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Representation of social actors in media discourse on Biafra Self-determination agitation

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Abstract:

Given the influence of the media on public discourse, this study analyses how social actors in the Biafra self-determination agitation discourse are represented in the Nigerian media. The data comprises articles downloaded from the online version of news reports of two Nigerian popular broadsheet newspapers – The Punch and The Guardian, between 2016 and 2017. The study is grounded in sociolinguistic-based Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It adopts Van Leuween's conception of social actor representation as an analytical framework to investigate the inclusion and exclusion of social actors and the roles allocated to social actors in the Biafra agitation discourse. The study finds that Biafra self-determination groups, security operatives and the Nigerian government are included in the news reports as social actors. Those referred to as 'attackers', and 'killers' are backgrounded and suppressed in the representation of the Biafra agitation discourse. Also, social actors are assigned both active and passive roles.

Keywords: Representation, Critical discourse analysis, Social Actors, Biafra Agitation, Van Leuween, IPOB, MASSOB

Introduction

The Biafra self-determination agitation is linked to and rooted in the British colonialists' Amalgamation proclamation of 1914[1]. Through the proclamation, British colonialists brought together two distinct and separate colonial administrative territories named the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria and the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria during their colonial activities in the upper and lower parts of the Niger Basin in the late 19th century[2]. Within the Niger Basin were distinct ethno cultural states comprised of distinct peoples and cultures that the proclamation unified under one political and administrative entity[3].

[1] Chima Korieh, "Biafra and the Discourse on the Igbo Genocide," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 48,no. 6 (2013): 729.
[2] Toyin Falola and Matthew Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 368.
[3] Arnold Obomanu, "The Nigerian Mindset," last modified Novermber 4, 2014. https://saharareporters.com/2014/11/04/nigerian-mindset-arnold-obomanu

The amalgamation created an "awareness of the principle of self-determination" among the distinct peoples and ethnic groups in the territory[4]. Significantly, the Federal system of government established in the 1950s that constitutionally divided Nigeria into three regions – the Eastern, Western and Northern Regions (a fourth region, the Mid-Western region, was created in 1963) – further deepened the competition and suspicion[5] among the three regions mainly controlled by one or two ethnic groups – Igbos in the Eastern Region, Yorubas in the Western Region and Hausa-Fulani in the Northern Region[6]. The constitutional provisions of Federalism brought to fore the ethnic differences among the regions, the consolidation of power centrally, and made each region strive for recognition and relevance at the national level[7]. Inevitably, post-independent Nigeria experienced crises with ethnic undertones spurred by political misrule and upheavals that still breeds 'tension and mistrust'[8]and 'inherent suspicion' among its people[9]. Of particular note are the military coup and counter-coup of January 15 and July 29, 1966, that led to self-determined agitations from the Eastern region. The crises along-side these agitations to secede and constitute the Republic of Biafra culminated in the Nigerian Civil War in 1967.

However, Biafra self-determination agitations did not end with the war. The culminated 'feelings of alienation and marginalisation'[10] led to the emergence of social movements like the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in 1999 and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in 2013[11].Summarily, the social movements demand the actualisation of the defunct state of Biafra using non-violent measures[12] such as peaceful demonstrations and sit-at-home protests[13].Subsequently,self-determination

