance to inequality.

Further, by ‘articulating’ analytical approaches to representations from the fields of social psychology, feminism and cultural studies (hence, Fraser’s participatory representation, Moscovici’s (1984, 1972) and Hall’s (1984, 1997) (social) representations), this study has examined how social representations of gender discrimination affect the conception, communicative and social practices of Nigerian blog authors and readers, and also highlights the subjective interpretations and tensions that comprise the representations of gender in/equality. By so doing, I have been able to transcend the limits of insights that come from a single theory, providing a rigorous understanding of the representations of gender in/equality on female blogs. This enriches feminist research on participatory representations by providing additional perspectives on discursive representation, and enhances social psychology and cultural studies research with useful insights on participatory representations.

Finally, the research examined the representation of gender equality in the GEO Bill and the interrelation between the blog reportage of gender discrimination and how blog users make sense of gender marginalisation. For instance, in Chapter 8, I showed how the representation of ‘gender equality’ as ‘gender equality in marriage’ by Senator Biodun Olujimi in the Nigerian National Assembly had a bearing on blog author reportage, as well as the conception of gender in/equality by some blog readers. While the study of social representations has been criticised for merely describing social phenomenon, rather than aiming to transform it (Howarth, 2006), this research has addressed the fundamental critique of representation theory as not being critical enough (Howarth, 2006; Wagner, 1998) and contributes to the body of literature aimed at addressing the effect of social representations on individual behaviour (Duveen, 2001; Farr and Marková, 1995; Howarth, 2002; Joffe, 2002).

¹⁹⁴ It may also be considered that the more popular a social movement becomes, the more possible for it to be marked by micro counterpublics.

10.4 Methodological Insights

While I drew on Chandler's (2007) approach to textual analysis, I broke down and adapted Chandler's concepts to be specifically suited for my research. Hence, in selecting specific blog comments that make up the research sample for CDA, I categorised my analysis into three: 'assessing the identity of the writer', the 'discourse structure', and 'the nature of the argument'. This allowed me to ensure that the selected blog text for analysis met the criterion of the required gender, was relevant to the topic of gender in/equality under study, and had communicative and conflictual traits that enabled the analysis of its discourse. By so doing, I was able to analyse data that helped me to better understand the experiences of Nigerian women online. In addition, the blog text analysis employed a mixed qualitative approach (CDA and thematic analysis) to study women's discourses on gender in/equality. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, the use of such an approach is rare in the context of African gender studies.

In the global context, this study draws from works that have used CDA to analyse the ways in which gender in/equality is institutionalised through discursive means (e.g. Lazar, 2004; Remlinger, 2005; Talbot, 1998; Walsh, 2001; Wodak, 2005). In addition, it has brought fresh insight into the relationship between women's response to the cultural devaluation of gender identity, socio-economic discrimination and political forms of marginalisation from an online discursive context. While my research builds on previous work on CDA, it also represents a significant new insight in terms of focus and depth of analysis in studying the blog discourses of gender in/equality in Africa. As regards the depth of analysis, I have provided a broader and more critical picture of online gender discourse practice than has previously been attempted in Nigeria¹⁹⁵ by examining how contextual factors¹⁹⁶ contribute to the production of discourses online. By so doing, I have tackled criticisms about CDA's inadequate theorisation of context, as presented by scholars such as Chouliaraki and Fairclough (2010) and van Dijk (2006).

In addition, I have drawn on Fairclough's (2013) approach to CDA, which is rooted in the tradition of critical realist philosophy, which argues for the emancipatory potential of rational inquiry. In this regard, I have gone beyond describing how cultural, economic and political forms of discrimination connect online by suggesting the way

¹⁹⁵ As evident from the African field of gender research, presented in Sections 1.4, 3.3, 4.1 and 4.4.

