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AN ANALYSIS OF THE METAPHOR IN MAMMAN VATSA'S POEM, "HOMECOMING"

Aliyu Muhammad GADANYA

Department of English Language
Federal University Dutsin-Ma, Katsina
amgadanya@fudutsinma.edu.ng
08034590777

Yahaya Ismail ISA

Department of English and Literary Studies
Northwest University, Kano
Abusafiyyah2017@gmail.com
08105393303

Jamilu AHMED

Department of English Language
Federal University Dutsin-Ma, Katsina
jahmed@fudutsinma.edu.ng

08037459092

Abstract

This paper analyses metaphorical expressions in Mamman Vatsa's poem, "Homecoming," by using the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). Six metaphorical expressions that employ ontological metaphors, specifically BUILDING IS A PERSON and OBJECT IS A PERSON, were identified and analysed in the study. By specifically adopting Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors we live by* (1980, 2003) as theoretical framework, the research demonstrates how the poet uses sustained metaphors to show the desertion experienced during the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970). The findings reveal that Vatsa's use of metaphors besides serving as ornamental devices, it also serves as cognitive mechanisms that make readers to conceptualize abstract experiences of war, loss, and loneliness through concretisation of the domains. This study contributes to the exploration of metaphors in poetry and gives an insight into how soldier-poets employ figurative language to tell traumatic historical experiences in Africa.

Keywords: Conceptual Metaphor Theory, ontological metaphor, Mamman Vatsa, civil war literature, African poetry

Introduction

Metaphor is a mechanism of semantic extension that involves conceptualizing one domain of experience in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 2003). It is traditionally viewed as a characteristic feature of language, especially poetic language. Contemporary cognitive linguistic scholarship has established that metaphor is fundamentally a matter of thought and cognition rather than merely linguistic ornamentation (Gibbs, 2017; Kövecses, 2010, 2015). According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 3), "our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature." This cognitive perspective suggests that metaphor is "pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action," serving as a means through which humans structure abstract thinking and construct experiences (Gibbs, 1994; Kövecses, 2005).

In poetry, metaphor reaches what many scholars consider its most sophisticated and complex manifestation (Saeed, 2009; Smith, 2002). Recent psycholinguistic research has provided evidence that readers actively access and process conceptual metaphors when interpreting poetry, which shows that "crucial aspects of poetic thought and language arise from conceptual metaphor" (Rasse et al., 2020, p. 1). This finding is significant for understanding how poets use metaphors not simply for aesthetic purposes but as tools for meaning construction and emotional expression.

Within the African literary tradition, metaphor serves additional functions related to cultural identity, historical memory, and social commentary. African poets who write in colonial languages employ metaphorical structures to "coin language, present their messages and carry" cultural meanings that resonate with their sociocultural contexts (Nwachukwu-Agbada, 1987, 1994). Studies on Nigerian poetry have demonstrated that metaphors address societal problems such as corruption, war, environmental degradation, and post-colonial challenges (Ojaide, 2013; Umeh, 1991). This makes metaphor analysis important in understanding the relationship between poetry and social reality in the Nigerian experience.

This paper analyses the use of metaphor in Mamman Jiya Vatsa's poem, "Homecoming," using Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as its analytical framework. Major General Mamman Jiya Vatsa (1940-1986) was a distinguished Nigerian military officer, poet, and patron of the arts who commanded the 21st Battalion during the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), and later edited *Voices from the Trench* (1978) which is an important collection of soldier-poetry documenting war

experiences (Abdullahi, 2024). His poetry which includes works that address the civil war period provides valuable insights into how soldier-poets employed literary devices to capture and commemorate the "harrowing experiences of war" and perform important "memorial functions" (Ojukwu, 2021, para. 7).

"Homecoming", published in Vatsa's collection *A Bird that Sings for Rain* (1978), focuses on "ordinary people's lives" and it has the capacity to transform military and domestic imagery into vehicles for expressing emotional and social realities. Through identification and analysis of the poem's metaphorical expressions, this study seeks to demonstrate how Vatsa employs sustained ontological metaphors to convey themes of abandonment, loneliness, and the negative impact of war on people's life.

