

# Narrative and Gendered Identities: A Feminist Narratological Reading of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and D.H Lawrence's *The Fox*

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## Abstract

The significant role that narrative strategy, plot structure, characterization, perspectivity and language, precisely, metaphors and metanarratives can play as textual sites of gendered identities has been recognized within feminist narratology which is an interdisciplinary sub-domain within narrative theory. Although the central role that narrative might proffer in the analysis of gender has over the last twenty years featured as a crucial area of research in feminist narratology, over-trodden data like Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and D. H. Lawrence's *The Fox*, seem to have received less attention in the light of categories or narrative strategies which can serve as sites of gender. In privileging feminist narratology as a suitable theoretical framework for locating, interpreting and analyzing sites of gendered identity construction in *Things Fall Apart* and *The Fox*, this study argues that the two texts team with narrative structures and strategies as well as linguistic evidences like metaphors and folkloric metanarratives, that may encourage a categorization of people into male and female; masculinities, femininities, and the subaltern. Gender markers: sexuality, characterization (psychological and biological elements), male-centered or "masculinist" plot structure, folkloric metanarratives, linguistic elements like metaphors and images in general as well as social codes that are gender-specific and that play a huge role in the context of the cultural construction/transmission and memory of gender are largely represented in the chosen texts. These textual devices have a highly ideological function: they are creative medial elements that play an important role in constructing and passing on the complex system of values, norms and ideas which constitute a society's patriarchal mentality.

**Keywords:** narrative, gender, identity, feminist narratology, Achebe, D.H. Lawrence

## 1. Introduction

The crucial role that narrative plays in the analysis of gender has emerged as an important area of research over the last twenty years. When Susan Lanser (1992) asserts that narrative strategies are gender-specific, she is saying that gender-sensitive aspects of narrative may be reconceptualized within the framework of feminist criticism. As suggested by Page (2007), "Feminist narratology is the umbrella term which covers the many different ways in which gender-related aspects of narrative and the paradigms and discourses used to analyze them may be interrogated from a feminist point of view" (p. 189). Insights drawn from neighbouring approaches have been integrated into gender and feminist studies. In an attempt to formulate a feminist narratology, or a feminist poetics of voice, Lanser has suggested ways social voice can become a narrative category. She characterizes feminist narratology as the study of narrative structures and strategies in the context of the cultural constructions of gender, masculinities, femininities and power relations. The cultural construction of gender by narrative means is possible because, as Page (2007) argues- "narrative analysis does not take place in a context-free vacuum...telling a story as well as the analysis of narratives are human activities- activities that generally entail gendered assumptions and practices" (p. 189). According to Lanser (1992) and Page (2007), an analysis of how narrative methodology can be relevant as sites of gender needs to take into consideration the fact that narrative comes from culture and is a vital tool by which cultural identity is reproduced. Narrative evidence can therefore be seen as the link between literary texts and gender. In this paper, characterization, social codes, metanarratives (folktales and myths) narrative perspective and language, (proverbs and metaphors) will be relevant first, as gender markers and further, as tools for the construction and legitimization of gendered identities.

Since Feminist narratology considers gender as a socio-culturally sensitive issue that emanates from culture and is

capable of being reproduced by narrative means, the study also seeks to highlight the role gender markers can play in the processes of (collective) identity constructions. In brief, Feminist narratology is concerned with gender, narrative and identity constructions, sexuality, voice, perspective and language. Without pretending to provide an exhaustive discussion of the key trends in feminist narratology,<sup>i</sup> this paper briefly provides the methodology for a feminist narratological analysis of texts, a definition of the gender-related concepts deployed, a specification of the medial role of language (metaphor, myths, folktales and images) in the construction and transmission of gendered identities, and then proceeds to analyse *Things Fall Apart* (TFA for subsequent usage) and *The Fox* for a practical illustration of how gender and cultural identities can be constructed using feminist narratology.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 *The Intersection of Narrative and Gender in Feminist Narratology*

Feminist narratology is an interdisciplinary research field within narrative theory which emerged in the 1980s with Susan Lanser's, "Toward a Feminist Narratology" (1986); a work credited for inaugurating the project (Page, 2007, p. 190). Lanser perceived narratology and feminist criticism as neighbouring disciplines with analogous methodological agendas capable of yielding mutual methodological benefits when integrated. Asserting that narratological structures are gender-specific and not neutral as Classical/Structuralist narratology had sought to demonstrate, Lanser points to the need to reconceptualise and make narratology amenable to the analysis of narratives told or read by women and stories representing female characters. Lanser also asserts that narratology can constitute a feminist critical tool for reading women's narratives and for identifying the ways they differ from those written by men. Taking their hint from Lanser, critics have been concerned with analyzing the marginalized voices as a group and related issues like male-centered values (masculinities) and male-centred plot structures of stories.

Feminist narratology is increasingly becoming interdisciplinary in its methodology, incorporating linguistics and postcolonial perspectives (notably in its interest in marginalized communities, what Spivak conceptualizes as the "subaltern"). However, since the study is particularly interested in addressing the key question of how narrative might be of importance in the analysis of gender, we wish to focus on Lanser's inaugural paper "Towards a Feminist Narratology" which is important for the present analysis in major ways. Lanser's theoretical argument is that, narrative strategies are gender-specific, and can be reconceptualized to constitute a social category. Her categories can usefully serve as interpretive and analytical guides for approaching gender-sensitive issues in narrative texts. These categories can also serve as crucial tools for constructing cultural identity since the ways gendered identities are constructed is highly culture-specific. But before examining Lanser's gender-sensitive narrative categories of voice and perspective, it is important to provide conceptual definitions of the term, gender and also some culture/gender-related concepts in this study: patriarchy, masculinities, and femininity.

### 2.2 *Conceptual Clarifications*

#### 2.2.1 Gender

Clement A. Okafor (2010) defines gender as a "social construction" whereby communities use various "cultural practices to teach their young people the norms of acceptable gender roles." (p.149) As Okafor's definition makes clear, differentiation into male or female is determined by social and cultural perceptions and categorizations. Similarly, gender to Lois Tyson (1999) refers to "cultural programming as feminine or masculine, which are categories created by society rather than by nature".(p. 84) Cultural programming or patriarchal programming as Tyson variously calls it, refers to traditional gender roles, norms, values that society dictates and expects of the sexes, thereby constructing their identities as males or females. Critics thus agree that gender is a cultural construct determined by "the role that is expected by culture and society" and "quite distinct from biological division between male and female which is based on one's physiological make up" (Oluyemi-Kusa, 2006, p. 208). From these definitions, gender is a cultural construction that stems from communities that deploy cultural practices, values and norms to emphasize acceptable roles. The idea that gender is the product of collective cultural frames of thought and values is taken up by Page (2007) who defines gender as "the socially constructed norms, practices, and codes which facilitate the identification of an individual or his or her behavior as 'masculine,' [or] 'feminine'" (p.191). Page's definition of gender as socially constructed norm, practice and code that attract categorization of people as men or women is closer to Tyson's and is relevant because it opens up premises for interrogating gender as cultural categories, and makes it possible to forge interconnections between gender and narrative, as well as gender and cultural identities.<sup>ii</sup>

It is important to point out that the above conceptualizations of gender seem to ignore issues of power relations between men and women which are often evoked to explain the topical issues of gender inequalities. The gap created by the omission of power relations in the conceptualization of gender is reduced when one considers the perspectives of Dayo Oluyami-Kusa. Oluyami-Kusa (2006) defines gender as "socially constructed based on the assumed power and position that a group of humans should possess...." Interestingly the critic adds that, power in the context of gender

means “the ability or freedom of individuals to make decisions and behave the way they choose” (p. 208), as such choices are necessarily dictated by society. Power thus becomes gender-sensitive when decision making or the freedom to make choices has to be endorsed by social/cultural values. The association of power with gender reveals the indubitable bond gender shares with patriarchy.

### 2.2.2 Patriarchy, Masculinities and Femininities

The relationship between gender and power and between gender and culture cannot be conceptualized without mentioning the fundamental role of patriarchy in the processes of constructing gender-oriented cultural identities. Lois Tyson (1999) defines “patriarchy” as “any culture that privileges men by promoting traditional gender roles” (p.83). The critic additionally states that traditional gender roles include norms and values that cast men as rational, strong, protective, superior, daring, decisive, but delineate women as inferior, emotional, irrational, weak, nurturing, and submissive. In view of the biases implied, Tyson describes patriarchy as “sexists”, arguing that it promotes the belief that women are innately inferior to men. For Tyson, patriarchal ideology works to keep men and women under traditional gender roles in a bid to promote the ideology of male dominance. The underlying suggestion is that social norms, values or cultural perceptions that mark one sex (the male) as superior and distinct from the other (the female who it casts as inferior), are gender markers. Since gender-definable norms and values do not exist in a vacuum but are often considered the products of given socio-cultural contexts, it is possible to view them as cultural delineators. It is in this light that some critics define patriarchy as a situation “where a group of individuals have been tagged and groomed to be the decision makers for another group considered inferior, weak and subordinate” (Oluyami-Kusa, 2006, p. 208). This implies that the role of individuals or a group to make decisions on behalf of others can be socially determined and thus function as a gender marker. The definition makes it possible to consider voice, particularly, when it originates from, or is ascribed to a cultural/social group as a social category, a view that is in tandem with Lanser’s “communal/collective” voice.

The argument above also makes it possible to consider socio-cultural norms, beliefs and values that confer power and authority and thus the right to decision-making to one group (men) while denying another group, considered marginal (women) the same structures of power, as patriarchies or masculinities that are gender-sensitive. Such power-oriented and gender-sensitive values, norms and beliefs can be understood as textual representations of collective voice, collective psyche or collective perceptions of given cultural communities.

Another related concept that is fundamental for understanding gender and its relationship to cultural identity is femininity. Lois Tyson argues that, while the concept of femininity is often associated with submission, frailty, modesty and timidity, masculinity is closely associated with power, authority and dominance. The concern with sexual politics and gender related identities makes femininity and masculinity closely related. *TFA* focuses largely on femininities and masculinities which in themselves are gender identity markers.