¹⁹⁶ By, for instance, drawing on the cultural, political and economic challenges faced by Nigerian women within the context of African feminism, I am able to establish a contextual background that allows a better understanding of how Nigerian women communicate online.

forward: for gender equality to be confronted from the point of redistribution in Nigeria. Hence, by taking a socio-political stance, I seek to transform how gender equality is confronted by women activists and legislators both in the online and offline worlds.

As stated in the introduction, the study merges methodological and theoretical perspectives by carrying out an interdiscursive¹⁹⁷ analysis (Fairclough, 2003). In this regard, I examine 'genre', 'style' and 'discourse', which reflect the theoretical perspective, as well as the research questions of study, which involve a combination of how women 'speak' or communicate online, how they represent the world in which they live in, and their actions, characterised by how they make sense of their social and personal identities. This approach could be useful to future researchers seeking to interrogate forms of discursive resistance to inequality.

The adoption of multiple qualitative methods (hence, interviews/thematic analysis and textual analysis/CDA) was also designed to yield rich and rigorous insights into how women conceive the various forms of gender discrimination, and the representational dynamics used to discuss them online. While designing this project, my goal was to collect rich data through a combination of methods that involved gaining insight from communicative practices as well as directly from individual subjects. It also made it easier to consider the extent to which discussions on gender in/equality online matched the attitudes, beliefs and knowledge of blog authors interpersonally. Hence, integrated qualitative methods comprise techniques that provide an understanding and complementary approach for the unpacking of women's blog discussions on gender in/equality in the Nigerian context.

10.5 Policy and Other Practical Implications

This project distinctively has implications on the activities of policy-makers and women activists. It has complicated the representation/conceptualisation of the GEO Bill as a policy document that caters for women's 'equality' with men. My close analysis of the Bill shows how, as regards areas of socio-economic equality and political participation, the Bill only provides for women's participation by 35%. This means that Nigerian women on blogs have subscribed to a fight that does not give them the required 'justice' but sustains patriarchal dominance and maintains their limited democratic

¹⁹⁷ Interdiscursive in this study reflects Fairclough's approach, which means the relations between types of discourse.

participation. Also, contrary to the perception of female blog users, that the provisions on rape in the GEO Bill seek to punish the perpetrators, my analysis revealed that the Bill only makes provisions for the victims of rape to have an abortion where it is deemed 'needful' by the law. In addition, this study questioned the extent to which the GEO Bill takes into cognisance the inequalities suffered by invisible and vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, disabled and rural women. For instance, as discussed in Section 8.4, the interests of disabled and elderly women were mostly addressed in relation to violence. This means that other areas where disabled or elderly women are likely to face discrimination are left un-tackled. The study also draws attention to the omission to FGM in the GEO Bill. FGM is a significant cultural practice that discriminates against women/girls in most rural areas in Nigeria and this calls into question the issues of gender equality prioritised by policy-makers and women activists in Nigeria. By projecting inequalities such as these, I drew attention to how articulations of gender (exemplified by the so-called GEO Bill) are often laced with dominant ideology and patriarchal hegemony (Almeida, 2018; Bailey et al., 2013; Lischinsky, 2017).

Further, the theoretical contribution of this study also has policy implications for Nigerian women activists and legislators, as I proposed that the fight for gender equality (often sought through policy) should commence from the point of redistribution being the better-tolerated form of gender inequality in Nigeria. Hence, cultural change can be achieved within the framework of redistribution, where certain cultural practices can be proved to infringe on women, and indeed girls' survival, and livelihood. Senator Biodun Olujimi who presented the GEO Bill in the Nigerian National Assembly was reported to have done so from a cultural perspective¹⁹⁸, citing 'equality in marriage and divorce settlements' as the predominant focus of the Bill (Unuigbo, 2016). This perspective, which presents the Bill as infringing on traditional marriage practices (that uphold male dominance) probably contributed to its rejection. The strategy for presenting the Bill, should have been from a redistributive standpoint, and even where questions are raised about the aspects of the Bill that threaten cultural practices, female legislators should defend such cultural forms of inequality by citing how they affect women's survival and livelihood. This is because it is evident that approaching cultural inequalities as a matter of justice in Nigeria does not look promising. As such, female legislators should rather appeal to the 'moral' sensibilities of the Nigerian Senate as regard cultural forms of

¹⁹⁸ This is discussed further within the context of representation of gender equality in Chapter 8.

discrimination. Nevertheless, owing to the cultural beliefs held by many Nigerian women, for this strategy to be effectively employed by policy-makers and women activists, Nigerian women need to first come to the realisation that it is alright for the social arrangements of gender to change.

