# CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE 'NON-NEGOTIABLE UNITY OF NIGERIA' DEBATE IN THE NIGERIAN PRESS

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**ABSTRACT:** This present study interrogated the 'non-negotiable unity of Nigeria' mantra propagated in the media by successive administrations in Nigeria. With a particular focus on two administrations—President Goodluck Jonathan and President Muhammadu Buhari, this study, using Critical Discourse Analysis, examined how the debate is represented in two Nigerian dailies—*Vanguard* and *Leadership*. Employing Fairclough's three-dimensional model, this research probed the discourse articulated and circulated through the news stories in these papers, which they produce to define the debate. The study found that both papers exploited the "us" versus "them" dichotomy to cut an image of institutions committed to Nigeria's unity. The study constructs proponents of Nigeria's unity, primarily the political elite, in a positive light as possessing agency, while it negatively frames secessionist agitators as lacking agency. The study demonstrated that the interests of the political class served and validated. The research indicated that the press mobilised discourses of patriotism and nationalism. By reinforcing the non-negotiable stance of the political elite, the press was narrowing the space for debate on Nigeria's unity, thus, perpetuating a dysfunctional union.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, CDA, IPOB, Transitivity Analysis, Editorials, Online Comments

## INTRODUCTION

One of the legacies of colonialism on the African continent was the formation of several African states. Craven (2015) observes that the main goal of the Berlin-West Africa Conference of 1884–1885 was to negotiate the process of colonisation in Africa in a bid to forestall the outbreak of an armed conflict between rival colonial powers. Each colonial power, including the US, endorsed a General Act as a result of the conference, outlining the conditions for acquiring territory on the African coast (Craven, 2015). The partitioning, as it turned out, did not take into account the ethno-religious peculiarities of each location. Nowhere has this been more evident than in Nigeria. Sir Frederick Lugard amalgamated the two protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria to form Nigeria as we know it today in 1914 (Crowder, 1978; Omobowale, 2018). Flora Shaw, who later married Sir Lugard, had sixteen years before amalgamation suggested in an article for *The Times* that the several British Protectorates on the Niger be known collectively as Nigeria (Crowder, 1978).

Although Nigeria was the creation of European ambitions and rivalries in West Africa, Crowder (1978) argues that it would be erroneous to assume that its people had little history prior to the final negotiation of its boundaries by Britain, France, and Germany at the turn of the twentieth century. Crowder (1978, p. 1) maintains that the then newly created country included "not just a multiplicity of pagan tribes, but also many great kingdoms that had evolved complex systems of government independent of contact with Europe." The unification of the

protectorates did little to unite Nigeria, as the rationale for the amalgamation was based on economic expediency (Crowder, 1978). A subsidy from the Southern Protectorate and an imperial Grant-in-Aid from Britain, amounting to £300,000 annually, met the Northern Protectorate's huge deficit (Daniels, 2012; Crowder, 1978). Several Nigerian leaders share this view. In his book, *Path to Nigerian Freedom* (1947), Chief Obafemi Awolowo, one of the leading figures of Nigerian politics, writes:

> Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. 'Nigerians' do not exist in the same sense as 'English', 'Welsh', or 'French'. The word 'Nigeria' is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not (pp. 47–48).

Mallam Tafawa Balewa, at the Legislative Council in 1947, made a similar assertion when he argued that, "Since the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Provinces in 1914, Nigeria has existed as one country only on paper. Nigeria remains far from achieving unity... Nigerian unity is only a British intention for the country" (Onwubu 1975, p. 399). Sir Lugard maintained administrative distinction between two protectorates, with indirect rule holding sway in the north and direct administration in the south, seemingly undermining the British intention (Berger, 2009). Men well acquainted with Nigeria, such as E. D. Morel, the then editor of the *African Mail* and a constant critic of colonial policy, argued against this, advocating for the division of the country into four large provinces (Crowder, 1978).

Despite Nigeria's existence for over a century, the country continues to grapple with the issue of national integration. Reflecting on this challenge, Tamuno writes:

> Historically, it was easier to establish the Nigerian state than to nourish the Nigerian nation. While the 1914 amalgamation largely achieved the former, both British officials and Nigerians struggled to achieve the latter for several decades thereafter (1970, p. 564).