### 2.3 *The Construction of Gender via Narrative: A feminist (Re) Conceptualization of Narrative Voice and Perspective.*

Besides their potential for illustrating the ways in which patriarchal ideology and masculinities determine gender roles and construct cultural identities (which are never fixed), the gender markers discussed above are useful for addressing questions pertaining to how language and voice/perspective can be treated as social categories. In arguing that narrative structures are gender-sensitive, Susan Lanser (1992) conceptually paved the way for integrating the methodologies of narratology, feminist criticism and gender studies. Lanser’s argument laid the groundwork for conceptualizing narratological concepts such as voice, perspective and focalization as social or cultural categories. Insofar as narrative has proven its potential as a powerful tool for linking texts to contexts, the questions that suggest themselves for feminist narratology are: how can narrative evidence construct the female group voice/perspective/focalization, as gender sensitive? What linguistic and socio-cultural narrative frames of thought can be productive in constructing male values, or the gender-sensitive marginalized communities? What is the role of Language in constructing gendered identities?

Social issues like the marginalization of women and even colonized people can be studied from a narrative perspective. Hence, narrative can construct gender-sensitive voice, perspective and focalization. This is because, questions such as “Who speaks?”, “Who perceives?” and “Whose voice, thoughts and perceptions are being represented, and by whom?” have been fundamental concerns of both narratology and gender theories’. Voice, thoughts and focalization can thus be refined in gender- narratological terms to constitute culturally determined narrative modes of constructing gendered beings. In seeking to show that voice, perspective and focalization are social categories of gender, this work (using particularly, *TFA*) relies on folklore, notably, the cultural text (myths, folktales, proverbs, metaphors, etc.), to demonstrate that cultural structures determine our perceptions of gender and its representations. What this implies is that, socio-cultural norms and values can confer the power of decision-making in one group (men) while denying another group considered marginal, the same structures of power. For Lanser (1986), such power-oriented

gender-sensitive values and norms go with cultural expectations and can be understood as textual representations of collective voice/ perceptions/consciousness of given cultural communities. Collective voice/ perspective can thus usefully describe a situation where gender-sensitive voice/perspective originates from a given cultural community and becomes its collective or communal property.

There have been attempts within feminist criticism at invigorating feminist approaches with narrative terminology aiming to link voice and perspective to social context. Such attempts proceed from the assumption that narrative can link gender to social ideology and contexts. According to Lanser, gender and narrative not only both have social dimensions; narrative technique is a product of (social) ideology, Lanser (1992) introduces communal narration which is linked to social ideology to construct a singular voice who though speaks like a homodiegetic narrator, represents his/her community rather than himself/herself (p. 5). For such a voice, Lanser uses Collective/communal voice/perspective. Her Collective/communal voice/perspective covers a range of verbal practices that express the dominant ideological perspective and thus gain narrative authority while silencing marginal voices/perspective. This study thus deploys Lanser's "Collective/communal voice/perspective/ focalizer" to cover a range of narrative practices where in his/her discourse, a single individual internalizes the voice, thoughts or perspective of his/her cultural context/community. When an individual or a cultural group (men) is structured or groomed to wield authority and power of decision-making over others considered weak and inferior, two things are portrayed: to begin with, voice becomes gender-sensitive because those who are culturally attributed power and authority are automatically ascribed the voice to speak or take decisions on behalf of those considered weak, inferior and fit to be represented. Secondly, when a single voice or perspective is socially constructed in the sense that it is ascribed power and authority in line with social/cultural expectations, it becomes a communal or collective property. In the context of feminist narratology, a situation whereby cultural beliefs, values and norms ascribe to a decision-making individual or group the power or authority to speak on behalf of others considered inferior may be conceptualized as communal or collective voice/perspective. In other words, the category of Collective/communal voice/perspective/focalization is used in this study to designate a male or female narrator, whose manner of speaking and views characterize him/her as representative of patriarchal ideology. Such a voice is always a hegemonic patriarchal voice/discourse that perceives the centre or the male as superior and thus representative of a cultural community.

Gayatri Spivak's "subaltern" can also be modified in the dimension of the above narrative category to make it relevant in constructing marginalized groups like women who are silenced or spoken for. In her article, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"<sup>iii</sup> Spivak examines the problems of the subaltern as gendered subjects and, using the Indian women in particular, she concludes that the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. For Spivak, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern who doubles as woman suffers double colonization and cannot speak or voice her resistance. The subaltern is not only governed by others, but is represented or spoken for. For situations where such silencing of the subaltern is sanctioned by cultural norms, we can use the category of "collective/communal silencing". To fully explore gendered identities in textual practice, one needs to also examine the role of Language (metaphor and other devices) in the construction and transmission of gendered identities.

#### 2.4 *The Role of Language in the construction and Transmission of Gendered Identities.*

Another narrative aspect that is fundamental to any feminist analysis of gender is language. Issues of language and gender are a major point of contention in feminist criticism. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) was the first to assert that women are not born, but made women for, they only **become** women through the process of socialisation. Being made a woman or becoming one is a process of learning; of acquiring certain cultural qualities, and a major medium by which such gender constructions take place is Language. Language may construct, but it may also reinforce, perpetrate or challenge gender stereotypes. This explains why Feminists are concerned with ideology in language; they particularly object to forms of linguistic expression that relegate women to the background or lock them up in the private sphere. Spender, in *Man Made Language* argues that language is not a neutral medium, but an instrument through which patriarchy finds expression. For Spencer (1980), men have intentionally, "Formulated a semantic rule [of language] which posits them central and positive as the norm, and they have classified the world from that standpoint, constructing a symbolic system which represents [the] patriarchal order" (58). The implication is that, men use language to perpetrate their authority and power while denying women their basic rights, hence, language reinforces prevailing hierarchies and legitimizes rigid images of men and women. Linguistic devices like proverbs, idioms, metaphors and metanarratives like folktales and myths function as creative medial elements in the construction, and transmission of gendered identities.

Gendered metaphors, proverbs, myths and folktales do not only influence a culture's perception of men and women, but also pass on this gendered content in texts and can thus be seen as a vital medium for the transmission, stabilization and memory of a society's gendered identities. Metaphors for instance, have been conceptualized by Cohn (1978) as psychoanalyses because they constitute cognitive activities with narrative potentials and thus are often referred to as

cognitive, mental or mind-related aspects of storytelling. Metaphor emanates from a cognitive experience (from the effects produced upon the imagination by mental/perceptual pictures). For Nunning and Nunning (2004), metaphors are cognitive, mental and perceptual tools for understanding something in terms of another. Nunning and Nunning (1996) have also pointed to the functions of metaphors in shaping imperial histories and in the making of imperialist mentalities, adding that metaphors assign roles to the colonizer and the colonized. Given that patriarchal subjugation of women is analogous to colonial subjugation of indigenous populations, literary writers, employ metaphors to highlight the patriarchal subjugation of women. Gender can thus be textually inscribed using metaphors, hence, metaphor needs to be integrated into the feminist narratological approach for the construction of gendered groups. Metaphors can be used as mental pictures that embody the values, norms, customs traditions and beliefs associated with the different genders of a cultural community. When such linguistic forms are largely shaped by, or encode the gender structures of society, they do the ideological work of perpetrating or legitimizing gendered identities. Since they embody the ideological and cultural values and stereotypes associated with gender, they function as conceptual and ideological fictions through which the representations of men as colonizers and women as colonized are preserved and circulated. In this regard, metaphor, like proverbs, myths, folktales etc. plays a vital medial role in the formation, preservation and circulation of gendered identities. As figurative codes, these devices do not simply mirror the discourses of gender they are embedded in; as carriers of ideology, they are active medial elements contributing to the legacy of the rhetoric of gender. That is, to the discursive formation of the culture of discrimination based on sex. They (e.g. metaphors and proverbs) are linguistic devices that can convey, hegemonic concepts of gender in a condensed form or pass them down through texts from generation to generation. They thus reflect and construct patriarchal mentalities and contribute to the legitimization of gender. Patriarchy thus plays a major role in the formulation of literary devices (metaphor, proverb, folktales) which present us with a rich collection of society's attitude towards women. As demonstrated in this paper, a modern psychological text like *The Fox* employs mainly metaphor in exploring gendered identities.

The view that linguistic devices like metaphor, proverb and the cultural text (folktales and myths) constructs and transmits gendered identities also permits us to attribute to them voice and focalization (perspective) in order to make them gender-shaping instruments. Since collective perceptions of gender circulates in myth, folktales and metaphors, and since such discourses of culture are necessarily embedded with patriarchal ideology and sanctioned by the shared values, norms and perceptions of society or a social group, this study also proposes the feminist category of collective/communal perspective for such genres. Relying on perceptual images, the concept of communal/collective voice or perspective will be used for all narrative situations where perspectivity is assigned to a shared community or social group and textually inscribed via a strand of cultural discourse or cultural text/genre (metaphors, myths or folktale).

### 3. Staging Gender in *Things Fall Apart*

Although readings of Achebe's *TFA* allocate an insignificant place for gender-sensitive identities, the novel focuses on gendered identities and the power dynamics that go with them. Masculinities and femininities embedded in proverbs, stories, folktales, myths, characterization, habits culturally attributed with manliness, (such as violence, courage, and bravery), all play crucial roles in establishing gendered identities and also the wide gap that exists between men and women in the social structure of Umuofia. The wide gap that exists between the sexes in *TFA*; a gap that is clearly expressive of the postcolonial ideological notions of the imperial center (occupied by the Colonialist, in this case, the African man) and the colonized periphery (occupied by the woman) is graphically mapped out in the sitting or standing positions of the sexes at the village court session in *TFA*. As the narrator tells us, "It was clear from the way the crowd stood or sat that the ceremony was for men". While "the titled men and elders sat on their stools", "there were many women, but they looked on from the *fringes* like outsiders" (p. 79).<sup>iv</sup> In situating the women at *the fringes*, the *periphery*, *margins* or outsider position, Achebe signals the power dynamics between the sexes. Masculinities and femininities play a crucial role in establishing the superior male power bloc and the inferior identity of women. In the following analysis, we will show how one is constructed as belonging to either the masculine center or feminine periphery, through references to behaviour or character traits and by means of cultural discourses— proverbs, metaphors, traditional folk stories (folktales and myths) or folk tradition— that are gender-sensitive.