Finally, the findings revealed the cultural devaluation of gender identity as the reason why some women suffer economic marginalisation. Therefore, despite being ‘qualified’, for jobs, women are turned down on the basis of their gender. Also, in the case of other women, the culture of being dependent on a man for sustenance, where the man pays the woman’s tuition fee and living expenses confines her to his control. These examples show that being ‘educated’ in some cases does not suffice in the struggle for gender equality. This also raises questions about the perception among African scholars that ‘education’ is the sole liberator of women from patriarchal dominance (Holmarsdottir, Nomlomo, Farag, and Desai, 2012; Male and Wodon, 2018) and calls for additional tactics in the struggle for women’s liberation.

10.6 Limitations

In this rich qualitative study, I compromised scope and size for depth of investigation. Other researchers can take the insights gained in my study of six blogs and eight blog authors and expand them to a broader selection of blogs and blog authors. As discussed in Chapter 4, the six blogs studied were the only ones accompanied by certified statistics on Alexa.com owing to the high traffic they generate. This means that such blogs hosted active and broad discourses on gender discrimination that allowed the informative use of CDA. The blogs hosted on Alexa.com also come with additional statistics that define blog visitors, such as average age, browsing location (e.g. work place, school, home, and others), gender, the blog’s Internet loading speed, and so on (see Appendix A). This enabled the contextual framing of women’s blog discussions on gender in/equality. My preliminary research analysis also revealed that blogs outside Alexa.com’s ranking did not provide the ‘breadth’ of discourses needed for a thorough application of the chosen research method. In addition, as stated in the introduction of the thesis, it must be noted that my reference to ‘women’ and ‘females’ in this study relates to the self-presentation of the actors on blogs.

Similarly, the decision to interview eight blog authors was in consideration that it would be a feasible number of informants for the conduct of thematic analysis. I considered that these eight blog authors would complement the CDA analysis of blog

content. In addition, as discussed in Chapter 4, I originally hoped to conduct face-to-face interviews with all the participants, but it was difficult tracking down the blog authors who had busy schedules and could hardly meet face-to-face. I, therefore, conducted two face-to-face interviews and six phone interviews with the other blog authors. As discussed in Chapter 4, phone interviews were specifically chosen to tackle issues of poor Internet connection in the country and the unavailability of blog authors to meet physically. Overall, it must be noted that this study is not meant to generalise across a wide range of discourses/bloggers, but instead seeks to present a deep understanding of the ideological practices, perceptions and experiences of Nigerian women. It must also be noted that female bloggers are not a representation of the Nigerian female population and thus, their discourses might not apply generally and are not generalizable.

In addition, the discourses on gender in/equality that I have presented in this thesis are partial¹⁹⁹ and should be seen as the first step of what I hope becomes a richer area of inquiry for African and other researchers. Moreover, as discussed in Section 4.4 certain insider bias might be evident in my interpretation and analysis of online data and participant interviews. Particularly, the design of the interviews was a subjective process involving some personal judgements. While these challenges are typically experienced by most researchers, I have been cautious to reflect on these in the thesis.

10.7 Future Recommendations

As discussed in Chapter 6, the contemporary struggle against gender discrimination in Nigeria seems to be more reflective and responsive towards issues tackled by the second-wave feminism (defined more by redistributive battles of socio-economic equality, domestic violence, and so on), situated mostly in the Keynesian era²⁰⁰. This challenges Fraser's (2005) conception of the third world as essentially keeping up with the contemporary subject of feminism in the West, which is mostly defined by discourses of recognition. This also draws attention to the relationship between the political landscape during the second wave feminism (hence, the Keynesian era) and the current so-called 'democratic' political era in Nigeria. For instance, both political settings are defined by male dominance in prominent areas such as employment, and the effect of

¹⁹⁹ Hence, are not exhaustive of the range of inequalities experienced by Nigerian women.