[4]AkinyeleRufus Taiwo. "The State and Minority Agitation in Nigeria." In *Minorities and the State in Africa*, edited by Michael Mbanaso and Chima Korieh, 293 – 316. New York: Cambria Press, 2010.
[5] Chima Korieh, "Biafra and the Discourse on the Igbo Genocide," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 48,no. 6 (2013): 732.
[6]Lasse Herteen and Dirk Moses, "The Nigeria-Biafra War: Post-Colonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide,"*Journal of Genocide Research*16, no. 2-3 (2014): 178.
[7]Esther Ajiboye and Taiwo Abioye, "When Citizens Talk: Stance and Representation in Online Discourse on Biafra Agitations,"*Discourse & Society* 30, no. 2 (2019): 124.
[8] Esther Ajiboye and Taiwo Abioye, "When Citizens Talk: Stance and Representation in Online Discourse on Biafra Agitations,"*Discourse & Society* 30, no. 2 (2019): 119.
[9]Chima Korieh, "Biafra and the Discourse on the Igbo Genocide," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 48, no. 6 (2013): 730.
[10]Innocent Chiluwa, "Social Media Networks and the Discourse of Resistance: A Sociolinguistic CDA of Biafra Online Discourses,"*Discourse & Society* 23, no. 3 (2012): 222.
[11]Innocent Chiluwa, "A Nation Divided against Itself: Biafra and the Conflicting Online Protest Discourses," *Discourse & Communication* 12, no. 4 (2018): 372.
[12]Innocent Chiluwa, "Social Media Networks and the Discourse of Resistance: A Sociolinguistic CDA of Biafra Online Discourses,"*Discourse & Society* 23, no. 3 (2012): 217.
[13]Obianyo Nkolika. 2007."Citizenship and Ethnic Militia Politics in Nigeria – Marginalisation or IdentityQuestion? The case of MASSOB." Paper presented at the 3rd Global Conference on Pluralism,Inclusion and Citizenship, Salzburg, Austria, 18–19 November.

agitations for a separate state of Biafra became more prominent in 2015 following a prolonged widespread wave of protests that started in the East and spread to other parts of the country. These protests championing self-determined agitations for a separate Biafra state attracted media attention and dominated newspaper headlines.

Generally, the news media and newspapers have constructed and represented the agitation discourse in various ways. Through these media representations, meanings are attached to social actors and issues in the Biafra self-determination discourse and made visible through language[14]. Language is, therefore, a tool used by the media to produce meaning and representation of versions of the agitations and social actors therein based on the media's organisational aim, interests and ideological positions[15]. Hence, the language of the news media is not objective as journalists employ language and personification techniques to create the impression that certain individuals, groups or institutions are acting in particular societal events. Hence, only a systematised and objective examination of the language of news reportage can identify the linguistic means used to include and exclude social actors in the Biafra self-determination discourse. Therefore, this article seeks to understand how selected newspapers have represented social actors in the media discourse of Biafra self-determination agitations.

Extant Literature and Statement of the Problem

Studies on Biafra self-determination agitation discourse in Nigeria have examined the underlying issues of these agitations in Nigeria[16,17]which predominantly focus on the origin and causes of the Biafran struggle[18],the marginalisation of the Igbos[19], the measures of repression adopted by the state

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[14] Zaline Roy-Campbell, "Meeting the Needs of English Learners," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 56, no. 3 (2012): 187

[15] Rotimi Taiwo and Ebuka Igwebuike, "Representation of Bakassi Peninsula Conflict in Nigeria and Cameroon Print Media: A Critical Discourse Approach," *Linguistik Online* 72, (2015): 130. https://doi.org/10.13092/lo.72.1976

[16]Esther Ajiboye and Taiwo Abioye, "When Citizens Talk: Stance and Representation in Online Discourse on Biafra Agitations,"*Discourse & Society* 30, no. 2 (2019): 121.

[17]Chris Ojukwu, "Igbo Nation, Modern Statecraft and the Geopolitics of National Survival in aMulti-Ethnic Nation,"*African Journal of Political Science and International Relations* 3, no. 5 (2009):187.

[18]Moses Duruji, "Social Inequality, Democratic Transition and the Igbo Nationalism Resurgence in Nigeria,"*African Journal of Political Science and International Relations* 3, no. 1 (2009): 54.

[19]Kingsley Ezemenaka and JanProuza, "Biafra Resurgence: State Failure, Insecurity and Separatist Agitations in Nigeria,"*Central European Journal of International & Security Studies* 10, no. 3 (2016): 90.

against the agitation[20,21] and arguments about the Biafra war being a genocide[22]. Using quantitative content analysis, other studies have also examined the media's framing of the Biafra self-determination agitation[23][24]. For instance, a study[25]examined *The Guardian* and *Nigerian Tribune's* framing of Biafra self-determination agitation discourse based on frame types, frame sources, editorial formats and the portrayal of neo-Biafra agitators in the selected newspapers.