#### 3.1 Constructing Gender Identities from Character Traits and Folk Culture.

In *TFA*, traits that delineate fictional characters are particularly relevant for categorizing each as either man or woman. To begin with, Osugo has taken no title; and so, in a gathering of his peers, Okonkwo unkindly tells him, "This meeting is for men" (p. 24). It becomes clear that in Omuofia, gender transcends the biological make up of people to include what they do or are capable of doing. The statement is only an instance of the various ways in which the Omuofia society linguistically constructs gender characteristics or traits. Although the authoritative sentence draws attention to Okonkwo's rebuke of Osugo, it serves as a glaring instance of how gender is constructed from character traits. Osugo's inability to take a title constructs his gender as a woman although biologically, he is man. Hence, in this verbal

confrontation, Okonkwo insists Osugo be excluded from the meeting supposedly attended only by titled men. Okonkwo himself has acquired this figurative use of the metaphor of “woman” for a lazy, non-title man, when “a [childhood] playmate had told him that his father was *agbala*. That was how Okonkwo first came to know that *agbala* was not only another name for woman, it could [metaphorically] also mean a man who had taken no title” (p. 13). What both examples above illustrate is the mechanism by which patriarchal masculinities are constructed. The two incidents imply that a “traditional title” is a symbol of male power and authority; title-ship is synonymous with masculinity and leadership which only the man can ascend to.

*Agbala* is another name for a woman in Ibo language and culture and thus not only links behaviour to gender, but is actually used to emasculate certain men; to construct men with womanly behaviour as unmanly. A title is thus also a metaphor for manliness. As a male attribute, title-ship is used in the text to construct male values or masculinities. In calling Osugo a woman because he has taken no title, Okonkwo infers that titles are gender markers. Not being able to take a title is a sign of weakness; of femininity; hence, a man without a title is supposedly as weak as a woman. Okonkwo may as well be saying that women cannot assume leadership positions, a view which is reiterated when he returns with Ikemefuna to his home and asks Nwoye’s mother to take the boy to her hut. When Nwoye’s mother asks if the boy will be staying for long, Okonkwo bellows, “Do what you are told woman. When did you become one of the *ndichies* [clan elders] of Umuofia?” (p. 14), a clear statement on women’s inability to be leaders. The voice we hear in these instances is Okonkwo’s, but the perception that women cannot earn or take traditional titles and cannot partake in leadership is that of the collective community of Umuofia. We can therefore say that, although the voice inscribed in the quoted lines originates directly from Okonkwo, he only articulates the point of view of the community. In the context of feminist narratology, this masculine discourse embeds a collective/communal voice/perspective: a situation where a single voice is mutually authorized to speak for, or on behalf of a given group or a community.

Okonkwo’s own character encodes the internalized norms, beliefs, values and social expectations of how a man should act or behave:

Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his children. Perhaps down in his heart, Okonkwo was not a cruel man. But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness...It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father....And so Okonkwo was ruled by one passion-to hate everything that his father Unoka loved. One of those things was gentleness... (p. 12)

Okonkwo is the authoritative mouthpiece of the society’s culture and can best tell us the gender markers of Umuofia. He associates women with weakness and emotional tendencies while casting men as courageous, heartless, daring, heroic and superior. In accordance with these gender divisions, “Okonkwo never showed any emotion openly, unless it was the emotion of anger.” A show of affection was a sign of weakness; “the only thing worth demonstrating for a man was strength. He therefore treated Ikemefuna as he treated everybody else-with a heavy hand.” (p. 26). Okonkwo’s temperament is image in a “storm,” always with the desire to “conquer and subdue” (39); always “rumbling like thunder in the rainy season” (p. 75) or, “roared” when he spoke. Metaphors are used to construct Okonkwo’s manliness against Nwoye’s femininities:

Okonkwo was popularly called the ‘Roaring Flame’...He was a flaming fire...How could he have begotten a son like Nwoye, degenerate and effeminate? Perhaps he was not his son. No! he could not be. His wife had played him false...He. Okonkwo, was called a flaming fire. How could he have begotten a woman for a son? At Nwoye’s age Okonkwo had already become famous.... for wrestling and his fearlessness. (pp. 139-140)

To begin with, as a real man, Okonkwo is metaphorically compared to a devouring fire: a “roaring flame”, “a flaming fire”. Secondly, the metaphors of “rule”, “storm”, “rumbling” and “flaming fire” with which Okonkwo is associated evoke behavior that is strong, cruel, insensitive, dangerous, and thus, bring to the fore issues of power, authority and dominance which mark his gender as masculine in line with socio-cultural expectations. One may infer that traditional gender roles suppose that men should be fearless and show no feelings of sympathy or affection openly, as doing so would disempower or emasculate and relegate them to the status reserved for women. Once more, although the voice we hear is Okonkwo’s, this patriarchal ideological role-stereotyping strikes us more as the authoritative voice of culture rather than that of an individual, and thus correspond in feminist narratological terminology to Lanser’s communal voice/perspective. Okonkwo’s warrior character, daring attitude, and other insensate traits carve out the type of masculinities his patriarchal society cherishes for men. However, Okonkwo mistakes these cultural constructions of manliness for biologically/genetically acquired characteristics, hence, he doubts his paternity for Nwoye. As masculine or manly as he is, Okonkwo forgets that he is ironically the son of an *agbala*: a man as weak as a woman and thus similar to Nwoye.

Okonkwo is disturbed about his father’s and his son’s effeminate characters. Like Unoka, Nwoye is an embodiment of

feminine weakness, and Okonkwo's preference for masculinities lead him to admire boys of his son's age who displays courage and strength:

If I had a son like [Maduke] I should be happy. I am worried about Nwoye. A bowl of pounded yams can throw him in a wrestling match. His two younger brothers are more promising. But I can tell you, Obierika, that my children do not resemble me. Where are the young suckers that will grow when the old banana tree dies?...Nwoye is old enough to impregnate a woman. At his age I was already fending for myself... A chick that will grow into a cock can be spotted the very day it hatches. I have done my best to make Nwoye grow into a man, but there is too much of his mother in him. (pp. 59-60)

Okonkwo expresses his worries in gendered metaphors. He conceives of himself as a "banana tree" and his male children as "the suckers" who will inherit him when he dies. The "banana tree" is a metaphor for "the head" of the family, which is an attribute that marks gender as masculine. From this perspective, the metaphor ascribes economic authority and protective role to Okonkwo, the "banana tree" because, the suckers depend on the banana tree for their survival. The metaphor of sons as "suckers" symbolizes the continuity of the family lineage. The "banana tree" here represents the man on which "the suckers" who are the male children depend for survival and inheritance. In order of merit, the "banana tree" is the most important element because it is the provider of, and provider for the suckers. It represents the father as the source of life. The metaphor thus ideologically structures Okonkwo as the "head" which is also a metaphor for leadership, and evokes male gender markers such as political ownership, authority, provider, economic power and role model. In the same vein, the sons, who are heirs occupy the lower rung of the family lineage. Finally, Okonkwo expresses his disappointment that Nwoye (the sucker) is a 'woman' and will not, or cannot make a befitting heir for him in proverbial language that clearly shows his preference for male rather than female children: "A chick that will grow into a cock can be spotted the very day it hatches. I have done my best to make Nwoye grow into a man, but there is too much of his mother in him" (p. 60). "Grow[ing] into a man" in this last sentence is an admission of awareness that, 'being a man' is not simply a question of biological sex alone but also of *becoming*; of gender: traits learned in the process of acquiring socially sanctioned masculinities.

What also strikes us in Okonkwo's discourse above is the complete absence of the woman/mother or the female child from the family lineage structure. It follows that the girl child, unlike the male child (perceived as a potential heir), symbolizes the extinction of family line and so is excluded from the cultural notion of a family-line or family tree. The metaphor of the banana tree and suckers ideologically structures the man as the main tree and the male child as sucker, and thus as a symbol of continuity. Such a metaphor functions as a gender marker and as a gender memory device. Value is attached to the male child as opposed to the female child who is perceived as a symbol of extinction of family name, which is why, "When a woman gives birth to three male children in succession, a goat is slaughtered for her as it was the custom" (p. 72). Such a custom marginalizes or alienates female children by excluding them from the family tree; an exclusion that evokes Spivak's silenced "subaltern" who cannot speak, a graphic illustration of which is the court scene where the elders have to decide the case of domestic violence by Ezewulu against his wife, Mgbafo. Since the culture does not permit a women to address the court, Mgbafo is represented and spoken for, by the brother:

My in-law has told you that we went to his house, beat him up and took our sister and her children away, all that is true.... My sister lived with him for nine years. During those years no single day passed in the sky without him beating the woman.... 'Two years ago', continued Odukwue, 'when she was pregnant, he beat her until she miscarried'... 'Last year when my sister was recovering from an illness, he beat her again...' (p. 83).

Here is a graphic picture of Spivak's silencing or exclusion of the subaltern. Since the silencing of women is sanctioned by the cultural norms, the voice/perspective/point of view is the "communal or collective silencing". Also, although it is Okonkwo who stresses the importance of male, children as heirs to their fathers, we know his point of view converges accurately with societal expectations regarding succession. The viewpoint is thus a collective/communal one.

Folkloric symbols of gender litter the narrative. Beside titles, yams symbolize manliness since the ability to produce yams marks a person's gender as masculine. This is supported by the narrator's references to yams as a "male crop" or "king crop" among crops: "Yams, the king of the crops, stood for manliness" (pp. 30-31). While men cultivated yams, "Women planted maize, melons and beans between yam mounds", a lesser work that does not require as much tact or energy. The ideology behind this gendered activity is that men are superior. Okonkwo's honour, power, authority and gender are constructed by means of references to the cultivation of this male crop. While the voice is that of the narrator, the point of view is collective.