Incidents of centrifugal tendencies have punctuated Nigeria's socio-political trajectory, stemming from the leadership's inability to nurture the nation. Tamuno (1970) attributes secessionist threats to several factors, including the country's heterogeneous ethnic make-up, cultural diversity, widespread administrative malfeasance, controversial political and constitutional arrangements, personality clashes among Nigerian leaders before and after independence, and the absence of a strong ideological pull. National negotiations have utilised the threat of secession from Nigeria as a negotiating tool since colonial times. For instance, in 1950, during the Richards constitution review in Ibadan, south-west Nigeria, an Emir from Zaria declared that if the Northern region did not receive 50 percent of the seats in the Central Legislature, it would seek separation from the rest of Nigeria based on the pre-1914 arrangement (Tamuno, 1970, p. 568). Three years later, the north issued a similar threat, sparking a debate in the House of Representatives over the Action Group-sponsored self-government motion (Sklar, 2004). Seven years after Nigeria achieved self-government, the country was involved in a civil war with the Igbos (Eastern Region) over what the region believed to be maltreatment of her people in other parts of Nigeria and the inability of the government to guarantee the safety of Easterners in various parts of the country (Stremlau, 2015; Chiluwa, 2012; Jervis, 1967). After the civil war, then head of state, Gen. Yakubu Gowon, declared there was no victor, no vanquished, and implemented the policy of

reconciliation, reconstruction, and rehabilitation to reintegrate defunct Biafra into Nigeria (Last, 2000).

In recent times, there has been a resurgence of separatist groups, particularly in the south-east and south-south geopolitical zones. Perceived injustices in these areas have sparked the agitation. The south-south, for instance, is agitating for resource control and environmental justice in its area due to oil exploratory activities. Recent alleged marginalization of the area has revived the South East's quest for the establishment of the sovereign state of Biafra. This has resulted in the emergence of separatist groups like the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) (Ajiboye & Abioye, 2019). Successive administrations have responded to such calls by insisting that Nigeria must remain one and indivisible country (Onuoha, 2018; Anber, 1967). In 2017, President Muhammadu Buhari, while receiving Vice President Yemi Osinbajo and other government functionaries in the State House who came to pay him *Sallah* homage, maintained that Nigeria's unity was not negotiable (*Punch*, 2016). The president's assertion was in response to agitation by Niger Delta militants and pro-Biafra groups for the breakup of the country. This declaration sparked significant media controversy, both for and against the statement. While those who support (*proponents*) President Buhari's assertion maintain that Nigeria must remain united, those who oppose (*opponents*) argue that Nigeria's unity is indeed negotiable.

The insistence on the indivisibility of Nigeria has been characteristic of Nigerian leadership. Several Nigerian heads of state, including both civilian and military, governors, lawmakers, and essentially all members of the political elite, have deployed the non-negotiable unity of Nigeria mantra to prevent any discussion about Nigeria's structural composition. This suggests that the Nigerian leadership lacks the political will to engage in a conversation about Nigeria's unity. Despite blocking such discussions and advocating for the non-negotiable unity of Nigeria in the media, centrifugal tendencies persist. The political class has access to the media and seems to advance a hegemonic narrative about Nigeria, which does entertain questioning the very nature of Nigeria (Rojas, 2010). The current wave of agitation for the renegotiation of Nigeria's unity began when President Muhammadu Buhari assumed office as the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 2015. According to Jimoh (2017), the president's alleged lopsided appointments have fuelled this agitation, seemingly alienating certain sections of the country.

Therefore, this paper, through the application of critical discourse analysis (CDA), aims to scrutinize newspaper coverage of the discussions surrounding Nigeria's unity. The way an issue is mediated in the media can arguably shape citizens' views on the matter. To put it another way, the research aims to identify the media discourses that drive this debate. Whose interest is served? Whose position is validated? Whose position is delegitimized? How is the issue defined?

The study starts by outlining its theoretical and methodological foundations. It then provides an analysis of the press's representation of the debate. Finally, we reflect on the findings and conclude the study.

**Theoretical and methodological considerations**

Poststructuralist understandings serve as the foundation for this work. This work relies on Foucauldian insights to understand the relationship between discourse, power, and subject. From a Foucauldian perspective, discourse extends beyond its linguistic definition as a mere string of words, group of signs, or text. Here, discourse extends beyond the text and signs of linguistics to encompass various institutions and practices that produce certain knowledge (Prinsloo, 2009). Prinsloo (2009) explains that discourse is preoccupied with knowledge, or what constitutes 'truth' in a specific time and place, as well as power. According to Foucault, discourse relates to a group of statements that provide a language for talking about a given topic at a specific historical moment (1981). Discourse is involved in the production of knowledge through language. Based on language and practices, discourse defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. Apart from defining what counts as truth, discourse also authenticates particular subject positions that are in line with that truth. A range of technologies enact a given moral order that discourse specifies. Foucault (1982) explicates that the subject exercises these technologies of self to construct and embody a given identity. Performance manifests this enactment and recognizes it. Authority figures determine truth, which links knowledge and power (Hall, 1997).