Theoretical Framework: Conceptual Metaphor Theory

This study adopts Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 2003) and subsequently refined by other scholars such as Kövecses (2010, 2015) and Gibbs (2017) as its analytical framework. According to Geeraerts (2010), CMT rests on three essential propositions: first, metaphor is a cognitive phenomenon rather than being lexical or linguistic. Second, metaphor involves mappings across conceptual domains that structure reasoning, experience, and everyday language. These mappings transfer the internal structure from a source domain (concrete and physically grounded) to a target domain (abstract). Third, metaphors are grounded in bodily, perceptual, and interactional experiences. Our understanding of abstract concepts derives from more basic and embodied experiences.

Types of Conceptual Metaphor

Three primary categories of conceptual metaphors were identified by Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 2003) and each is serving specific cognitive functions:

i. Structural Metaphors

Structural metaphors involve understanding one concept in terms of another as in ARGUMENT IS WAR or LOVE IS A JOURNEY. These metaphors provide frameworks through which complex abstract domains can be conceptualized using the rich inferential structure of more concrete source domains.

ii. Orientational Metaphors

Orientational metaphors organize systems of concepts with respect to spatial orientations such as UP-DOWN, IN-OUT, FRONT-BACK, CENTER-PERIPHERY. Examples include HAPPY IS UP, SAD IS DOWN, CONSCIOUS IS UP, UNCONSCIOUS IS DOWN. These metaphors derive from our embodied spatial experiences and cultural practices.

iii. Ontological Metaphors

Ontological metaphors involve "ways of viewing events, activities, emotions, ideas, etc., as entities and substances" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 25). This includes some of the most basic metaphors in human cognition. As Lakoff and Johnson explain, ontological metaphors allow us to refer to abstract concepts as physical entities, quantify and measure experiences, identify specific properties, determine causes and set goals as well as reason about abstract phenomena. Ontological metaphors are expressed using personification, in which "physical objects are further specified as being persons" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 33). This enables rich metaphorical understanding, as the source domain of human experience becomes available for conceptualizing inanimate objects and abstract phenomena.

Following the framework, the identification and analysis of metaphorical expressions in "Homecoming" are done through these stages: metaphorical expressions are identified, then source and target domains are determined. This is followed by identifying which conceptual domains are being mapped as well as specification of conceptual mappings and lastly the meaning of the metaphor is interpreted. This methodology aligns with contemporary approaches to metaphor analysis in poetry, the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) and cognitive semantic analysis techniques that have been successfully applied to diverse poetic traditions (Hussein & Ismail, 2025; Lin, 2024; Rasse et al., 2020).

Literature Review

The study of metaphor has a long history which dates to classical antiquity. Traditional rhetoric, which began with Aristotle and continued through medieval and Renaissance periods, classified metaphor as part of the "rhetorical tropes". These are mechanisms designed to embellish texts and capture audience attention (Geeraerts, 2010). In Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, as cited in Geeraerts (2010, p. 214), metaphor is described as "so natural to us, that the illiterate and others often use

unconsciously, but it is so pleasing and ornamental that in any composition however brilliant it always makes itself apparent by its own lustre."

This traditional view, however, presents metaphor as a literary device which is optional and largely for aesthetic purpose. Contemporary cognitive linguistic research has challenged this assumption. The publication of Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) marked a shift in metaphor studies. Rather than viewing metaphor as peripheral to thought and communication, Lakoff and Johnson demonstrated that metaphorical structuring pervades ordinary language and fundamentally organizes human conceptual systems. This "conceptual metaphor theory provided much of the early theoretical spark" for cognitive semantics and has become foundational to cognitive linguistics more broadly (Evans, 2007, p. 34; Evans & Green, 2006, p. 286).

The cognitive linguistic perspective maintains that metaphor is present throughout everyday language and thought. It is not specific to poetry or any special discourse. It is also organized into coherent systems rather than occurring as isolated instances. Moreover, metaphor is grounded in physical, perceptual, and motor experiences and is shaped by cultural practices and values.

Kövecses (2005, 2010) has further developed CMT by examining the relationship between metaphor and culture. He observes that metaphor and culture are intimately linked because "creative writers and poets commonly use metaphors and because literature is part of culture" (Kövecses, 2005, p. 68). His work has shown that many conceptual metaphors exhibit cross-cultural universality because of shared experiences, yet significant cultural variation exists in metaphorical patterns, particularly in their frequency, elaboration, and specific instantiations.

However, scholars have recently expanded our understanding of how conceptual metaphors function specifically in poetic contexts. Rasse et al.'s (2020) psycholinguistic study provided empirical evidence that readers actively retrieve conceptual metaphors when interpreting poetry, supporting the claim that poetic thought and language fundamentally arise from metaphorical cognition. Their research demonstrated awareness of conceptual metaphors during poetry reading, validating CMT's relevance to literary analysis.