Tasks in Omuofia are gender markers. Okonkwo cannot tolerate his son, Nwoye, performing feminine tasks or listening to feminine stories. Although his daughter, Enzima is more masculine than feminine, Okonkwo would also not permit her to venture into tasks reserved for male children. Consequently, when Enzima offers to follow her father with his stool to the New Yam Festival, Okonkwo retorts, "No, that is a boy's job" (p. 41). In spite of her masculinity, Enzima is

a female child tailored for domestic chores. On his part, Nwoye knows that his father, Okonkwo (well noted for gender-sensitive preferences) would not have him perform female roles. Hence, Nwoye “feigned that he no longer cared for women’s stories” (p. 49) and domestic chores, although he truly enjoyed them. Perceiving Nwoye’s apparent resentment of domestic roles as a sign of manliness, Okonkwo approvingly contemplates thus:

Okonkwo was inwardly pleased at his son’s development,... He wanted Nwoye to grow into a young man capable of ruling his father’s household when he was dead and gone to join the ancestors. He wanted him to be a prosperous man, having enough in his barn to feed the ancestors with regular sacrifices. And so he was happy when he heard him grumbling about women. That showed that in time he would be able to control his women-folk. No matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and his children (and especially his women) he was not really a man... (pp. 47-48)

The line “No matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and his children (and especially his women) he was not really a man” is fundamental for understanding the proximity of gender to colonial ideology. The passage constructs patriarchal ideology in terms of colonial discourse often equated with power and supremacy. Here, the marriage institution is constructed as a colonized region where the patriarchal colonizer colonizes and silences his wife, dictating roles and building boundaries she cannot cross. Like Spivak’s “subaltern” who cannot speak, the married woman in Umuofia suffers “double colonization”, has no voice and cannot take major decisions. Marriage becomes a form of domestic colonization for, like a colony on which the colonizer imposes his rule, forcing the natives into subordination, the patriarchs of Umuofia must impose patriarchal domination on women. Okonkwo says a man is only worthy of the masculine sex, if he is able “to rule his women and children,” and ruling them includes thrashing them whenever they go wrong. By implication, leadership, especially in marriage is solely a male prerogative. Since leadership is inextricably linked to decision making, Okonkwo is saying that, in the marital sphere, the man/ husband takes the important decisions and his wife and children merely obey them. Uchendu, another elder affirms, “We all know that a man is the head of the family and his wives do his bidding.” (p. 106).<sup>v</sup> Like the metaphor of “head” of family, the metaphor of ‘Ruling’, or “to rule” is synonymous with leadership and power, and serves to construct a gender as masculine. Since the imperative call for men to “rule”, conquer” or “subdue” (p. 31) their women encodes the perceptions, thoughts and beliefs of Umuofia and converges accurately with their cultural expectations, we can describe the voice/perspective/point of view as a collective voice/perspective. Embedded in the imperative “to rule” women is the need to silence them, hence the point of view can also be described as “collective/communal silencing” of women. Such silencing might even take the form of beating. Umuofia men use domestic violence to “conquer” “subdue”, ‘silence’ and “rule” their woman. Okonkwo himself employs the strategy:

Okonkwo second wife had merely cut a few leaves off it to wrap some food, and she said so. Without further argument Okonkwo gave her a sound beating and left her and her only daughter weeping....And so when he called Ikefemuna to fetch his gun, the wife who had just been beaten murmured something about guns that never shot. Unfortunately for her, Okonkwo heard it and ran madly into his room for the loaded gun, ran out again and aimed at her as she clambered over the dwarf wall of the barn. (p. 35).

Although the dire need for a man to “conquer”, subdue” and “rule” over his wives and children is expressed by Okonkwo, this view of the marital home as a man’s dominion is shared by all and sanctioned by the norms. What one finds in Okonkwo’s expression of the need to “rule” over women is a case whereby narrative authority is invested in a community (Umuofia), but textually transcribed through the voice of a single individual (Okonkwo), who speaks for the said cultural or ideological community. Narration in the line: “No matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women... he was not really a man” suits Lanser’s collective voice/perspective as Okonkwo is acting in line with social expectations. In feminist narratology, when an individual, (Okonkwo), is mutually authorized to speak on behalf of a community, his voice or point of view becomes a communal/collective voice/perspective.

A further productive way gender is constructed in Achebe’s novel is by means of sexuality. Sexuality, morality and virtue are forms of gender marker. The belief that morality, virtue and chastity are found in the married woman is much in line with the 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian ideal of “the virtuous woman”. In Umuofia, the success of any marriage depends on the man’s good opinion of his wife-to-be and the criteria for feminine good conduct is purely patriarchal and biased. When Obierika gives his daughter in marriage, he expects her to be a good woman and to bear male children while nothing is said of male fertility or female children: “We are giving you our daughter today. She will be a good wife to you. She will bear you nine sons like the mother of our town” (p. 106). The man’s fertility is not evoked because male fertility is a given that is never questioned. What is suggested in the line, “She will bear you nine sons like the mother of our town”, is first, that motherhood is the first function ascribed for the wife and second, that her duty is to ensure that her husband’s family name continues: that a family name survives through her male children; a lineage that would likely be extinguished if the products of the said marriage were not male but female children. The male child is perceived as a symbol of the continuity of family lineage. The implication is that, the girl child is a sign of the

extinction of the family line and thus a source of ruin for her father. Though father of the bride-to-be, Obierika speaks, not for himself, but as a representative of the community that perceives the woman as such. His discourse is imbued with the communal cultural consciousness of Umuofia and so his point of view is the communal perspective. Obierika's expectations in giving out his daughter for marriage are the standard expectations regarding female children in a patriarchal system like Umuofia and are thus used on this occasion to demonstrate that a woman's identity is constructed around her child-bearing role. A man's male children are his assurance of a bright legacy. His wife's duty is to provide him with children, especially male children. That is their usefulness as women. Nneka's situation in the text can be used to buttress this view of the woman primarily procreative function

Nneka has had four previous pregnancies and childbirths, none of which has resulted to anything fruitful since on these occasions, she had given birth to twins which, as the custom demands, had been immediately thrown away. Her husband and his family were already becoming highly critical of such a woman and were therefore not unduly perturbed when they found out that she had fled to join the Christians. Nneka's absence was welcome relief to her in-laws who perceive her in a state of childlessness as worthless. Her case demonstrates that, if a woman cannot successfully bear children for her husband, she is not worth much. Consequently, her in-laws felt spared the trouble of keeping a woman who cannot pull her weight by providing children. Obierika's emphasis on his daughter's procreative function and Nneka's story support the argument that, in the Ibo culture, only motherhood can give cultural legitimacy to a woman. Childbearing is one of the cultural parameters defined by patriarchal ideology for identifying women, and women have learnt to live by them. Obierika's view of women in terms of their procreative function is therefore a collective/communal perspective.

Obierika's daughter's marriage ceremony reveals that fidelity is a gender marker. When Amikwu is marrying a new wife, Njide conducts the oath of confession, a ritual that demands the bride-to-be swears an oath of fidelity as the following intimidating exchange illustrates:

Remember that if you do not answer truthfully you will suffer or even die at child-birth, she began. 'How many men have lain with you since my brother first expressed the desire to marry you?'

'None,' she replied simply.

'Answer truthfully,' urged the other women.

'None?' asked Njide.

'None,' she answered.

'Swear on this staff of my fathers,' said Uchendu.

'I swear,' said the bride....

From that day Amikwu took the young bride to his hut and she became his wife. (p. 120)

The oath of virginity is performed only by the bride and not the groom, and this makes the custom gender biased. The common binary of "the woman of virtue"/ "man of valor", so common in African literature becomes evident. While women are expected to be virtuous, the same culture expects the men to display valor. While the women must be faithful, the man's achievements are grounded on the number of wives he has. A man's pride and honour is based on the number of wives he has while a woman's is based on her fidelity to her husband.

In Umuofia, sexuality further defines gender roles in a variety of ways. First, the men perceive the sexual act in terms of a wrestling match in which the man is expected to "subdue" and "conquer" the woman in the same way he does his opponent in a wrestling match. As Okonkwo prepares to wrestle, we are told that, "Okonkwo cleared his throat and moved his feet to the beat of the drums. It filled him with fire...he trembled with desire to conquer and subdue...like the desire for women" (p. 39). The sexual act is a conquering mission and the analogy with wrestling is meant to valorize men's sexual prowess and enhance the text's general presentation of the man as active and the woman as passive. Closely linked to this is the positions of the sexes during the sexual act. The men's discussion on cultural differences at the marriage ceremony of Obierika's daughter reveals their belief in gendered positions during sexual intercourse:

All their customs are upside-down. They do not decide bride-price as we do, with sticks..." said Obierika's elder brother. "But what is good in one place is bad in another place. In Umuonso they do not bargain at all, not even with broomsticks. The suitor just goes on bringing bags of cowries until his in-laws tell him to stop.... "The world is large," said Okonkwo. "I have heard that in some tribes, a man's children belong to his wife and her family." "That cannot be," said Machi. "You might as well say the woman lies on top of the man when they are making the children (p. 67).

For Machi, such an aberration of appropriate sexual positions—like the woman lying on top of the man—threatens to

emasculate the man. This being a common view among Omuofia men, Machi expresses a collective consciousness and thus a collective perspective.

### 3.2 Folkloric Meta-Narratives<sup>vi</sup> of Gendered identities in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

Omuofia further constructs, legitimizes and perpetrates its gender roles through an educational system in which traditional folk stories play a fundamental role. As significant gender markers, folk stories for men are different from those for women. Men's stories are expected to be about bravery, violence and bloodshed while folk stories about the ordinary, emotional, commonplace or imaginary events and actions are reserved for women:

So Okonkwo encouraged the boys to sit with him in his *obi*, and he told them stories of the land-masculine stories of violence and bloodshed. Nwoye knew that it was right to be masculine and to be violent, but somehow he still preferred the stories that his mother used to tell, stories of tortoise and his wily ways, and of the bird *eneke-nti-oba* who challenged the whole world to a wrestling contest and was finally thrown by the cat (pp. 48-49)

Nwoye's effeminate character is marked by the kind of stories he loves. Feminine stories that thrilled Nwoye include the tale of the Snake-Lizard; the story of the mosquito and the ear; that of the tortoise and the birds and the story of the quarrel between the Sky and the Earth. These tales encode gendered identities and illuminate the gender conflict in the novel.

The Snake-Lizard fable is told by Ekwefi to her daughter, Ezinma while they are preparing vegetables. When Ezinma remarks that her mother is cooking too much "vegetables, Ekwefi reminds her of the fable of the snake-lizard who "gave his mother seven baskets of vegetables to cook and in the end there were only three. And so he killed her" (p. 76), only to find out later that vegetables actually shrink when cooked. The story is significant in assigning, legitimizing and transmitting gender roles. Fathers had the responsibility of educating their sons in their gender roles; that is why "Okonkwo encouraged the boys to sit with him in his *Obi*, and he told them stories of the land, masculine stories of violence and bloodshed" (p. 48). Similarly, mothers had to educate their daughters on "becoming" women and wives. This tale on cooking constitutes part of Ezinma's socialization process. It is therefore not coincidental that Ekwefi, (her mother), who is entrusted with Ezinma's cultural education is the narrator. We assume that Ekwefi is authorized to speak for the community and her voice/perspective is a communal voice/perspective. The collective perspective of the tale becomes even clearer when we understand that folk stories are a share property. They are imprinted in the minds of members of the community from which the tale emanates. Hence, as soon as Ekwefi hints at the story, Ezinma remembers and responds:

Ekwefi asked, "And you know how leaves become smaller after cooking."