Only a few studies have used Critical Discourse Analysis to examine the Biafra agitation phenomenon[26][27]. For example, a study[28] also applied critical discourse analysis to study online discourses produced by one of the pro-Biafra groups, the Indigenous People of Biafra. The author specifically examined the discourse structures, discursive strategies and the political implications of the online discourses to the overall actualisation of the Biafra nation. Another study[29] also examined the discursive strategies deployed in Nigerian newspapers' framing of pre-civil war events and Biafra agitations.

Out of these few studies, very scant research has examined social actors' representation in the Biafra agitation discourse. Only one study[30] applied critical discourse analysis to explore the social actor representation in the Biafra agitation discourse. The study, however, only provided insights on the

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[20] Olalekan Adigun, "Repression of the Neo-Biafra Movement – Measures, Responses and Consequences,"*Journal of Social Science Studies* 5, no. 2 (2018): 142

[21] Olasupo Thompson,Chris Ojukwu, and Onyekwere Nwaorgu, "United We Fall, Divided We Stand: Resuscitation of the Biafra State Secession and the National Question Conundrum," *JORIND* 14, no. 1 (2016): 10.

[22]Chima Korieh, "Biafra and the Discourse on the Igbo Genocide," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 48, no. 6 (2013): 728.

[23] Verlumun Gever, Michael Okunu, and Eke Oyeoku, "Media and opposing voices: Newsframes and slants of Nigeria's restructuring agitations,"*African Journalism Studies*39, no. 4 (2019): 133. 10.1080/23743670.2018.154957

[24]Chinenye Nwabuezeand Ephraim Ezebuenyi, "Newspaper Framing of Biafra Agitation under Buhari's Administration and Its Influence on Public Support for the Struggle," *African Journalism Studies* 40, no. 1 (2019): 13.

[25] Francis Amenaghawon, "Framing of Neo-Biafra Agitations in Selected Nigerian Newspapers,"*Ebonyi State University Journal of Mass Communication* 4, no. 1 (2017): 7.

[26] Muhammad Ahmad, "Social Media and Hate Speech: Analysis of Comments on Biafra Agitations, Arewa Youths' Ultimatum and their Implications on Peaceful Coexistence in Nigeria,"*MCC* 2, no. 1 (2018): 58.

[27] Esther Ajiboye, "Polarisation and Sustenance of Biafra Secessionist Discourses Online,"*Journal of Asian and African Studies*55, no. 4 (2020): 480, doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909619883403

[28]Innocent Chiluwa, "A Nation Divided against Itself: Biafra and the Conflicting Online Protest Discourses," *Discourse & Communication* 12, no. 4 (2018): 369.

[29] Moyosore Alade and Kolade Ajilore,"Nigerian Newspapers' Framing of Pre-civil War Events and Biafra Agitations in Nigeria: An Analysis of Discursive Strategies,"*ESUT Journal of Media Studies* 10, no. *1* (2019):

[30]Esther Ajiboye and Taiwo Abioye, "When Citizens Talk: Stance and Representation in Online Discourse on Biafra Agitations,"*Discourse & Society* 30, no. 2 (2019): 124.

stance, representation and positioning of social actors in the online citizen discourse on Biafra self-determined agitations. This study goes beyond online citizen discourse and differs from previous studies because it examines the discursive construction and representation of social actors in Biafra self-determination agitation discourse which has not been adequately researched. Therefore, this study examines the discourse strategies deployed by Nigerian newspapers in (re)presenting social actors in the Biafra self-determination agitation discourse through a social actor analysis. A social actor analysis of the media discourse on Biafra self-determination agitation significantly exposes discriminatory discourse[31], gives insight into how language is ideologically used to re(present) social actors and shows the implication of media (re)presentations of the agitation discourse on public perception. Therefore, the current study investigates the inclusion/exclusion of social actors and their roles in the media discourse on Biafra self-determination agitations.