Discourse is both productive for the subject and limits the forms and likely realms of knowledge and action (Foucault, 1979). In the same vein, Foucault (1979) asserts that power works on the body through "a set of material elements and techniques that serve as weapons, relays, communication routes, and supports for the power and knowledge relations that invest human bodies and subjugate them by turning them into objects of knowledge" (p. 28). Subjectivity relates to various subject positions validated by a given discourse. People believe that a particular discourse produces and subjects a subject to itself (Hall, 1997). For instance, a capitalist discourse shapes those whose knowledge it shapes into willing subjects of capitalism, and these subject positions are considered normal. In every historical moment and place, no single discourse exists (though there may be hegemonic ones), but there is always a contending one in circulation. Dewa and Prinsloo (2012) contend that in any discursive field, a multitude of competing discourses strive to establish their own dominant regime of truth. Therefore, discourse is never static but always shifting in reference to other discourses.

Located within an interpretive tradition, this qualitative study adopts CDA as its approach. CDA represents a burgeoning body of literature that uses the functionalist definition of discourse (Richardson, 2007). Apart from its conception of discourse as language in use, Richardson (2007) explains that the main objective of CDA is to connect linguistic analysis to social analysis. CDA takes the view that power relations are discursive (Machin & Mayr, 2012). In other words, discourses transmit and exercise power. If we accept Gee's (2011) view of a general idea of functionalist discourse, which holds that language use plays a role in the reproduction of social life, then critical discourse analysts argue that discourse must contribute to the production and reproduction of social inequalities (Richardson, 2007). Consequently, CDA aims to intervene in social practices and social relationships, especially in relation to marginalization, oppression, prejudice, and discrimination (Richardson, 2007). Specifically, CDA scrutinizes news texts, political speeches, advertisements, and schoolbooks, revealing strategies that, while seemingly normal on the surface, may actually be ideological and aim to manipulate the portrayal of events and personalities to achieve specific objectives (Machin & Mayr, 2012). By deploying its critical nature, which denaturalizes language to reveal ideas, absences, and taken-for-granted assumptions in texts, CDA realises this exposure. CDA offers

theories and methods for the pragmatic study of relations between discourse and social and cultural developments in various social settings (Jorgensen & Philips, 2002). CDA does not only describe and interpret discourses in social context but also provides explanations of why and how they operate (Rogers, 2004).

This study applies Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of CDA to look into the Nigerian leadership's claims of unbreakable unity in the country. Fairclough (1995, p. 57) includes the model's analysis of the text (the words and ideas in the communication), discourse practice (the making and use of the text), and socio-cultural practice (the social and cultural events that the communication is a part of). With respect to textual analysis, the study adopts an eclectic approach, drawing insights from Halliday's transitivity analysis and Thompson's modes of ideology, among others. Transitivity analysis is a "layered and complex process" that focusses on types of verbs and is concerned with who or what does what to whom (Janks, 1997). Thompson (1990, p. 60) outlines five general modes through which ideology can operate: legitimation, dissimulation, unification, fragmentation, and reification. Second, the discourse practice will examine how these stories are produced and consumed in Nigeria's newspaper industry. Lastly, the socio-cultural approach examines the connection between the texts and the society that produces them. We will address issues of subjectivity, power relations, and ideology.

This study accounts for the ethnic backgrounds of the owners of *Vanguard* and *Leadership* newspapers as conditions for their selection. Sam Amuka Pemu, a Southerner, owns *Vanguard,* while Sam Nda-Isaiah, a Northerner, owns *Leadership.* This ownership structure is believed to influence their positions on national issues, including the negotiation of Nigeria's unity (Adesoji & Hahn, 2011). *Vanguard* is a widely-circulated publication in Nigeria with a daily print run of 120, 000 copies (*Vanguard*, 2019). *Leadership* prides itself as the nation's most influential newspaper (*Leadership*, 2019), and for this reason, it is important to examine their take on an issue as critical as Nigeria's unity. The selection of news reports is time-specific, reflecting two moments: (i) during the administration of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, from the South (2011-2015), and (ii) during the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari, from the North (2015-2019). We entered keywords like "non-negotiable unity of Nigeria," "unity of Nigeria," and "National unity" into the websites of both dallies and entries that emerged from there were screened. Articles that do not relate to the issue of Nigeria's unity, those outside the timeframe under investigation and those from other newspapers were discarded. News reports relating to Nigeria's unity inform the selection of these stories for this study. These newspapers provide a crucial context for examining the representation of Nigeria's non-negotiable unity in the press, as they provide a potent lens for defining these issues and proposing attitudes towards them.