"Yes," said Ezinma, "that was why the snake-lizard killed his mother."

"Very true," said Ekwefi.

"He gave his mother seven baskets of vegetables to cook and in the end there were only three. And so he killed her," said Ezinma. "

That is not the end of the story."

"Oho," said Ezinma. "I remember now. He brought another seven baskets and cooked them himself. And there were again only three. So he killed himself too" (pp. 75-76)

The fable performs the ideological function of (to quote Tyson), "programming" female children in their gender roles as prescribed by the clan. The tale also structures the man, that is, the Snake-Lizard who is male (a son) as provider (of the vegetables) and the woman (the snake-Lizard's mother) in the domestic role of cooking the provided food. Logically too, she knows the cooking profession better than the man: that vegetables shrink when cooked. The man is the breadwinner and his role is simply to provide the food, as the snake-Lizard does. The tale encodes Omuofia culture's preoccupation with gender roles and serves as a major avenue through which patriarchal gender roles are transmitted from an older to a younger generation. By representing society in accordance with stereotyped notions of gender, the tale functions as a medium through which patriarchy ensures socio-cultural conformity to gender roles.

Another gender-sensitive tale is the one told by Nwoye's mother about the Tortoise and the Birds. All the birds are invited to a "*great feast in the sky*" and the wily Tortoise who happens to know about their feast, convinced the birds to lend him some feathers to enable him fly with them to the feast. Deceived by his "sweet tongue", the birds not only provide him with feathers, but also elect the Tortoise to be their spokesman. The cunning Tortoise also tricks the birds into adopting new, but fictitious names for the occasion, with his own self assigned name being, "All of You" (p. 88). When sumptuous varieties of food (pounded yam and yam pottage cooked with palm-oil and fresh fish) are served, Tortoise cunningly asks: "For whom have you prepared the feast?" and the host replies, "For all of you". So Tortoise insinuating that the food is for him, ate the best part, leaving only the remains. Tortoise's greed angers the birds who

withdrew their feathers, leaving him stranded in the sky. Tortoise requests that parrot tells his wife to cover the compound with all the soft things from the house so that he can jump down from the sky uninjured, but the Parrot intentionally **reverses** tortoise's message, telling his wife to put out all the hard things. Tortoise could not see clearly the objects his wife placed outside because of the height, and so he jumped and broke his shell into pieces. It was the strongest medicine man who put back the pieces of tortoise's shell together, but it remained a patched, rough work.

At the surface level, the tale warns against 'sweet-tongue' people who like the tortoise are likely to deceive us or explains to children "the origin of the tortoise's rough or patterned shell". At the deeper level however, the tale "represents more than indigenous folk wisdom ..." (Harlow, 1991, 74) for, it illuminates the themes of colonialism and gender relations in Omuofia. Slaughter (2010) shares this view when he asserts that, the story is "an anti-colonialist allegory" adding:

In such an allegory, Tortoise represents colonial power. The birds, who are his victims, signify the colonized population that remains subject to manipulation until it learns to command the weapons the colonizers have used against it: words, machetes, spears, and a cannon. The folk wisdom of the animal fable reveals a political message: both rhetoric and armed struggle are crucial to an oppressed people's organized resistance to domination. Ekwefi's tale radically re-evaluates folk wisdom, which the tortoise-colonizer uses as a means of subjugation, appropriating custom to legitimize claims to African resources – the "great feast in the sky" (p. 85).

While this interpretation of the tale remains sound and convincing, one must not lose sight of the close link between colonialism and the subjugation of women, a link that has been reiterated by both postcolonial and feminist critics. As Donaldson (1992), quoting Marilyn French argues, "if we transpose the descriptions of colonized and colonizer to women and men, they fit in every point" (p. 5). If as Barbara Harlow asserts, the tale of the tortoise and the birds is an "anti-colonial allegory" in which the tortoise represents the colonialists or "colonial power while the birds represent the colonized population that remains subject to manipulations until it learns to command the same weapons — "words, machetes, spears, and a cannon"— the colonizer has used against it", then the same can be said of the relation of the tale to gender roles. In other words, the tale constitutes an allegory for the gender relations in the text, whereby the tortoise (who has a wife) is the colonialist and thus represents the [Umuofia] man while the birds (said to have "painted their bodies with red cam wood and drew beautiful patterns on them with Uli"), are the women. If true, then the tale encodes a call on women to radically re-evaluate the patriarchal wisdom [contained in the metaphors and the tales], which the tortoise-colonizer/patriarchs of Omuofia use as a means of subjugation, appropriating customs to legitimize superior roles for themselves and inferior roles for women. The tortoise is as 'sweet-tongued' as the colonialist when they first entered Africa/Omuofia. Barbara Harlow's claim that Ekwefi's tale [the tale of the tortoise and the birds] radically re-evaluates folk wisdom, which the tortoise-colonizer uses as a means of subjugation by appropriating custom to legitimize claims to African resources is true of what the patriarchs of Omuofia do to maintain their roles as men and leaders. One weapon of subjugation the tortoise- colonizer- patriarchs employs is discourse. Colonial discourse (a set of codes, stereotypes, and vocabulary; in short, all textual forms by which the West codified knowledge about the non-metropolitan areas and cultures, especially those under colonial control (Christman & Williams, 1993, 5) which the colonizer employs whenever the relationship between a colonial power and its colonies is written or spoken about constructs the colonized (indigenous population) as inferior and the colonizer are superior. In like manner, the tortoise whose gender is masculine (he has a wife) constructs himself in discourse (he is said to have a "sweet-tongue" (p. 88) and "full of cunning" (p. 87) as "All of you" and as "spokesman" for the birds thus silencing and representing the birds. Barbara Harlow alleges that the tortoise-colonizer uses "folk wisdom" and "custom" as a means of subjugation and as a means of legitimizing his claims to African resources represented by "the great feast in the Sky". This is even more true of the Omuofia men who employ "folk wisdom" inherent in the discursive structures of metaphors, proverbs, myths, folktales and other customs to construct women's inferior identity and positions and their own superior position.

Language or discourse plays an important role in the formation and transmission of both imperial and patriarchal legacies. All the gender stereotypes in *TFA* are constructed by, encoded in, and transmitted through language: proverbs, wise sayings, myths, folktales, metaphors; all of which project the superiority of men and the inferiority of women. In this light, the tale implicitly places the responsibility for a feminist re-evaluation of the language (folktales, metaphors, proverbs etc.) on its female tellers. Can women as tellers of the tales re-evaluate in a feminist light the patriarchal wisdom inherent in the tales, myths and metaphors? For Barbara Harlow, the colonized people can only liberate themselves if they can also learn to command the weapon ("words": language or discourse) that the colonizer has so far used against them. In the tale of the tortoise and the births, the birds (the colonized), who are the tortoise's (the colonizer's) victims learn to command the weapon (discourse, language) by which the tortoise has deceived and subjugated them. The tale of the tortoise and the birds is told by a woman and reveals in the birds those traits that Okonkwo and the men of Omuofia attribute to women: sympathy, compassion and kindness on the part of the birds who lend their feathers to tortoise. But after the greedy and patronizing treatment he gives them in the sky, the birds learn

from his cunning and adjust their tactics to the new situation. The Parrot learns from the Tortoise's cunningness and adjusts, consequently, she inverts/reverses the tortoise's message to his wife. However, in the context of the narrative, the colonized (Okonkwo) fails to learn from the adaptability that the parrot manifests. Unlike the Parrot, Okonkwo fails to adapt to the new culture and his tragedy is the result of his inflexibility.

Feminist generally argue that language is gendered. For many feminists, language is "masculine"; essentially a male instrument fashioned for male purposes as we have seen in the proverbs, metaphors, and tales in *TFA*. This explains why feminism is in part, preoccupied about women re-shaping language for their own purposes or use. Feminism cherish language use that challenges, transforms or neutralizes gender hierarchies. French feminists for instance, have attempted to construct a model of women's language that is theoretically free from phallogocentric biases and masculine orientation. The tale of the tortoise and the birds implies that, one way by which the women can attempt to redress the gender imbalance in their patriarchal society and culture is to use their oratory as tellers of these sexist tales construed (by men), and for men, to challenge, revise or neutralize the hierarchical relation between the sexes. The challenge posed by the tale to Omuofia/African women is: Can the women learn from the Parrot's wisdom to use the masculine language (the tales, metaphors, images, etc.) as transformatory tools to reverse, re-evaluate or neutralize the male gender hierarchies?

Another feminine tale in the novel is that of "the mosquito and the Ear" told in chapter nine. Okonkwo has been trying to catch some sleep a few days after he murdered Ikemefuna when a mosquito disturbs, forcing him to recall the story about the "Mosquito and Ear" that his mother used to narrate to him when he was a child. The mosquito had proposed to marry the Ear but she had turned down his request, making fun of the mosquito's frail body and claiming he has a very short life span. Feeling greatly humiliated, the mosquito had sworn to take revenge. Ever since then, whenever Mosquito passes by the Ear, he buzzes as to remind the Ear that he is still alive. Okonkwo never liked this imaginary story. Evidently, the fact that the story of the Mosquito and Ear is simply an imaginary childish tale of unreciprocated love explains why Okonkwo considers women's tales silly. As he tells us, the story is "as silly as all women's stories" (p. 68). For Okonkwo, such "folktales are what the adult male is supposed to have out grown". Listening to feminine stories by women is a feminine act that real men should avoid by all means.

Silly as the myth of "the Mosquito and ear" may now appear, it significantly reveals that Okonkwo has himself been exposed to the same humanizing mother's (women's) tales that Nwoye now yearns for, but which Okonkwo struggles to exclude both from his life and from Nwoye's. However, the fact that Okonkwo still remembers this childish story his mother told him years ago indicates that he has not succeeded in completely banishing the feminine influence or feminine traits from his personality. Regardless of his harshness, we still see that Okonkwo is full of the same emotion and affections he attributes to women, only he refuses to openly show them (p. 26). The need to show manliness in every circumstance obliges Okonkwo to consciously repress the moderating female/feminine influence in his personality.