Studies on metaphor in modern poetry have identified multiple mechanisms through which metaphors operate, including blending, frame shifting, image schema, conceptual integration, contextual grounding, and embodied cognition (Lin, 2024; Young, 2023). These mechanisms allow poets to create layered meanings and evoke complex emotional and aesthetic responses. It is

important that research has shown metaphors in poetry function not merely as ornamental devices but as the poet's "conceptualization and cognitive means" for expressing experience (Hallowell & Umeh, 2022, p. 145)

Within African literary studies, several scholars have examined metaphorical structures in poetry, though much work remains to be done. Studies have demonstrated that African poets employ diverse metaphorical strategies, including animal metaphors, synaesthetic metaphors, organic metaphors, and telescoped metaphors, often addressing socio-political issues through these figurative structures (Oloko, 2017).

Research on Nigerian poetry specifically has shown that metaphors serve as linguistic armouries deployed to question and address socio-political issues (Oloko 2017). Metaphor analysis, in this context, must attend to both universal cognitive patterns and culture-specific motivations that shape metaphor production and interpretation (Ojaide, 2013). The relationship between language and culture permits metaphor to function as "the best way of illustrating culture because it shows the relationship between language and culture" (Lichang, 2004, as cited in *Metaphor and Nigerian English studies*).

Scholarship on Nigerian Civil War literature has highlighted the memorial and testimonial functions of soldier-poetry. Vatsa's editorial work on *Voices from the Trench* (1978) and his own war poetry exemplify how military writers used literary devices to "capture the harrowing experiences of war" and "perform an important memorial function" (Ojukwu, 2021, 5). These poems configure "graphic, shocking images of the atrocities" while also exposing "the evil and the absurdity of the enterprise" of war.

Despite growing interest in metaphor studies and African poetry, relatively few studies have applied systematic CMT analysis to specific Nigerian poems, particularly works by soldier-poets like Vatsa. While scholars have examined metaphorical patterns in works by prominent poets such as Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, Niyi Osundare, and Tanure Ojaide, Vatsa's poetry has received limited analytical attention despite his significant contributions to Nigerian literature and his unique perspective as both military officer and poet.

Furthermore, while studies have examined various aspects of civil war literature, systematic cognitive linguistic analysis of how metaphorical structures in war poetry enable readers to conceptualize traumatic historical experiences remains an underdeveloped area of inquiry. This

study addresses these gaps by providing a detailed CMT-based analysis of "Homecoming," demonstrating how Vatsa's metaphorical language constructs a coherent experiential framework for understanding the impact of war on civilian spaces and communities.

The Analysis of Metaphor in Poem "Homeworking"

The poem:

Homecoming

I was there in 1967

The library was asleep.

And the campus bereft

With its silent classroom

And idle chalks

Watching the dusters

That had ceased to harass

The dirty blackboard.

I went back in 1974.

There was a jam of everything

From traffic to bookshop

The men you hear of

But hardly see

Are all back there

Arresting the ruins of war

And already the cult music –

Omaba and the Muse

Are being recorded

(Vatsa, 1978, p. 45)

Background

The time covered by the poem, 1967 and 1974, provides the picture of the Nigerian Civil War period (1967-1970) and its immediate aftermath. The first stanza depicts a military educational facility during the peak of the war, when soldiers had departed for the battlefield and left their barracks and institutions abandoned. The second stanza portrays the return and recovery phase, as soldiers and civilian life gradually resumed. This historical context is crucial for understanding the emotional weight and memorial function of the metaphorical expressions.

In the poem, "Homecoming", Vatsa deploys two primary conceptual metaphors that organize the entire first stanza:

- BUILDING IS A PERSON

- OBJECT IS A PERSON

Both metaphors belong to the category of ontological metaphors and specifically employ personification, which is giving human attributes to non-human entities. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 33), "ontological metaphors serve various purposes, and the various kinds of metaphors there are reflect the kinds of purposes served." Among ontological metaphors, personification metaphors are particularly prevalent because "physical objects are specified as being persons," which allows us to "comprehend a wide variety of experiences with nonhuman entities in terms of human motivations, characteristics, and activities."