Theoretical Framework

The study is theoretically grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), within which van Leuween's conception of the Representation of Social Actors[32] is situated as an analytical framework to examine how social actors are discursively represented in the Biafra self-determination agitation discourse in selected Nigerian online newspapers. The framework allows the author to examine how power is socially assigned to social actors viz-a-viz the implication of such assignment. The analytical framework gives insight into the inclusion/exclusion of social actors and their roles and unravels the unequal power relations that might play in the media discourse on Biafra self-determination agitations in Nigeria.

This study adoptedvan Leuween's socio-semantic network of social actors because of its focus on the semantic representation of social actors in discourse. Van Leuween proposes that social actors are defined and labeled based on the 'roles assigned to them in reality or represented in the given text'[33]. This study focused on two categories of Leuween's[34] framework – exclusion/inclusion and role allocation. The framework was applied to investigate the inclusion and exclusion of social actors and the participant roles assigned to them. Representations can either exclude or include social actors. Social actors are excluded when they are completely or partially left out of a text. The exclusion process is further divided into two categories: suppression – no reference is

[31] Theo Van Leuween, *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Analysis*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[32] Theo Van Leuween, *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Analysis*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[33] Ayo Osinsanwo, "Role Allocation in the Media Representation of Participants in Selected Electoral Discoursesin Nigeria," *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications* 2, no. 3 (2016): 183 – 204.
[34]Theo Van Leuween, *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

made to the social actor(s) and backgrounding – social actor(s) are mentioned in the text but not in relation to an action[35]. Suppression is realised through passive agent deletion, non-finite clauses functioning as a grammatical participant, deletion of beneficiaries, nominalisations and process nouns, and adjectives, while backgrounding is realised through simple ellipses in non-finite clauses with *–ing* and *–ed* participles, infinitival clauses with *to* and paratactic clauses[36].

The second category, role allocation, refers to how representations "reallocate roles or rearrange the social relations"[37] between social actors. Roles are allocated in two ways – activation and passivation. Activation has to do with the representation of social actors as active participants in a given activity. It is realised through participation, prepositional circumstantials, and possessive pronoun (possessivation). Passivation, however, has to do with the representation of social actors as beneficiaries of an action and is further divided into two categories: subjected, that is, social actors treated as objects and beneficialized, that is, social actors that benefit from an action. Subjection is realised by participation, circumstantialization, and possessivation, while beneficialization is realised by participation, where the social actor is at the receiving end of a material or verbal process[38].

Van Leuween's socio-semantic network of social actors is relevant to understanding the representation of social actors in the Biafra self-determination agitation discourse because it significantly contributes to the disclosure of discriminatory discourses and reveals unequal power relations.

Methodology

This study is mainly concerned with how social actors are discursively represented in the Biafra self-determination agitation discourse. To this end, the data for this study are articles on the discourse obtained and downloaded from the electronic version of two mainstream newspapers – *The Punch* and *The Guardian*. *The Punch* and *The Guardian* newspapers were purposively selected because their printed versions are widely circulated in Nigeria, and the electronic version is available online and easily accessible. A total of 100 articles on Biafra agitation were obtained. The keyword 'Biafra' was used to extract articles from the websites of the selected newspapers. The 100 articles were selected from online news articles on Biafra agitation that appeared in the first

[35] Theo Van Leuween, *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Analysis*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9.
[36] Theo Van Leuween, *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Analysis*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 10.
[37] Theo Van Leuween, *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Analysis*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 12.
[38]Theo Van Leuween, *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

ten webpages of search results – 50 articles for *Punch* and 50 articles for *The Guardian*. The articles are dated between 2016 and 2019, when Biafra self-determination agitations became intense and widespread. The issues and events reported in the selected newspaper articles include but are not limited to the Biafra agitation championed by pro-Biafra groups demonstrated in sit-at-home protests and strikes, the government's response to the agitation, security operatives' intervention and response to Biafra-led protests and demonstrations, court hearings of pro-Biafra group members among others.