²⁰⁰ This discussion highlights how both the Keynesian era and the (current) so-called democratic political dispensation in Nigeria are defined by male dominance in prominent areas such as employment. A more detailed study of the characteristics of these eras could make for interesting future research.

this inequality on women's liberation could be something that could be elaborated or tested by future researchers.

Further, Schuster's (2013, p.11) study on young women's use of social media for feminist activism shows that online activism is believed to affect intergenerational communication in a way that has negative outcomes for feminist movements. This raises questions about how the generational divide on Nigerian blogs could challenge women's effective collaboration for activism. Future research could investigate if the effectiveness of the fight for gender equality is challenged by the lack of collaboration between younger women online and older women who are mostly offline.

In addition to age and education, this study shows that geographical factors have a bearing on women's use of the online space in Nigeria. Hence, women from southern Nigeria are seen to be more represented in blog discussions than women from the northern regions. This relates to the North-South divide in Nigeria (presented in Chapter 2), which shows the impact of cultural, among other challenges on women's livelihood. Such challenges could also have an impact on northern women's ability to be online. Fraser (2008) defines the issues that determine the boundaries of inclusion in gender discourses as misframing. In relation to discourses on Nigerian female blogs, such issues include illiteracy, geographical positioning and age, which raise questions about the inclusivity of the online sphere and the role of digital divides. Therefore, when we talk about Nigerian women on blogs, are we really talking about women mostly from southern Nigeria who reside in the urban areas? This is a significant issue to be investigated, and could be extrapolated for the study of other different contexts as well.

In conclusion, this research has identified that there is a need for future study on how women respond to gender equality both online and offline. It has identified gaps in literature that future researchers could elaborate, test and research more regarding the struggle for gender emancipation. As stated in Chapter 3, despite the relevance of the relationship among the subjects of gender equality in the attainment of gender parity, very few global studies have related the concepts of redistribution, recognition, and representation to online platforms/online-communicative practices. In addition, similar to the Western context, most literature on women's misrepresentation as it relates to participation in Africa are mostly offline and are focused on highlighting forms of gender inequality rather than examining the possible factors that define women's lack of participation. Finally, as stated earlier in the chapter, this study showed that most scholarly work on how women challenge mainstream discourses, male dominance, the

adherence to societal/cultural norms and sexual harassment often presents women as a homogeneous counterpublic group. Such research rarely considers tensions that occur within women's 'resistance' to inequality.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Blog Profile for CDA

Name of blog ²⁰¹	Monthly page views ²⁰²	Daily page views per visitor (no. of times)	Average daily time spent on blog (mins)	Internet loading speed ²⁰³ (all sites are rated ‘very slow’)	Age of blog visitors	Female/male blog visitors	Educational level of blog visitors	Visitors by top 5 countries
Linda Ikeji	18,612,905	3.12	11:58	7.569 seconds: 91% of global sites are faster	18-24:15.4% 25-34:42.2% 35-44:35.8% 45-54:3.5% 55-64:2.0% 65+:1.1%	Male: 37.9% Female: 62.1%	No College ²⁰⁴ /University qualification: 16.1% College ²⁰⁵ /University qualification: 83.9%	Nigeria: 81% UK: 4.9% US: 3.2% SA: 2.5% Canada: 2.3%

²⁰¹ All demographics in the table were retrieved from Alexa.com in February 2016. The statistics reflect an approximate percentage calculated and updated monthly by Alexa.com.

²⁰² This refers to the total number of page views on the blogs in the Month of February 2016.

²⁰³ Alexa.com takes the median of all the page load times observed for a site and compares it to other global sites.