The transitivity framework was applied to identify the types of processes (material, mental, relational etc.) represented in the texts and who is positioned as the agent or experiencer. Thompson's mode of ideology was applied to the present study by assessing which modes of ideology are dominant in discussions about Nigeria's unity.

**Social Media and Alternative Voices**

Social media has significantly transformed the realm of political discourse, altering the dissemination of information and the manner in which citizens participate in political discourse (Klinger & Svensson, 2015; Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012). Platforms such as X, formerly Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram facilitate immediate contact, enabling real-time discussions that surpass geographical

limitations. This accessibility has democratized political participation by enabling ordinary people to express their views, garner support, and contest conventional political narratives (Hendriks & Dzur, 2022; Glover, 2012).

These platforms have offered marginalised communities the opportunity to advance their counter-hegemonic narratives. Little wonder, social media has become a major platform for subalterns to champion views that are ordinarily off-limit in mainstream media (Koiranen et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2018). Separatists groups like the indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in Nigeria (Chiluwa, 2012), the Mthwakazi Liberation Front (MLF) in Zimbabwe (Reim, 2023), the Separatist Anglophone Radical Militia (Amba Boys) in Cameroun (Ngam, 2020) usually use social media to challenge dominant discourses in their respective countries. This has led to the revival of almost forgotten national question.

## Constructions of non-negotiable Unity of Nigeria in News Reports

Report I: 'Nigeria's unity is non-negotiable.' Jonathan (*Vanguard*, September 21, 2012)

This news story was based on *Vanguard*'s coverage of the Nigeria Labour Congress's (NLC) national summit and rally for peace, unity, and development in Abuja. Invited to the event were then president Goodluck Jonathan, retired general Yakubu Gowon, and the governor of Edo State, Adams Oshiomhole, among others. Though NLC was the convener of the summit, *Vanguard*, in keeping with the news value of prominence (Watkin & Looney, 2019), chose to focus her coverage on the above-mentioned personalities. In the report, *Vanguard* aligned its position with that of the President, who stated that "Those seeking the disintegration of the country are 'lazy politicians' seeking to be kings in tiny islands." Politicians, unable to achieve their political objectives, viewed re-negotiating the country's unity as a demand. This took the attention away from the dysfunctional federal state (where constituent states aren't allowed to use their resources to develop their states as espoused in true federalism) and the marginalisation of some parts of the country, making it impossible to deal with the problem in a genuine and honest way. Once again, people mobilized negative stereotypes, such as "lazy politicians," to paint agitators in a negative light. "Kings" and "tiny islands" were words that highlighted the undesirability of this separation. Usually endowed with unlimited powers, kings tend to be tyrannical in nature, implying that whoever leads a breakaway region will lack democratic values. The term "Tiny Islands" alludes to a small, isolated nation that struggles to sustain itself. The Nigerian leadership does not prioritize negotiations for Nigeria's unity. "They will not succeed, as Nigeria will not split." The sentence omits the question of "who" will not comply with the agitators' demands. The news story identified the main actors by name, but it collectivises agitators with pronouns like "they" and "those" and labels them as "lazy politicians." A transitivity analysis revealed active involvement of the President through verbal process: 'Jonathan spoke', 'The president noted that the strength of the nation' 'President Jonathan underscored the need for Nigerians' and mental processes— 'because I believe' 'from the little I know' 'I think those who'. The opponents were once mentioned, with a negative action attributed to them as "seeking the disintegration of Nigeria." The Vanguard report, in contrast to the journalistic practice of ensuring balance and fairness, did not record any attempt to seek the opinion of agitators in the news story.