Okonkwo is indeed a split personality. Nwoye, his son is Okonkwo's alter ego, just as Unoka, his father was. The link between the three is obvious: "Nwoye resembled his grandfather, who was Okonkwo's father" (p. 140) and as Obierika tells us, Nwoye had "too much of his grandfather" in him (p. 60). Like Unoka, Nwoye represents the feminine self that Okonkwo so eagerly wants to undo or exclude. As a son himself, Okonkwo has suffered the pains of having a weak, lazy and feminine father and in reaction, his life has been driven by a rejection of the feminine weaknesses of his father; his alter ego: "And so Okonkwo was ruled by one passion — to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved. One of those things was gentleness and another was idleness" (p. 13). Now, as a father himself, this weaker feminine self resurfaces in the form of his own son, Nwoye to threaten his masculine personality again, and Okonkwo is determine to eliminate this feminine personality: "But he had long learnt how to lay that ghost. Whenever the thought of his father's weakness and failure troubled him, he expelled it by thinking about his own strength. And so he did now. His mind went to his latest show of manliness" (p. 60). In view of this Freudian repression: "the 'forgetting' or 'ignoring' of unresolved conflicts, unadmitted desires so that they are forced out of the conscious and into the realm of unconscious" (Barry, 1995, pp. 96-97), one of the narrative motifs of Achebe's novel is, "Will Okonkwo who "was ruled by one passion: that of eliminating from himself all the feminine influence that his father and son represent succeed or not?" That the conflict between Okonkwo and his father, Unoka, like that between Okonkwo and his son, Nwoye represents the conflict between the wild masculine principle and feminine/female moderating principles in Okonkwo is supported by yet another myth of a quarrel between the Sky and the Earth.

The myth of the quarrel between Earth and the Sky is told by one of Okonkwo's wives. As the story goes, the Sky withheld rain for seven years, and the ground/soil became hard. While crops withered, the dead could not be buried under the tough Earth. Vulture, Earth's emissary was thus sent to plead with the Sky to soften his heart, and there, Vulture sang for mercy and Sky was moved to pity and gave Vulture rain wrapped in leaves of coco-yam. On his way home, Vulture's long talon pierced the leaf and rain fell as it has never fallen before, forcing Vulture to flee to safety in a distant land and never to return to deliver the message.

Nwoye's passion for this tale and others of its kind is emphasized, and while he listened to "Okonkwo's stories about tribal wars, or how, years ago, he [Okonkwo] had stalked his victim, overpowered him and obtained his first human head" (pp. 48-49), his mind constantly went away to his mother's hut where many enchanting stories were being told. Okonkwo, who prefers to tell his male children the kind of stories that narrate true violent and bloodshed accounts of battles and heroic acts, must have also told Nwoye of the days when he was like the vulture, sent as an emissary of war to Mbaino, not to plead and supplicate like the Vulture, but to deliver an ultimatum. If the people of Mbaino should fail to comply, the consequence was to be war and bloodshed. This is exactly the kinds of disgusting or gruesome tales that the effeminate Nwoye recoiled from, preferring instead, his mother's purely imaginative stories with an entirely different kind of emissary to Sky, who will beg, plead, soften hearts and like vulture, obtain peace instead of bloodshed. The traits that the Vulture embodies and manifests on his mission are those that Nwoye endorses and identifies with, but which his father, Okonkwo associates with women and struggles to eradicate, both from himself and from Nwoye.

Nnolim (1983), quoting Donald Weinstock and Cathy Ramadan, gives a structural and thematic (gender-oriented) dimension to the myth. He argues that "the initial quarrel between Earth and Sky represents the struggle between masculine and female powers and principles" (Nnolim, 1983, 39). I wish to add that these masculine and female principles are represented in the novel by Okonkwo and Nwoye respectively. But the quarrel of Sky and Earth also reflects the struggle between masculine and feminine forces within Okonkwo, both of which are required to make any human personality stable. Earth is a goddess, Ani, and the Sky is a god. Okonkwo, who occasionally but reluctantly yields his tender emotions (feminine qualities) most often expressed perversely towards Ikemefuna and Nwoye, is a paradigm for Sky, who withholds rain for years and only releases it perversely since rain falls as it had never fallen before, forcing Vulture, the representative of the female principle, not to return to deliver his message; just as Nwoye who embraces the Christian religion that preaches, peace, love and compassion fails to return to Okonkwo's compound and in so doing turns his back definitely on Okonkwo's masculinist values. With Nwoye gone, Okonkwo has finally succeeded in completely banishing the female moderating principle in his make-up. Having separated himself from his moderating female principle, Okonkwo is now overwhelmingly ruled by the masculine principle he so much cherishes. By cutting himself off from the wholesome female influences of the mother's stories and from Nwoye in favor of overcompensating masculinity, Okonkwo sets the stage for his own downfall. It is in part, Okonkwo insistence on living by the time worn masculinist tradition of his ancestors, to the exclusion of any feminine valve that eventually leads to his tragedy. In the wider context of the novel, the two tales encode the conflict between the wild masculine and moderating feminine principles and thus seek to warn that a stable human personality combines both principles and any imbalance may be just as suicidal as it does for Okonkwo.

#### **4. Staging Gender in D.H. Lawrence's *The Fox*: The Role of Metaphor in the Construction of Gendered Identities**

D. H. Lawrence's *The Fox* is a modern novel with largely psychic settings and psychic or reflector characters that make themselves known through their thoughts, feelings, mental states and internal processes in general rather than through physical action. The majority of action-oriented verbs in the novella play important roles in unravelling what is going on in the consciousness or mind of the main characters (March, Henry and Banford), hence a synopsis of the novella may provide a basis for exploring the crucial psychological role that metaphor plays in the representation of gendered identities.

*The Fox* is set in a secluded Bailey Farm, in rural London. Although the novel is largely sustained on the power struggle and love/hate conflict that characterize the relationship between the main characters-March, Henry and Banford, its subject matter focuses largely on March's feminist struggles against her patriarchal husband, Henry. Ellen March (Nellie) and Banford (Jill) live together in Bailey Farm after the war, where they are trying to run a small farm. The reader is told that they are raising chickens in order to maintain their livelihood. Given that the war has just ended, the two women are experiencing postwar challenges such as the great flu epidemy, cold winter, and the barrenness of the farm and chickens. Banford provides capital while March provides labour, and does mostly outdoor tasks such as wood chopping, repairing the fence and hunting of invaders like the Fox that has become a hindrance to the girls as it constantly invades the poultry farm and carries off the hens. Feeling harassed and "exasperated" (p. 5)<sup>vii</sup> by the Fox which constantly invades and carries off their fowls, March and Banford decide to hunt and shoot it. At this point, much of the narrative focuses on March's constant struggle to kill the Fox, and how she is often hypnotized or fascinated by the animal each time it appears. Despite the challenges, the two ladies manage to sustain a living until a young soldier, Henry Grenfel, returning from war, joins them in Bailey Farm while on vacation. Henry soon falls in love with March, and proposes marriage to her, an action that hurts Banford, and constitutes the source of an epic or sustained conflict between Henry and Banford.

Antagonism between Henry and Banford heightens when the latter vehemently objects to Henry's decision to marry March, an adamant position that gets Henry incensed, especially as March, although often wavering, has given her

consent to his proposal. At this point, there is no compromise between Banford and Henry as the apparent rivalry to possess March not only splits them apart but also sows the seeds of disdain and hatred for each other. Perceiving Henry as an intruder and a rival that has come to rob her of her only source of happiness, Banford schemes and treats the latter with malicious and dramatized denigration. Hoping that such an attitude may dissuade March from marrying Henry, Banford fabricates insidious lies to tarnish Henry's reputation and tear the two apart. Eventually, Banford orders Henry to leave Bailey Farm. Henry goes back to the Military where he works, but before he leaves, he and March resolve to get married in December and leave for Canada when he returns.

After Henry's departure, Banford continues to promote her agenda of frustrating the planned marriage between March and Henry. Through her entreaties and maneuvers in the form of manipulative lies and lavish defamatory portrayal of Henry, March writes to Henry cancelling their marriage plan and announcing an end to their relationship. In rage, Henry rushes back to Bailey farm to see March. Upon his arrival, March is falling down a tree. He offers to help complete the job, but consciously directs the slanting tree to fall in the direction where Banford is standing. The tree falls on Banford, killing her. The sustained conflict between Banford and Henry is laid to rest. Once the obstacle, Banford is removed, March and Henry get married. But the death of Banford and the relation between the couple however puts March in a sustained psychologically mood, as she is not happy. At the end of the novel, the narrator shifts the setting to March's mind. She is meditating and philosophizing on the emptiness of life, feeling so vain and frustrated; pondering why happiness is unachievable; contemplatively questioning why things get worse the more one tries to be happy; and musing on the fact that the woman's efforts to be happy, or to make her companion happy, always end in failure. It is however her feminist musings that is the focus of this study.

Besides the sustained love-hate conflict that leads to the death of Banford, a feminist reading of D.H. Lawrence's *The Fox* is plausible. Based on textual evidence, one can describe the novel as a feminist novel; as a narrative of power struggle featuring the patriarchal cultural institution, represented by Henry, fighting to exert dominance on the wife (feminist institution) represented by March. The two institutions-patriarchy and feminism, seem respectively to be fighting for dominance and self-assertion. On the one hand, there is the patriarchal institution, represented by Henry, fighting to wield unrestrained authority and control, so as to remain the sole voice and decision maker, in the institution of marriage; while on the other hand, there is the woman, struggling to resist male chauvinism, and to regain her voice through knowledge acquisition and self-assertion. Narrated in the form of a poetic monologue or what one may say is a series of silent self-conversations, meditations and musings, March renders her feeling of patriarchal oppression from her husband, Henry in a series of metaphors, one of which is the metaphor of "sleep" and the resistance to sleep. In various images of passivity and docility, March also perceives herself with a domineering man, Henry, who expects from her total and permanent submission:

She had to be like the seaweeds she saw as she peered down from the boat, swaying forever delicately under the water,... sensitive, utterly sensitive and receptive within the shadowy sea, and never, never rising and looking forth above from the water while they lived. Never. Never looking forth from the water until they died...But while they lived, always submerged, always beneath the wave...But it was always under water, always under water. And she, being a woman, must be like that (p. 95).