Analysis and Findings

This study's theoretical framework of analysis is Van Leuween's[39]conception of the Representation of Social Actors. Within this analytical framework, I examine the representation of social actors in the Biafra self-determination agitation discourse. The main findings of the study are summarised below under the following headings – inclusion/exclusion of social actors in the Biafra agitation discourse and the roles allocated to social actors in the Biafra agitation discourse in terms of being assigned active or passive roles in media representation of the discourse. Social actors assigned active roles are represented as actors in a given activity, while social actors assigned passive roles are represented as patients or at the receiving end of an activity. According to van Leuween (2008), passivated social actors can either be subjected (treated as an object) or beneficialized (benefit from an action).

Inclusion of Social Actors in Media Discourse of Biafra Self-Determination Agitation Discourse

To discuss the pattern of inclusion of social actors in the media discourse on Biafra self-determination agitation, there is a need to categorise the social actors represented under various common denominators. The categorisation serves "as an anchor for analysis" (van Leuween, 2008:11). Hence, for this analysis, "pro-Biafra self-determination groups" are referred to as actors (social movements' leaders and/or members) who actively clamour for a separate state of Biafra. The Nigerian government and government officials are called the"government", while the police officers, military personnel and department of state services are the"security operatives."Those who attack or victimise others are"attackers",and those who kill are "killers".

Pro-Biafra Self-determination Groups

The selected newspapers included members and leaders of pro-Biafra self-determination groups such as MASSOB, IPOB, and Biafra Zionist Federation (BZF), among others, as social actors. The groups and members are included

[39]Theo Van Leuween, *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Analysis*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

and activated as 'sayers' in verbal processes explaining their activities and response to opposition(s) towards their clamour for the actualisation of a sovereign state of Biafra. See the excerpts below:

A1. Pro-Biafra agitators, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB**),** have declared a general strike across the South-east and South-South geo-political zones and other areas where Biafrans reside on September 14 to mourn those killed in the struggle for the restoration of Biafra Independence since 2015. (*The Guardian*, August 28, 2018).

A2. Leader of MASSOB, Uchenna Madu, stated in Awgu, Enugu State, during the 20th anniversary celebration of the group, that there was no going back in the struggle for Biafra republic. (*The Guardian*, September 16, 2019)

In A1 and A2 above, the self-determination agitators are depicted as resolutely fighting for a cause and actively taking steps, including declaring a 'general strike' to mourn the killings of their members while ensuring that the struggle for a separate state of Biafra does not end despite lives lost. The head of one of the groups, Madu – the leader of MASSOB – described their resolute stance of winning the struggle for a separate state of Biafra without turning back from their mission. Again, the functionalisation strategy is deployed here to justify Madu's position in the discourse. Madu's voice is authentic and validated by his position as the leader of MASSOB. As the leader, he must ensure that the goal of having a separate state of Biafra is actualised. The tactical employment of his name shows that he is the one in charge at MASSOB.

It is also important to examine excerpt A3 below regarding how pro-Biafra self-determination groups were included and activated as 'sayers' in verbal processes.

A3. The proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra, on Tuesday, announced that it would be holding a referendum on the same day as the presidential election on February 16.(*Punch*, January 29, 2019)

In excerpt A3, the fronting of the 'proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra' by the selected newspapers is to validate the group's voice as making an announcement that should not be taken seriously since it has been proscribed. The 'proscribed' and 'it' deployed in the excerpt depicts a denial of the existence and disassociation from the group by the newspaper in this instance. In the same instance, they were also activated as being defiant to the government of the day through the verbal process, which confirms that its activities would hold on the same day as the presidential election. The pragmatic implication in the excerpt above is that the author of the text relays the announcement of the referendum as declared by IPOB while encouraging the readers to pay attention to its proscribed status as a way of dissuading them from following through with attendance at the referendum.