²⁰⁴ ‘No College/University’ degree refers to possessing a secondary school leaving certificate.

²⁰⁵ ‘College/University’ degree connotes possessing or in the process of gaining some form of post-secondary school certification (e.g. Diploma, Bachelor’s degree, Master’s degree, and so on).

Bella Naija	765,543	3.11	6:04	5.321 seconds: 81% of global sites faster	18-24: 31.0% 25-34:43.8% 35-44:16.9% 45-54:4.2% 55-64:2.9% 65+:1.2%	Male: 19% Female 81%	No College/ University qualification: 10.3% College/University qualification: 89.7%	Nigeria: 74.9% US: 9.7% UK: 5.3% SA: 3.7% Canada: 2.6%
Stella Dimokorkokus	441,851	4.10	10:34	4.872 seconds: 84% of global sites are faster	18-24:18.1% 25-34:35.6% 35-44:36.9% 45-54:6.1% 55-64:3.1% 65+:0.2%	Male: 26.1% Female: 73.9%	No College/University qualification: 8.5% College/University qualification: 91.5%	Nigeria: 80.8% US: 5.6% UK: 5.5% Ireland: 4.8% Austria: 2.2%
Laila's blog	217,143	3.90	9.18	3.564 seconds: 86% of global sites are faster	18-24:13.4% 25-34:44.7% 35-44:21.8% 45-54:16.1% 55-64:3.9% 65+:0.1%	Male: 27.9% Female: 72.1%	No College/University qualification: 8.6% College/University qualification: 91.4%	Nigeria: 80.5% US: 7.2% UK: 3.1% Netherlands: 2.9% Italy: 2.5%
Ladun Liadi	201,489	2.52	4:89	4.401 seconds: 82% of global sites are faster	18-24:21.9% 25-34:51.9% 35-44:18.2% 45-54:3.6% 55-64:3.3% 65+:1.1%	Male: 37.7% Female: 62.3%	No College/University qualification: 20.1% College/University qualification: 79.9%	Nigeria: 84% Austria: 7.3% UK: 2.1% Canada: 1.9% US: 1.7%
Miss petite Nigeria	148,342	3.04	7.12	6.785 seconds: 86% of global sites are faster	18-24:17.7% 25-34:33.5% 35-44:31.4% 45-54:13.5% 55-64: 3.5% 65+:0.4%	Male: 19.9% Female: 80.1%	No College/University qualification: 23.8% College/University qualification: 76.2%	Nigeria: 82.2% US: 6.2% Poland: 3.3% UK: 2.4% India: 1.5%

Appendix B: Profile of Interview Participants

Aderonke is in her early-30s, single and lives in Canada. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Communication and currently blogs full-time. Aderonke started blogging in 2010 and has come to see her role on Bella Naija as that of filtering out Misogynistic content and writing positive stories about the Nigerian culture and lifestyle. Because she currently resides in Canada, Aderonke is able to have 24/7 access to the Internet with minimal restrictions. She also blogs on an average of 16 hours daily. In 2016, Bella Naija was voted African blog of the year.

Tosin is in her mid-30s and created Olorisupergal blog in 2010. She is single and has a Bachelor's degree in Accounting as well as a Diploma in Media Studies. Tosin was listed among YNaija's 100 most influential women in Africa in 2016. Tosin's primary motive for blogging on gender issues is to create awareness of domestic violence and the sexual harassment of young girls in Nigeria. While Tosin is able to blog for 8 hours daily, she is sometimes constrained by poor Internet connection and electricity supply.

Shola is in her late 30s and created woman.ng blog in 2014 after she earned her MBA from University of Wales in Cardiff (now called Cardiff Metropolitan University). Woman.ng is dedicated to news, women related issues and debates and opinions by Nigerian women. Shola's goal was to start a blog that would shed light on women's issues and challenge patriarchal norms in the Nigerian society. Despite challenges of electricity supply and poor Internet connection, Shola is able to blog on an average of 9 hours daily.