Here are the Victorian expectations regarding womanhood that were inherited by the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The ideal woman here is metaphorically imaged in a "delicate" "seaweed" that remains forever in the "shadowy sea". "The shadowy sea" that colonizes the woman ("seaweed"), denying her the slightest chance of "rising" or "looking forth" is a metaphor for the man, Henry whose greatest ambition is to keep the woman (March) in the shadow. Although in her musing, March, the woman struggles to be "sensitive" and "receptive" Henry, a personification of male supremacy, wants nothing short of total submission from her, and is determined to take away her consciousness so that she becomes simply, a mindless wife material:

She would have to leave her destiny to the boy. But then, the boy. He wanted more than that. He wanted her to give herself without defenses, to sink and become submerged in him. And she-she wanted to sit still, like a woman on the last milestone, and watch. She wanted to see, to know, to understand...And he! He did not want her to watch anymore, to see anymore, to understand anymore. He wanted to veil her woman's spirit, as Orientals veil the woman's face. He wanted her to commit herself to him, and to put her independent spirit to sleep. He wanted to take away from her all her effort, all that seemed her very *raison d'être*. He wanted to make her submit, yield, blindly pass away her strenuous consciousness. He wanted to take away her consciousness, and make her just his woman. Just his woman. (p. 98)

This entire passage can be described as a metaphoric expression of Henry's wish to bury March's identity in oblivion. Henry does not only want March to entrust her destiny entirely into his hands without any defenses. The Victorian ideal of man as rational and thus the decision-maker is evoked here in symbolic terms. Henry does not want the wife "to watch",

“to see” or “to understand”. The negation of these cognitive verbs which are perceptual markers of knowledge awareness clearly indicate that, like the patriarchal men of Umuofia, Henry will not allow his wife to put on a thinking cap or make decisions.<sup>viii</sup> That will amount to possessing the public space (reserved for men) and challenging patriarchal ideology. Public affairs like decision making was regarded as the domain of men and men alone; so Henry regards March’s active mind as a threat. The line “He wanted to veil her woman’s spirit, as Orientals veil the woman’s face” brings out the sociocultural attitudes that seek to rob the woman of her potentials thereby keeping her in private spaces under total control and dependence. Henry will no doubt, agree with Okonkwo that, “No matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and his children (and especially his women) he was not really a man...” The following lines strike a similar note to Okonkwo’s strong desire to control his women folk:

But then, the boy...He wanted her to give herself without defenses, to sink and become submerged in him...He did not want her to watch anymore, to see anymore, to understand anymore. He wanted to veil her woman’s spirit, as Orientals veil the woman’s face. He wanted her to commit herself to him, and to put her independent spirit to sleep....

These lines structure the man, represented by Henry, in dire need to be in control, and express his strong fear of losing grounds if the woman is in control. A further possible meaning is that the man, Henry, like Okonkwo, wants to shrink the woman in status and potentials so that he can silence her, hover above her and feel superior. Metaphors such as “submerged”, “sink”, “swaying”, “beneath”, “commit”, “submit”, are particularly effective as they not only position the woman in the private space, but additionally highlight cultural perceptions of inferiority and patriarchal attitudes that seek to thwart woman’s aspirations, thereby keeping her permanently under dependence, subservience and subordination. The verbs “commit”, “submit” and “sway” like Okonkwo’s “to rule”, “conquer” and “subdue” are particularly effective metaphors that capture the false-self or distorted role that Henry as man, tries to impose on March as woman. The images also structure the relationship between husband and wife as that of economic dependence whereby the man is cast in the role of authority and provider, while the woman is cast in the role of dependence. From the above, it is clear that, like the men of Umuofia, Henry wants power and control over women; he does not see marriage as a partnership; but as an institution in which the man should colonize the woman by making power and decision making his exclusive prerogatives.

The above passages illustrate that metaphors are an important considerations when analyzing gendered identity construction. The connotative and cognitive power of images such as “submerged”, “sink”, “yield”, “swaying”, “beneath”, “commit”, “submit”, in structuring gender differences in marriage cannot be ignored. The images are particularly effective as they not only position the married woman in the private space, but additionally highlight the cultural perceptions and patriarchal attitudes behind Henry’s views that seek to thwart the woman’s aspirations, thereby keeping her permanently under dependence and subordination, in the domain of marriage. “Commit”, “submit” and “sway” particularly structure the relationship between husband and wife as that of domination and economic dependence whereby the man is cast in the role of authority and provider, whereas the woman is programmed in the role of dependence. Like “beneath”, “yield”, “swaying”, and “submit”, the metaphors of “submerged” and “sink” render the passage poetic in the way it structures the relationship of the husband and wife (Henry and March) in marriage as one in which, one of the partners (the man) must remain in the limelight while the other, the woman remains in the shadow; one’s identity (the woman’s) must be destroyed, buried or erased for the other (the man) in order for him to glow, shine and hover over the other as master (authority). While the metaphor in which this relationship, is perceived conceives of the man (Henry) as master, March (the woman) is cast in the role of a dependent totally subjected to the authority of Henry—the husband. It is important to note that the association of the married woman with perceptual, mental and cognitive metaphors that suggest dependency, submissiveness, subjection and subjugation only amount to powerlessness or what Spivak, says about the situation of the gendered subject and of Indian women in particular: voicelessness. Communal or collective voice/perspective or focalization suits Henry’s cultural discourse in the above passages since he is simply reproducing the Victorian point of view that his age had inherited.

Lawrence’s text seem to structure the subject in a simultaneous interplay of two opposing strands of thought: patriarchy and feminist thought. Hence, in the manner of a feminist agenda structured in monologic utterances, March rejects complacency to the patriarchal domination expressed above. She resists Henry’s attempts to erase her identity or imprison her—— her sense of self negated by the volition of a more powerful other:

And she was so tired, so tired, like a child that wants to go to sleep, but which fights against sleep...She seemed to stretch her eyes wider in the obstinate effort and tension of keeping awake. She would keep awake. She WOULD know. She WOULD consider and judge and decide. She WOULD have the reins of her own life between her own hands. She would be an independent woman to the last. (p 99).

This is the crucial act of resistance and assertion of one’s own identity. March’s domination and resistance are expressed in various metaphors: veiling her woman’s spirit” and sleep and the resistance to sleep. Her resistance takes the form of openly decrying the chauvinistic socio-cultural point of view, expressed by Henry, that seek “to veil [the] woman’s spirit”, an attitude she associates with the Eastern mentality “as Orientals veil the woman’s face”. Lawrence also uses

the metaphor of sleep and resistance to sleep to stage the intensity of the fight for dominance and self-assertion between Henry and March respectively. The reader finds an unhappy March, “sitting in a niche of the high, wild, cliffs of West Cornwall, looking over the westward sea, . . .” determined to overcome sleep so as to stretch her knowledge: “She would know and she would see what is ahead.” Lawrence seems to say that resisting sleep is synonymous with resisting patriarchy which is out to impose “sleep”, an image that suggests a situation of passivity or docility on the woman. March seems to be saying that girls and women should not be passive, but should sharpen and build their skills as well as fight for their rights; they should actively participate in decision making when it comes to issues that affect them most. That is what March means when she expresses her determination to “know”, to “consider”, to “judge” and to “decide”. In resisting “sleep” then, March seems to call on the need to empower the woman and put her in the public space where she can be allowed to exercise her potentials without restrictions on the basis of sex. In view of her feminist agenda which embodies a crusade for the rights of women, March features in the novel as an activist and an advocate for women’s rights.

Like Henry’s argument for patriarchy above, March’s psychological musings about the nature of relationships as well as her determination to be free are strikingly rendered in a metaphor of sleep and resistance to sleep and thus constitutes a productive illustration of the role of metaphor in constructing or challenging gender dichotomies in texts. The use of the metaphor of “sleep” and resistance to sleep is important in staging the intensity of the fight for dominance and self-assertion between the couple. By her determination to resist sleep, March seems to suggest two things here: first that a woman who is “submerged”; who “sink[s]” or “yield[s]”; a woman who keeps “swaying”; who accepts to stay “beneath”; “commit[s]” to, or “submit[s]” entirely to a man’s authority, is one who sleeps, hence, “sleep” is synonymous to endorsing patriarchy. Conversely, resisting sleep is synonymous to resisting patriarchy which tries to associate the married woman with the image of “sleep”, an image that suggests a situation of being passively “submerged” in patriarchy. Secondly, the above passage conceives of our cultural gender relations in the metaphor of a journey on horseback in which the principal rider is the man who has the reins of the horse in hand. By insisting that “she would have the **reins** of her own life between her own hands”, March (as wife) refuses to entrust her destiny in the hands of a man (her husband). Rather, she will take her destiny into her own hands; she must regain her voice in the relationship with Henry and make decisions for herself. Metaphors are used by March here both to show the way men perceive them (women) as well as to challenge/erase gender roles. March’s metaphor of having the “reins” of her horse in hand is a superb expression of a woman’s determination to erase the conventional definitions of a woman as inherited from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century or Victorian age. Encoded in this metaphor is March’s determination to take her destiny into her hands; a determination embedded with a desire for a new a-historic space where she can reformulate gender relationships and roles on the basis of equity.

On his part, Henry seems to go into marriage with March, not as a partner, not as a husband, but as a man, a colonizer, who is determined to wield unrestrained authority over his female partner, causing her to “yield and sleep in him” (p. 99). Once this happens:

...he would have all his own life as a young man and a male, and she would have all her own life as a woman and a female. There would be no more of the awful straining. She would not be a man anymore, an independent woman with a man’s responsibility. Nay, even the responsibility for her own soul she would have to commit to him. He knew it was so, and obstinately held out against her, waiting for the surrender (pp.99-100).

Here is what Henry wants, to live with March along the lines of (Victorian) cultural expectations regarding gender roles in marriage: “to “have his own life as a young man and a male” and March to “have all her own life as a woman and a female.” In this way, March “would not be a man anymore” or as is the case presently, “an independent woman with a man’s responsibility.” March would have to “commit” even her soul to him. Henry is convinced that this is the correct way with marriage and so obstinately holds out this cultural viewpoint in the conflict awaiting March’s “surrender”.