THE METAPHOR ANALYSIS

Metaphor 1: "The library was asleep"

Source domain: Rest/Sleep (human physiological state)

Target domain: Building (physical structure)

Conceptual mapping:

- i. Human being -- Library building
- ii. State of sleep -- State of non-use/closure
- iii. Awakeness/consciousness -- Activity/use
- iv. Sleeping person's inactivity -- Library's unavailability

Conceptual metaphor: BUILDING IS A PERSON / A LIBRARY IS A SLEEPING PERSON

Interpretation: The verb “asleep” attributes a human physiological state to the library building. Sleep represents a temporary cessation of conscious activity which is a periodic withdrawal from engagement with the world. By characterizing the library as “asleep”, Vatsa conceptualizes its closure and abandonment not as only physical emptiness but as a dormant state pregnant with the possibility of reawakening. This metaphor exemplifies how “ontological metaphors like these are so natural and so pervasive in our thought that they are usually taken as self-evident, direct descriptions” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 27). Readers can immediately grasp the library's state without conscious awareness of the metaphorical nature of the expression.

Metaphor 2: “And the campus bereft”

Source domain: Emotional loss/loneliness (human psychological state)

Target domain: Campus (physical space/institution)

Conceptual mapping:

- i. Grieving person -- Campus
- ii. Loss of loved one -- Loss of occupants/users
- iii. Emotional pain -- Physical emptiness
- iv. Social isolation -- Spatial abandonment

Conceptual metaphor: BUILDING IS A PERSON / A CAMPUS IS A BEREAVED PERSON

Interpretation: The word "bereft" carries powerful connotations of loss and grief. Its primary definition involves "being deprived of something valued or beloved" or "suffering the death of a loved one." By attributing this human emotional state to the campus, Vatsa creates a particular metaphorical understanding: The metaphor foregrounds that the campus doesn't merely lack people, it experiences their absence as loss. It also implies prior relationships between the campus and its community. The campus is cast in the role of mourner, emphasizing the human cost of war. Bereavement implies connection; the campus is portrayed as inherently social. This metaphor is especially powerful in the civil war context. The campus has been "bereft" of its students and faculty many of whom likely served as soldiers and may have died in the conflict. The personification allows readers to connect with the abstract notion of institutional abandonment by mapping it onto the human experience of grief and loss. The metaphor potentially hides the material destruction of war, focusing on emotional and social rather than physical damage, the agency behind the campus's abandonment and other forms of loss beyond human absence.

Metaphor 3: "With its silent classroom"

Source domain: Muteness/silence (human communicative state)

Target domain: Classroom (physical space)

Conceptual mapping:

- i. Speaking person -- Active classroom
- ii. Silent person -- Unused classroom
- iii. Voice -- Educational activity/student voices
- iv. Enforced silence -- Absence of users

Conceptual metaphor: BUILDING IS A PERSON / A CLASSROOM IS A SILENT PERSON

Interpretation: Silence, especially enforced one or unnatural one, carries emotional and social weight. While classrooms may be literally silent during examinations or individual work, the expectation is that classrooms are spaces of vocal activity including discussion, lectures, questions, and conversations. The metaphor of a "silent classroom" personifies the space as having been deprived of its natural voice. The classroom's silence metonymically represents the absence of

students and teachers. However, by using personification rather than direct statement, Vatsa creates a more haunting, memorable image. The metaphor invites readers to imagine the experience of entering what should be a vibrant space and encountering only silence.

Metaphor 4: “And idle chalks”

Source domain: Unemployment/idleness (human social-economic state)

Target domain: Chalks (inanimate objects/tools)

Conceptual mapping:

- i. Working person -- Used chalk
- ii. Unemployed/idle person -- Unused chalk
- iii. Labor/productivity -- Writing/markings
- iv. Economic inactivity -- Functional disuse

Conceptual Metaphor: OBJECT IS A PERSON / CHALKS ARE IDLE WORKERS

Interpretation: The word “idle” introduces the semantic field of labour and productivity. An “idle worker” is one who should be working but, in this case, remains inactive either due to lack of work opportunities, choice, or external circumstances preventing employment. By describing chalks as “idle,” Vatsa conceptualises the personification from buildings to individual objects, treating educational tools as if they were unemployed laborers. This metaphor highlights the chalks exist to be used but cannot fulfil their purpose, idle workers remain capable and ready. The chalks await use and idleness often results from larger economic or social issues in this case due to war, finally idle capacity represents waste of potential productivity. The metaphor participates in a specific pattern throughout the first stanza, which is every element of the educational environment is personified. The progression from the library (sleeping) to the campus (bereaved) to the classroom (silent) to the chalks (idle) creates an increasingly intimate focus, moving from institution to building to individual objects. Each level here receives human characteristics, building a picture of abandonment. What enriches this metaphor is a cultural context. In Nigerian and many African societies, idleness carries particular social stigma. The emphasis on productive labour and communal contribution make

enforced idleness especially poignant: the chalks "want" to work but cannot, reflecting broader social disruption caused by war.