Emeh is in her early 30s and has a daughter. She created Miss petite Nigeria blog in 2011 after she graduated from the University where she read Law. However, Emeh never practiced the Law profession as she had a passion for writing. Although Misspetite Naija blog reports on entertainment, fashion and lifestyle, Emeh has a soft spot for topics that concern poverty, underdevelopment and gender discrimination. She hopes that her reportage on issues of gender discrimination will create change in the Nigerian society. Misspetite Naija blog was voted the 'Best New Blog' in the Nigerian Blog Awards of

2012. Although Emeh is often constrained by slow Internet services and broadband rates, she manages to blog for approximately 10 hours daily.

Laila is in her mid-30s, married with three children and created Laila's blog in 2013. Laila gained a Bachelor's degree in Chemical Engineering but decided to work in the banking sector. She shocked family and friends when she decided to quit her position as an Assistant Banking Officer in 2016 to focus on blogging. Laila's motivation for blogging is to create awareness of women's suffering in Nigeria. In 2017, Laila won the Entertainment Blogger of the Year Award at the Nigerian Writers Awards (NWA). While Laila is able to blog for up to 12 hours daily, her blogging practice is often constrained by poor electricity supply and the cost of Internet services.

Vivian is single and in her late 20s. She created Viviangist blog in 2014. Vivian has a Diploma in Mass Communication and draws on that knowledge to blog about political news, entertainment, and women's discrimination topics. Her motive for blogging about gender-related topics is to create awareness on women's marginalisation. Although Vivian is often constrained by poor Internet services, low electricity supply and the cost of Internet data, she is able to blog on an average of 8 hours daily.

Lateefah is in her early 30s, single and has a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science and a Master's degree in Multimedia Applications. She is also a Web designer and is currently trying to forge a path in online journalism. Lateefah's initial motivation for blogging was to 'find herself'; she was stressed about issues in her life and decided to start a blog on entertainment, celebrity and fashion news. However, having moved to Nigeria (in 2011) after her Master's degree in England, she soon realised that gender discrimination topics were very prominent within the local environment in Lagos, Nigeria. She decided to incorporate gender discrimination topics in her blog reportage in order to encourage women's voices to be heard and to challenge people who treat women as second-class citizens. Lateefah is able to blog for up to 17 hours daily despite constraint of poor the Internet services in Nigeria

Appendix C: Letter of Invitation to Participate in Research

17th of June 2017

Title of Research: The Discourse of Gender (in)equality: Assessing the Blog Communication of Nigerian Women.

Researcher: Diretnan Dikwal-Bot

Project Supervisors: Dr. Panayiota Tsatsou and Dr. Kaitlynn Mendes

I, Diretnan Dikwal-Bot, from the Department of Media, Communications and Sociology, University of Leicester, invite you to participate in a research project entitled: The discourse of gender (in)equality: Assessing the Blog Communication of Nigerian Women.

The purpose of this project is to examine how Nigerian women discuss gender discrimination topics on blogs. It seeks to understand what motivates Nigerian female blog authors to report on topics of gender discrimination and how they conceive the concept of gender equality. The study also examines how Nigerian female bloggers perceive the subjugation of women, which is encouraged by some female blog readers, and the impact of these arguments on the attainment of gender equality in Nigeria. In addition, owing to the fact that only 25% of Nigerian women are reported to be online, my research aims to assess if the blogging motive of Nigerian female blog authors embodies inclusiveness of the offline majority.

The expected duration of the interview is 45 minutes. Ultimately, this research may be published as part of a book, published in a journal article or presented as a paper. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to:

- provide your contact information such as your mobile phone number and a functional email address for communication purposes as it concerns the interview process.
- fill a consent form accepting to formally partake in the study.

- choose whether you would prefer an online or face-to-face interview method and to arrange a possible location, time and date as it applies to the interview method chosen.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me (see below for contact information)

Thank you.



Diretnan Dikwal-Bot.