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They were also included through the circumstantial preposition 'by' as disturbing the peace of the populace and security agencies. See excerpt A4 below:

A4. The statement said: "The attention of the general public is hereby drawn to the unwarranted **attack** that was launched **by** combined members of the Movement for Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) against the peace-loving populace as well as security agencies at about 0415 hours on May 30 2016. (*The Guardian*, June 1, 2016)

The functionalisation strategy is deployed to justify the statement's position referenced in the excerpt. Functionalisation refers to the activities of social actors in terms of the role allocated to them in the discourse. As included social actors, pro-Biafra self-determination agitators, particularly IPOB and MASSOB, are assigned the role of constituting a threat to the peace of citizens of the state who are naturally 'peace-loving' and security agencies that are meant to keep the peace in the state.

Also, pro-Biafra self-determination groups are passivated and subjected to 'arrest', 'attacks', 'exploitation', 'humiliation', 'slavery' etc. Hence, they are assigned the roles of being subjected to these activities. See the excerpts below:

A5. We petition the UN to support, facilitate and conduct a referendum in Nigeria for Biafrans to affirm their self-determination, rights and stop being massively exploited and used as slaves to sustain northern Nigeria," the group said in its petition. (*Punch*, November 4, 2017)

A6. They brought war and death to us**,** and they will one day, in the not too distant future, reap what they sowed. (*Punch*, October 10, 2017)

A7. However, the MASSOB, which in a statement signed by its National Director of Information, Samuel Edeson, distanced its members from the disruption of the meeting, has asked Governor Ugwuanyi to intervene and ensure the immediate release of all those arrested by the police for allegedly participating in the disruption of the meeting. (*The Guardian*, March 1, 2018)

There are also instances where pro-Biafra groups are passivated as negatively benefiting from an action; in this case, the presence of Biafra in Nigeria without seceding has made Biafra agitators benefit negatively in terms of war and death (see A6). The passive construction in the excerpts above shifts away attention from the agents of the negative actions of being 'exploited', 'used', 'arrested' etc., to the patients of the actions. Hence, the media discourse emphasises the negative aspects of the conflict involving Biafra self-determination groups while hiding and shifting attention away from the perpetrators of the violent acts.

In another instance, categorisation strategy was used to depict Biafra self-determination groups. Categorisation is a strategy that identifies individuals in terms of functions and ideologies they share with other groups. This is revealed in the excerpt below:

A8. We, the global family of the Indigenous People of Biafra ably led by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, wish to announce officially to the people of Biafra, both home and in the diaspora, friends of Biafra and lovers of freedom, that our supreme leader Mazi Nnamdi Kanu is currently in London to join his family and see a newborn child he hadn't seen because of his illegal incarceration and detention since 2015. (*Punch*, January 29, 2019)

Using the categorisation strategy, the Biafra self-determination agitators are compared to lovers of freedom that want to be free to secede from Nigeria to constitute Biafra. The reporter uses the word 'lovers of freedom' as association to denote 'us', a group of people who are united in their resolve against 'them' – the government of Nigeria.

Security Operatives

Other social actors included in the Biafra agitation discourse are security operatives. As social actors, security operatives are represented in a contradictory manner. They are activated as the doer in carrying out their duties of arrest and protecting the polity and perpetuating oppressive acts like 'beating' innocent citizens. The activated roles of the security operatives were realised by prepositional circumstantials such as 'by'(see A10). See the excerpts below:

A9. The Guardian gathered that heavily armed personnel comprises the Army, Police, DSS, Civil Defence and Road Safety Corps were seen patrolling some strategic locations in the state. (*The Guardian*, September 15, 2018)

A10. The secessionists were arrested by the police and the Department of State Services as they approached the gate to the Government House. (*Punch,* November 5, 2018)

In the excerpts above, security officials are depicted as 'heavily armed' and 'patrolling some strategic locations' and arresting secessionists to ensure peace and security in the state. The pragmatic implication of this excerpt is that Biafra self-determination agitators have constituted a huge threat to the peace and security of the state that security operatives need to keep and be 'heavily armed' while at it. The security operatives are represented as protecting the citizens against the harmful tendencies of pro-Biafra self-determination agitators.