Metaphor 5: "Watching the dusters"

Source domain: Vision/observation (human sensory capacity)

Target domain: Chalks (inanimate objects/tools)

Conceptual mapping:

- i. Seeing person -- Positioned chalk
- ii. Visual attention -- Spatial proximity
- iii. Conscious observation -- Inactive co-presence
- iv. Watching/waiting -- Static positioning

Conceptual Metaphor: OBJECT IS A PERSON / CHALKS ARE WATCHERS

Interpretation: The attribution of "watching," which is an animate and conscious activity to chalks may represent the most striking personification in the poem. Vision requires not only light sensitive organs but intentionality, attention, and consciousness. By claiming that chalks "watch", Vatsa creates an image that emphasizes the strangeness and unnaturalness of the abandoned space. The metaphor suggests that the chalks possess awareness of their surroundings, watching without acting emphasizes helpless awareness and sustained attention over time. It also emphasizes that watchers often wait for something; the chalks await resumed activity and the chalks and dusters exist in conscious relation to each other. This metaphor conceptualises the idle labour metaphor: unemployed workers might spend time watching others, watching the clock, or watching for opportunities. The chalks, unable to fulfil their purpose, can only observe their companions in idleness. The image also creates an effect, reminiscent of scenes in post-apocalyptic fiction where inanimate objects seem to observe the absence of humanity. This contributes to the poem's overall mood of abandonment and suspended animation.

Metaphor 6: "Dusters that had ceased to harass the dirty blackboard"

Source domain: Aggressive behaviour/harassment (negative human social action)

Target domain: Cleaning action (physical process)

Conceptual mapping:

- i. Harassing person -- Duster in use
- ii. Victim of harassment -- Blackboard
- iii. Aggressive/annoying behavior -- Vigorous cleaning action
- iv. Cessation of harassment -- Cessation of cleaning
- v. Peace from harassment -- Accumulated dirt

Conceptual Metaphor: OBJECT IS A PERSON / CLEANING IS HARASSMENT

Interpretation: The word “harass” introduces an interesting dimension to the poem's metaphorical structure. While the previous metaphors portrayed personified entities in states of loss, sadness, or inactivity, this metaphor characterizes the *normal active state* of the dusters (cleaning blackboards) as “harassment” which is an unwelcome and annoying behaviour. This metaphor creates multiple layers of meaning: first, from the blackboard's perspective, the duster's cleaning action is experienced as harassment which is constant and violent rubbing that removes the board's skin (chalk marks). The blackboard now rests in “peace” though that peace results in accumulating dirt. This reading emphasizes the blackboard's relief from aggressive cleaning, even as it means the blackboard cannot fulfil its function. Second, the “harassment” might playfully represent the constant cycle of writing and erasing in active educational settings. Teachers and students continuously fill and clean blackboards; a repetitive process that, from the board's perspective, might seem relentless. The stoppage of this “harassment” indicates broken educational routines. Third, there may be gentle irony in characterizing useful, necessary activity (cleaning) as harassment. This irony underscores the unnaturalness of the current situation: when normal, beneficial activities cease, even the objects “suffer” from the absence of what might appear like harassment. The blackboard's peace is degradation as it remained dirty. This metaphor provides subtle commentary on educational processes. The aggressive term “harass” might reflect students' or the poet's memory of constant classroom activity including the continuous cycle of lessons, notes, assignments, erasures, and new lessons. Characterizing this activity as “harassment” creates distance and maybe mild critique, even as the poem mourns its absence.