Email: ddb11@leicester.ac.uk

Mobile number: +447743219259

If you have any further questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact

Panayiota, Tsatsou (first project supervisor)

Associate Professor in Media and Communication

Telephone: 01162522889

Email: pt133@leicester.ac.uk

Kaitlynn Mendes (second project supervisor)

Associate Professor in Media and Communication

01162237229

Email: km350@leicester.ac.uk

Appendix D: Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title of study: The Discourse of Gender (In)equality: Assessing the Blog Communication of Nigerian Women.

Researcher: Diretnan Dikwal-Bot is a Ph.D. student in the Media, Communications and Sociology Department of the University of Leicester, UK. This study is being conducted as part of Diretnan Dikwal-Bot's doctoral thesis.

Introduction

You are being asked to participate in a research study that seeks to understand your blogging activities as it relates to topics on gender inequality.

You were selected as a possible participant because of your blog's active reportage and holding user discussions on stories of gender discrimination. Hence, Alexa.com and the Nigeria Blog Awards Websites influenced the choice of your blog which is rated among the top 10 blogging Websites in Nigeria.

I ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of the study

My research studies how Nigerian women discuss gender discrimination topics on blogs. It seeks to understand what motivates Nigerian female blog authors to report on topics of gender discrimination and how they conceive the concept of gender equality. The study also examines how Nigerian female bloggers perceive the subjugation of women, which is encouraged by some female blog readers, and the impact of these arguments on the attainment of gender equality in Nigeria. In addition, owing to the fact that only 25 percent of Nigerian women are reported to be online, my research aims to assess if the blogging motive of Nigerian female blog authors embodies inclusiveness of the offline majority, or if it merely reproduces alternative forms of marginalisation. Ultimately, this research may be published as part of a book, published in a journal article or presented as

a paper. In addition, the interview sessions will be video recorded for the purpose of the research process and is expected to last for a duration of 45 minutes.

Description of the study procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked for your contact information such as your mobile phone number and a functional email address for communication purposes as it concerns the interview process. You will also be asked to choose whether you would prefer an online or face-to-face interview method and to arrange a possible location, time and date as it applies to the interview method chosen.

Benefits of being in the study

It may not be certain that you will benefit directly from taking part in this study. However, owing to the general lack of literature on how women discuss issues of discrimination or the challenges involved in their fight against gender inequality in Nigeria, your participation in this research improves the information on women's online activism as regards gender inequality. Your participation will also provide information that can enable the understanding of the challenges faced by Nigerian women and possibly lead to the formulation of strategies that can help tackle some of these setbacks.

Risks/discomforts of being in this Study

I expect that any risks, discomforts, or inconveniences will be minor and I believe that they are not likely to happen. If discomforts become a problem, you may discontinue your participation.

Confidentiality

This study provides you with the option of making your identity explicit or anonymous. If you wish to make your identity anonymous, your identity will be represented by an unidentifiable pseudonym in the research content. All recorded interviews will be transcribed for analysis but no video or audio records will be directly used in the research. Hence, no information that will make it possible to identify you will be included in the research. However, if you wish for your identity to be made explicit, your identity will be disclosed in the research. Nevertheless, you will be given the opportunity to review and approve any material that is published about you. Also note that videotapes made will

not be viewed by anyone outside the study and will be destroyed after the research is completed.

Payments for online interview participants

Participants who opt for online interviews, will receive payments of 2,000 naira each to purchase Internet data to be used for the online interview sessions. The payment will be made through bank transfers and would occur immediately after an interview date has been scheduled.

Right to ask questions and report concerns

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, *Diretnan Dikwal-Bot* at email, ddb11@le.ac.uk or by telephone at +447734219259. If you like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you.

Rights of research participants

This research project abides by the laws that govern the use of data and confidentiality by protecting the information retrieved from research participants in line with the 1998 Data Protection Act (UK).