A11. The Imo State correspondent of The PUNCH, Emeka Ihiegbulem, was on Tuesday beaten up by the men of the Nigeria Police Force, soldiers and other security agencies during the 18th anniversary celebration of the formation of the Movement for the Actualisation of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Biafra Independent Movement (BIM), founded by Chief Ralph Uwazuruike. (*Punch*, May 23, 2016)

In excerpt A11 above, however, security operatives are depicted as being a threat to law-abiding citizens going about their professional duties. The fronting of the Imo state correspondent of *The Punch* newspaper that was beaten up by security operatives authenticates the voice of the newspaper on the matter. Here, the media house confirms the violent attacks by security operatives on responsible citizens such as a journalist.

Government

However, alongside its security operatives, the government is constructed as the perpetrator of the violence associated with Biafra self-determination agitation and is not capable of stopping the activities of pro-Biafra self-determination groups. See the excerpts below:

A12. It was the Nigerian government and her security operatives that brought violence into the Biafran agitation, not IPOB. Should IPOB decide to engage in armed struggle at a future date, the world must hold the government of Buhari, Igbo governors and Ohanaeze Ndigbo responsible. (*Punch*, October 10, 2017)

A13. Okpara Square and other parts of Enugu were surrounded with heavy security, but Buhari and his men failed to stop the swearing-in of Zionists leader, Onwuka, as Biafra president. (*The Guardian*, August 1, 2019)

The government, in some instances, was also assigned an active role as a social actor. The government was activated as a 'behaver' in the behavioural process of wanting to promote favouritism in the country. See the example below:

A14. Speaking with The Guardian in Enugu, Eya stressed that the deliberate desire to favour a section of the country over others by the government was creating infractions among the populace. (*The Guardian*, July 7, 2019)

There are also instances the government was assigned the role of being an actor in the material process of identifying the reasons for the Biafra agitation. See the excerpt below:

A15. Acting President Yemi Osinbajo scored a bull's eye with his identification of the pathogen causing the eruption and inflammation of ethnic animus across Nigeria recently. (*Punch*, July 6, 2017)

Exclusion of Social Actors in Media Discourse of Biafra Self-Determination Agitation Discourse

Van Leeuwen's[40] analytical framework notes that social actors canbe excluded in a less radical manner (backgrounding) or a radical manner (suppression). In line with this, the analysis reveals that "attackers" who victimise others were backgrounded as social actors, as depicted in the excerpts below:

A16. The secessionist group added that, through the referendum, it intends to "return power to the long-suffering, downtrodden masses, to enable them to determine their destiny which was cruelly taken away by successive Nigerian governments." (*Punch*, June 20, 2018)

A17. A statement in Enugu by the Deputy Director, Army Public Relations, 82 Division, Nigerian Army Enugu, Col. H.A Gambo, stated that the intervention of the army followed a fierce attack launched on security operatives who were carrying out their legitimate duties. He said that the attack came from protesters who included members of the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and IPOB. (*The Guardian*, June 1, 2016)

As seen in excerptsA16 and A17, the social actor(s) responsible for the downtrodden state of the masses and the attack is backgrounded and not mentioned in direct relation with the given action of "downtrodden" and "fierce attack". However, it can be implied that "successive Nigerian governments" and "protesters", mentioned elsewhere in the texts, are represented as the social actor responsible for the downtrodden state of the masses and the attacks on security operatives, as seen in the next clause. Backgrounding social actors categorised as attackers reduced the number of times they were referred to in the online newspaper articles.

Not only were attackers backgrounded, but they were also suppressed as social actors and excluded radically from the newspaper articles, as seen in the excerpts below:

A18. He narrated how he and his family members escaped what he described as "assault," promising that the "efficiency of the MOSSAD" would be replicated in the IPOB intelligence to avenge the blood of IPOB members that fell. (*Punch*, October 21, 2018)

A19. In a statement signed by the leader of MASSOB Comrade Uche Madu made available to newsmen in Abakaliki, MASSOB made it clear that no amount of intimidation, harassments, arrests, killings and detentions will stop them from actualising the Sovereign state of Biafra. (*The Guardian*, May 11, 2016)

[40]Theo Van Leuween, *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Analysis*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