Discussion

Metaphor works on many levels in poetry and the best way to show how metaphor functions, according to Smith (2002), is to identify the use of a sustained metaphor which runs through the entire poems. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), personification metaphors are among "the most obvious ontological metaphors" and enable us to "make sense of phenomena in the world in human terms" (p. 33). The six metaphorical expressions analysed above cohere into a sustained metaphorical framework organized around two primary conceptual metaphors: **BUILDING IS A PERSON** (Metaphors 1. Library as sleeping person, 2. Campus as bereaved person, 3. Classroom as silent person) and **OBJECT IS A PERSON** (Metaphors 4. Chalks as idle workers, 5. Chalks as conscious watchers, 6. Dusters as harassers who have ceased their action. Both conceptual metaphors are **ontological metaphors** employing **personification** which is the attribution of human characteristics to non-human entities.

The beauty of this sustained metaphorical structure achieves some important effects. Each metaphor contributes to an overall atmosphere of abandonment, loss, and suspended movement. The progression from sleeping to bereaved to silent to idle to watching to ceased creates an emotional weight, building from inactivity to profound loss. The metaphors move from larger institutional structures (library, campus) to specific spaces (classroom) to individual objects (chalks, dusters, blackboard). This hierarchical progression creates a sense of zooming in, allowing readers to apprehend abandonment at multiple scales of experience. By attributing personhood to every element of the educational environment, Vatsa creates a collective "voice" for the abandoned space. The institution becomes a community of persons, all experiencing the absence of human activity. This multiplies the emotional impact as many entities suffer the effects of the war. The sustained personification creates an implicit narrative which is "persons" (buildings and objects) once participated in educational life. They experienced constant activity, interaction, and purpose. War removed their human partners which left them in various states of suspended movement, waiting and deteriorating. The personification serves an important memory. By giving voice to the inanimate environment, Vatsa indirectly honours the absent humans. Every sleeping library and silent classroom testifies to the presence of the departed soldiers and students. The poem thus performs what Ojukwu (2021) identifies as the "important memorial function" of civil war poetry: documenting absence as a way of commemorating presence and loss.

Finally, this analysis demonstrates the applicability of Conceptual Metaphor Theory to African poetry, particularly works addressing historical trauma and social disruption. The sustained use of ontological metaphors with personification in "Homecoming" exemplifies several key principles of CMT. Vatsa's metaphors are not random or isolated decorative elements but form a coherent system organized around consistent source-target domain mappings. The systematic nature of metaphorical thought predicted by CMT is clearly manifest in how each element of the educational environment receives similar personified treatment.

The source domains employed, including sleep, grief, silence, idleness, watching, and harassment, are all derived from human bodily, emotional, and social experiences. This embodied grounding makes the abstract situation (institutional abandonment during war) comprehensible and emotionally resonant. Readers can map their own experiences of sleep, loss, silence, and unemployment onto their understanding of the abandoned campus. Each metaphor highlights certain aspects of the target domain while obscuring others. The sleeping library metaphor highlights temporariness and potential for reawakening at the same time it hides the cause and human agency. The bereaved campus highlights emotional loss while potentially obscuring material destruction. This selective hiding demonstrates how metaphorical framing shapes understanding in subtle but significant ways.

While the primary metaphors (BUILDING IS PERSON, OBJECT IS PERSON) demonstrate cross-cultural universality due to their grounding in basic human experience, specific cultural meanings emerge in interpretation. The "idle" chalks resonate particularly within Nigerian socioeconomic contexts emphasizing productive labour and collective contribution. The "bereaved" campus evokes cultural practices and emotional experiences surrounding death and mourning that carry specific weight in Nigerian cultural contexts.

Conclusion

This analysis of Mamman Vatsa's "Homecoming" demonstrates that metaphor in poetry functions not merely as ornamental device but as cognitive mechanism which enables readers to conceptualize abstract and traumatic experiences through concrete domains. The poem's sustained employment of ontological metaphors, specifically BUILDING IS A PERSON and OBJECT IS A PERSON, creates an experiential framework for understanding institutional abandonment during the Nigerian Civil War. Conceptual Metaphor Theory provides an analytical framework for examining these structures, revealing systematic mappings across conceptual domains that highlight certain aspects of war's impact but obscuring others. The analysis supports CMT's central claims

about metaphor's cognitive nature, systematic organization, and experiential grounding and demonstrates culture-specific dimensions that shape metaphorical production and interpretation. Vatsa's artistic achievement in "Homecoming" depends on transforming historical documentation into memorable aesthetic experience. By giving voice to voiceless spaces and objects through personification, the poem performs crucial memorial functions; yet it maintains aesthetic sophistication. The work exemplifies how soldier-poets employed literary craft to process and communicate traumatic experiences thereby contributing to Nigerian literature's engagement with social and historical realities.

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