Consent

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by **(Diretnan Dikwal-Bot)** of the Department of **(Media, Communication and Sociology)** at the University of Leicester, UK. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be tape recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the dissertation and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be either anonymous or non-anonymous depending on my choice.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty as disclosed by the researcher.

This project had been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Research Ethics Review Board at University of Leicester. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in his study, I may contact Dr. Panayiota Tsatsou (**phone: 01162522889, email: pt133@leicester.ac.uk**) or Dr, Kaitlynn Mendes (**phone: 01162237229, email: km350@leicester.ac.uk**).

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to have my interview tape recorded.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to the use of anonymous ☐ or non-anonymous ☐ verbatim quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the researcher.

Participant's Name
(print):

Participant's Signature:

Date:

Appendix E: Topic guide for in-depth interviews

Personal information

- Age
- Highest educational qualification
- State of Origin

Technology-use

- History of technologies use
- Average number of hours spent online in a day/week
- Factors that possibly affect online presence

Blogging activities

- Personal blogging history
- Range and type of topics blogged about
- Experiences from blogging

The subject of gender inequality

- Understanding of gender equality
- Topics of gender inequality mostly discussed on blogs.
- Reasons for blogging about gender equality

Divergent discourses

- Perception about blog readers who support the subjugation of women
- Perception about the possible impact of blog discussions that encourage the subjugation of women

Inclusivity of blog discussions

- Views about women who are not able to be online
- Motivation for blogging about the experiences of women who are offline.

Appendix F: Coding Framework

1. Personal Information

1.1 Age

- Early 30s
- Mid 30s
- Late 30s

1.2 Highest educational qualification

- Higher National Diploma
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree

1.3 Region of origin in Nigeria

- South-East
- South-West
- South-South

2. Technology Use and Blogging History

2.1 Average number of hours spent online daily

- 14
- 8
- 9
- 12
- 17
- 8-10

2.2 Year that blogging commenced

- 2009
- 2010
- 2011
- 2013

- 2014

2.3 Factors that affect online presence

- Electricity supply
- Poor Internet services
- Expensive Internet data packages

2.4 Experiences from blogging

- Positive experiences from blogging
- Both positive and negative experiences from blogging

3. The Subject of Gender Inequality

3.1 Positions on gender equality

- In support of gender equality
- Against gender equality and against certain forms of female subjugation
- In support of gender equality but reporting stories in a ‘neutral’ way

3.2 Topics of gender inequality mostly discussed on blogs.

- Girl kidnapping
- Girl kidnapping and forced marriage
- Domestic violence
- Girl-child Marriage
- Girl-child trafficking
- Sexual harassment
- The rejection of the GEO Bill
- President Buhari’s position on women and the follow-up discourses
- Widowhood inheritance
- Socio-economic inequality
- Political misrepresentation
- Educational disparity
- Domestication of women
- Cultural devaluation of gender identity

3.3 Conceptions on gender equality

- Gender equality versus feminism
- Cultural roles and gender equality
- Cultural change and gender equality
- Geographical space and gendered identity

3.4 Outlook on cultural change

- In support of cultural change
- Cultural change as necessary for gender equality
- Highlighting areas of cultural disrespect but less critical of cultural practices

3.5 Reasons for blogging about gender equality

- To create awareness
- Empathy
- To make a difference
- To create change

4. Divergent Discourses

4.1. Perception on alternative discourses on gender equality

- Societal pressure
- Lack of knowledge
- Fear of repercussions owing to poor legislative backing

5. Inclusivity of Blog Discussions

5.1 Topics on the offline majority

- Girl kidnapping
- Girl kidnapping and forced marriage
- Domestic violence
- Sexual harassment
- Networking and community

5.2 Blog reader contributions

- Positive contributions

- Positive and negative contributions

5.3 Motivation for blogging about the experiences of women who are offline

- To create awareness
- Empathy
- To make a difference
- To create change

5.4 Views on the inequalities faced by women who offline

- Inequalities faced by the offline majority are often captured in discourse
- Inequalities faced by the offline majority are sometimes lost in discourse

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