The examples (A18 – A19) above show that social actors who attacked leaders and members of pro-Biafra groups such as Biafra Zionists' Federation (BZF) and IPOB were suppressed. Instead, the subjects of the attacks were the focus. They include the IPOB leader, Nnamdi Kanu and other members of pro-Biafra self-determination groups like MASSOB and BZF, represented as dogged fighters who would not back down from their clamour for a separate state of Biafra despite 'intimidation, harassment, arrests, killings and detentions.' Like the social actors categorised as "killers", the suppression of "attackers" in the selected newspaper articles was realised through passive agent deletion. Ideologically, the text producer tries to generalise the actors involved in the killing, harassing and intimidating Biafra self-determination agitators and leaves the mind of the readers to fill in the gap depending on their perspective.

Findings also reveal that "killers"- those categorised as responsible for the death of members of pro-Biafra groups- were suppressed as social actors. For example:

A20. The leader of the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra, Nnamdi Kanu, has said that the intelligence prowess of the MOSSAD will be replicated within Biafran intelligence, purposely to avenge the death of 28 IPOB members, that of his cousin Adaku; and also that of Jack, his dog, all of who were allegedly killed during the invasion of his father's compound last year.(*Punch*, October 21, 2018)

A21. One person was reportedly killed while the city police are now looking for the concerned persons so as to deport them, a source told Times of India. (*Punch*, September 27, 2017)

A22. Pro-Biafra agitators, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) have declared general strike across the South-east and South-South geo-political zones and other areas where Biafrans reside on September 14 to mourn those killed in the struggle for the restoration of Biafra Independence since 2015.(*The Guardian*, August 28, 2018)

From the examples (A20 – A22) given above, it is evident that social actors responsible for killing members of pro-Biafra self-determination groups, such as IPOB in this case, were completely omitted and suppressed through passive agent deletion in the newspaper articles. Those killed due to the agitation are the focal attention here; hence, those killed are fronted in the discourse. The reader is left to wonder who did the killing.

Conclusion

The clamours for a separate state of Biafra is a discourse that is not letting up as different pro-Biafra groups continue to champion it. These agitations remain a vital and volatile issue in the Nigerian polity. As a result, examining how various participants in the Biafra agitation discourse are made visible as social actors in

the Nigerian media has become imperative. Hence, this study examines the media discourse on the inclusion/exclusion and the allocated roles of social actors in the Biafra self-determination agitation discourse using Van Leuween's[41] conceptualisation of the Representation of Social Actors. The study shows that Biafra self-determination groups, security operatives and the government were included as social actors, attackers were backgrounded, and both attackers and killers were completely suppressed in the newspaper reports. Also, security operatives were assigned active roles as doers, while Biafra self-determination groups were assigned active roles as both sayers and participants in the material processes of lobbying for the Biafra referendum, among other things. The government, however, was assigned the active role of behaving and acting in response to the activities of the Biafra self-determination agitation groups. The study shows that only Biafra self-determination groups were assigned passive roles and subjected to arrests, attacks, humiliation and slavery. They were also perceived as negatively benefitting from their continued existence in Nigeria.

One of the main security implications of the media's representation of social actors in the discourse on Biafra self-determination agitations, as revealed by this study, is that the depiction of the Nigerian government and its security operatives as reacting and responding negatively to the self-determination agitations through arrests and attacks the agitators are subjected to is a strong discursive strategy that favours the agitators while making the government and its security agencies look bad. Although, Biafra self-determination groups are also depicted as threatening the peace of the polity. However, compared to the government and its security agencies depicted as actual perpetrators of violence and attacks, this representation of Biafra agitators pales in comparison. Hence, this media representation is likely to incite and promote support for the agitators at national and international levels, thereby sustaining the conflict over time. Another security implication of the media's discourse on Biafra self-determination agitation is the total suppression of enactors of violence. The media's failure to explicitly include and identify other enactors of violence apart from the government and its security agencies in its discourse on Biafra self-determination agitation makes these 'killers' and 'attackers' faceless. This makes it difficult to identify who or what is responsible for the violence associated with the agitations.

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