Lawrence does not however provide a solution to the fight for authority represented by Henry and the struggle for resistance against male chauvinism, and also the struggle to regain one’s voice through knowledge and self-assertion, represented by March. This impression is gauged from the fact that the novel ends with March looking around Henry “with the strained, strange look of a child that is struggling against sleep” (p. 100). Henry feels threatened by what the woman (March) possesses (the spirit of independence and authority) and gladly assumes that she would lose that spirit of independence and authority to him when she totally submits to him, through marriage: “She would not be a man anymore, an independent woman with a man’s responsibility. Nay, even the responsibility for her own soul she would have to commit to him. He knew it was so, and obstinately held out against her, waiting for the surrender.” (p. 100) Once more, the marriage institution is presented as a cultural tool to keep women permanently under subjugation and dependence, while the right to decision making remains the prerogative of the man.

In the theoretical section, we defined metaphor as a cognitive activity. *The Fox*, it must be remembered, is a modern

narrative text that predominantly features a reflector character, a figural consciousness, or an internal focalizer, and in such a narrative mood, the perceptions, sensory impressions and the internal processes of the thinking, feeling and perceiving characters usually takes the place of accounts of events and actions and determine what is narrated. In such narrations then, metaphors function as what Fludernik's conceptualizes as 'frames of viewing and perceiving' and (Birk, 2006), citing Eubanks (1999) describes as "mini-narrations" (p. 265). Earlier in *The Fox*, when Henry strategizes on the best method to ensnare March into a love affair and eventual marriage, metaphor is used as a device to reflect, confirm or legitimize sexual roles in courtship where the man is constructed in the cultural memory as the Don Juan— i.e., the all-time hunter or pursuer of women— and the woman as the prey in the duel of sex:

[Henry] scarcely admitted his intensions even to himself. He kept it as a secret even from himself. It was too uncertain as yet. He would have to see how things went. Yes, he would have to see how things went. If he wasn't careful, she would just simply mock at the idea. He knew, sly and subtle as he was, that if he went to her plainly and said: "Mrs March, I love you and want you to marry me," her inevitable answer would be: "Get out. I don't want any of that tomfoolery." This was her attitude to men and their "tomfoolery." If he was not careful, she would turn round on him with her savage, sardonic ridicule, and dismiss him from the farm and from her own mind forever. He would have to go gently. He would have to catch her as you catch a deer or woodcock when you go out shooting. It's no good walking out into the forest and saying to the deer: "Please fall to my gun." No, it is a slow, subtle battle. When you really go out to get a deer, you gather yourself together, you coil yourself inside yourself, and you advance secretly, before dawn, into the mountains. It is not so much what you do, when you go out hunting, as how you feel. You have to be subtle and cunning and absolutely fatally ready. It becomes like a fate. Your own fate overtakes and determines the fate of the deer you are hunting. First of all, even before you come in sight of your quarry, there is a strange battle, like mesmerism. Your own soul, as a hunter, has gone out to fasten on the soul of the deer, even before you see any deer. And the soul of the deer fights to escape. Even before the deer has any wind of you, it is so. It is a subtle profound battle of wills which takes place in the invisible. And it is a battle never finished till your bullet goes home. When you are really worked up to the true pitch, and you come at last into range, you don't then aim as you do when you are firing at a bottle. It is your own will which carries the bullet into the heart of your quarry. The bullet's flight home is a sheer projection of your own fate into the fate of the deer. It happens like a supreme wish, a supreme act of volition, not as dodge of cleverness (pp. 26-27).

The entire passage renders Henry's thoughts on how best to ensnare a woman one wants to marry, in poetic and metaphoric utterances involving images and symbols rich in suggestiveness. Here is a monologue structured on a concrete metaphoric and poetic image that seems to convey and reinforce the cultural view that man is the all-time hunter and woman the eternal prey in the love chase that takes place in courtship. The metaphor effectively conjures up the anxieties of a hunter trailing and luring a prey ("*a deer or woodcock*") in a manner that bears a semblance to courtship. The first strategy, meditated and dismissed by the hunter in that of walking up directly to the prey and declaring your intension. Hence, Henry conjures a monologic conversation that registers the fears of failure (the fear of being turned down by the woman he loves) inherent in this approach: "Mrs March, I love you and want you to marry me," her inevitable answer would be: "Get out. I don't want any of that tomfoolery". Analogically, he concludes, "*It's no good walking out into the forest and saying to the deer: "Please fall to my gun."*" Such a direct approach would not do. Like serious hunting, courtship is rather "*a slow, subtle battle*" in which a man catches a woman in the way a hunter catches "*a deer: or a "woodcock"*", therefore, "*He would have to catch her as you catch a deer or woodcock when you go out shooting*". Henry then goes on with an elaborate conceit, or psycho-narration of the process of "hunting" a woman. The subconscious metaphoric association of the procedure of ensnaring a woman into falling in love with an admirer, to a prey that requires tactics before one can ensnare and trap it, appears to reflect, confirm and legitimize or stabilize the cultural construction of gender roles in courtship where the man is often perceived as the hunter and the woman, the hunted prey. In short, courtship is a hunting expeditions in which the woman (March), represented in the metaphor of a deer must be ensnared and trapped by the intelligent man or potential spouse (Henry) who must deploy caution, patience and tact in order to ensnare and trap his bet.

The above metaphor thus implicitly encodes the patriarchal stereotypical traits by which western civilization traditionally casts the man: rational, strong, active, decisive, adventurous, creative, domineering, assertive, and aggressive and in control. In like manner, the metaphor attributes the opposite traits to the woman, the deer or the victim in the dwell. Once more, Henry's subconscious equation of the man to the hunter and the woman to the prey in a dwell of sex is a communal believe, not only in Victorian England, but around the world. Taking the clue from Lanser (1992, p. 21), what one finds in Henry's monologue above is a case whereby narrative authority is vested in a community but textually inscribed through the voice of a single individual (Henry), who speaks for the said cultural or ideological community. Such a thinking or believe about the manifestation of sexual relations can be covered by Lanser's categories of either communal or collective voice/consciousness or hybridized perspective due to its transcultural nature.

In view of the above analysis, one can submit that language in general and metaphor in particular constitute the foundation stone of narrative discourses on gender and performs the narrative function of reflecting, constructing, legitimizing or challenging gender inequalities. It is thus evident from the above analysis that D. H Lawrence's *The Fox* constructs or narrates its gender theme largely via cognitive metaphors in the minds of its reflector characters. The presence of such cognitive metaphors would definitely attract a feminist reading that privileges for interpretation and analysis, linguistic techniques like symbols, metaphors, myths, etc., all of which, as literary devices, can show how gendered identities enter certain narrative texts and leave strategies for constructing feminist oriented narrative meanings.

## 5. Conclusion

Cultural practices that go with bravery, insensitivity, prestige, power, authority, complacency, tolerance, and obedience, are first, gender markers, and by virtue of the fact that they can be endowed with group/communal voice and perspective and accorded narrative potentials, render them as paradigms for feminist narratology. Roles and images associated with men are discussed in a manner that suggests courage, heroism, power and authority, while those used to construct the female gender are described in a manner that draws attention to complacency, submissiveness, subjection, tolerance, marginalization, timidity, and obedience.

In TFA, character traits, cultural texts or traditional narratives and narrative evidence have proven their potential both as paradigms for feminist narratology and as gender markers. It is evident from the analysis that the current socio-cultural structures have created beliefs in which women are disenfranchised, marginalized, suffer exclusions, disempowered, and their aspirations reduced to domestic roles. The perception that cuts across gender both in Africa and the West is that there are different roles for men and women. In both texts, women are excluded from leadership and decision-making platforms because of the fear of losing control and power which patriarchy assumes to be male attributes. Such gender markers which constitute cultural perceptions have been subsumed under the narrative categories of collective perspective or communal voice and communal consciousness.

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## Notes

- <sup>i</sup> For a detail discussion of trends in feminist narratology, see Susan Lanser (1992), Gabby Alrath (2005) and Ruth Page (2007: 189-202) and others
- <sup>ii</sup> It is important to note that the definition of gender as a social construct above has often been used in respect to the female and male genders, hence, ignoring the fact that there are many genders and that a given concept of gender can also be largely determined by sex and sexuality or the sexual orientation of an individual, an issue that is the subject of debate. In other words, the definitions provided above do not seem to have taken into consideration the ambiguous humans. On the issue of the existence of different and ambiguous types of sexual orientations, Oluyami-Kusa (2006: 209) argues as follows: “[a] one-to-one mapping of gender onto a common place categorization of sex as male/female is over-simple”, even with respect to biology and medicine, as there are chromosomal variations and syndromes not to mention morphological ones that create genuinely ambiguous individuals.” In additionally evoking categories such as masculine females and feminine males, Oluyami-Kusa seems to say that “we do not know how many genders there are” because in practice, or with respect to “performance and dressing up”, the categorization of individuals into different genders as well as the deployment of any particular concept of gender “varies according to what is assumed about sex and sexuality” (Oluyami-Kusa, 2006:209).
- <sup>iii</sup> For all information from Spivak, see, Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (1993). For a further discussion on gender silencing, also see, Nkamanyang and Nforbin (2016).
- <sup>iv</sup> This citation is taken from Chinua Achebe (1958). *Things Fall Apart*. Essex: Heinemann. Henceforth, cited with only page references provided in parenthesis.
- <sup>v</sup> It is important to note how Okonkwo makes a mockery of Ndulue for sharing ideas with his wife, Ozoemena: It was always said that Ndulue and Ozoemena had one mind’, said Oberika..... ‘I did not know that’ said Okonkwo. ‘I thought he was a strong man in his youth’ (62).
- <sup>vi</sup> The term, metanarrative is used in this paper, not in Jean-Francois Lyotard’s sense of a master or grand narrative (consisting of some universal truth) that connects other smaller narratives or events and functions to legitimize these other little narratives that cluster around it. In the context of this paper, metanarrative is used in the simply sense of a narrative within a narrative that functions to highlight, illuminate or legitimize certain central themes within the main narrative plot; they are thus metanarratives only in as much as they exist within a larger narrative like a novel, a short story etc. They are folkloric in the sense that they are drawn from the folk tradition
- <sup>vii</sup> This citation and all others (cited henceforth with only page references provided) from D. H. Lawrence’s *The Fox* are taken from a web Edition published by eBooks@Adelaide and rendered into HTML by Steve Thomas. Updated, 28 Aug.2010.
- <sup>viii</sup> Like Okonkwo who makes a mockery of Ndulue for sharing ideas with his wife, Henry, believes that thinking and making decisions are the exclusive prerogatives of a man and not women.

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