Report II: Why Nigeria's unity is non-negotiable, Jonathan, others (*Vanguard,* February 5, 2013)

At the event marking the commencement of activities that will culminate in Nigeria's Centenary celebration of the amalgamation of Southern and Northern protectorates in 1914,

President Jonathan addressed the gathering at the Banquet Hall, Presidential Villa, Abuja. It was an auspicious occasion to discuss Nigeria, and Vanguard took up the question of Nigeria's non-negotiable unity. Through its headline, the paper positioned itself as if it were explaining to Nigerians "why Nigeria's unity is non-negotiable." Rationalisation plays a crucial role in establishing the legitimacy of the Nigerian leadership's non-negotiable unity stance. Jonathan's praise for the "virtues of the country... a collection of people specially created by God" aligns with the narrative that Nigeria has no problems. The narrative framed the amalgamation of Southern and Northern protectorates as an "act of God," thereby erasing the role of Governor General Frederick Lugard. Consequently, those who questioned this marriage were seen as challenging a divine arrangement. To 'protect' what God has created, the President "enjoined Nigerians to safeguard those things that have kept the country together for this long." The president did not specifically mention any uniting factor for Nigeria, potentially indicating a lack of a strong national ethos. In an effort to forestall any possibility of splitting the country, the president insisted that "we must remain forward-looking people." The phrase "forward-looking" established the polar opposites of those agitators as "anti-progress" and "backward-looking." In the news report, there was an over-lexicalisation of the pronoun "we." This could be an attempt to rally readers behind this cause.

Report III: 'Nigeria's Unity is not negotiable; the group backs Buhari.' *Vanguard,* July 14, 2016

Following the declaration by President Buhari that Nigeria's unity is non-negotiable, a socio-political group, Stand Up for Nigeria (SUN), held a rally in Lagos to support Mr. President's declaration. Vanguard, seeking to legitimize the largely unknown socio-political group SUN, carefully highlighted the "members of SUN," who marched out in their thousands, distributed pamphlets in various parts of Lagos, and described the participants as a "tumultuous and massive crowd." This report, similar to its predecessors, attempted to create dichotomies between those advocating for the re-negotiation of Nigeria's unity and those who oppose it. While the proponents of Nigeria's unity "insisted that the unity and continued existence of Nigeria are not negotiable," they depicted calls for re-negotiation of Nigeria's unity as "bogus claims," "distraction," and propagated by "crisis entrepreneurs" to undermine the legitimacy of the demand. It also created a sense that agitators have not thought through their demands. Predication was extensively employed in this news report to delegitimise the position of the agitators. Some of the agitators were accused of "hyping restructuring," "strident point," and "childish demands." On the other hand, the presentation of individuals advocating for Nigeria's unity, along with their actions, was positive, portraying them as "conscientious Nigerians" and "rightly concluded." In defining the issue at hand, there was an attempt to attribute the current state of disenchantment to "If the various ethnic nationalities that comprise Nigeria feel unfulfilled, it's because their leaders are corrupt, act with impunity, and encourage violence against their own ethnic groups." This approach absolved the President of any misconduct and depicted him as a victim of unjust accusations. Similar to previous reports, the report neglected the principles of balance and fairness, which are hallmarks of journalistic practice, by failing to include the views of those who oppose the non-negotiable unity of Nigeria.

Report IV: 'Nigeria's Unity is Settled and Not Negotiable—President Muhammadu Buhari' *Leadership,* August 21, 2017

We based this story on President Buhari's nationwide broadcast following his return from a medical vacation in the United Kingdom. Part of the president's speech was a reaction to growing calls for the re-negotiation of Nigeria's corporate existence; the president noted that

some "have crossed our nation's red lines by daring to question our collective existence as a nation." The president's statement seems to imply that Nigerians, regardless of the union's shortcomings, should not question their unity, a concept known as "national red lines." The word "daring" was indicative of the degree to which a creation of the British colonial masters has been so naturalised that attempting to review an arrangement made without the people's consent was seen as a "step too far." To delegitimize and demonstrate the agitators' lack of understanding of current political realities, the narrative recounted the President's 2003 Daura discussion with Late Chief Odumegwu Ojukwu, during which they "came to the conclusion that the country must remain one and united." Thompson (1990) explains that a person's charisma can achieve legitimacy. Thompson (1990) used this interaction to argue that if Ojukwu, the leader of defunct Biafra, had decided that everyone should stay in Nigeria, then demanding Biafra's emergence was inappropriate. Again, President Buhari implicated readers: "we shall not allow," "we are going to reinforce," and "we shall tackle them all." The president's claim that "the vast majority of Nigerians share this view" depicted him as 'knowing' Nigerians' minds on the unity of Nigeria question. The strategic move was to thwart IPOB's demand to hold a referendum in the Eastern region to determine Biafrans' desire for a separate country. The framing of agitators as "terrorists and criminals," "irresponsible elements," and "political mischief makers" seeking to instigate "trouble" was prevalent. They euphemised the conditions that gave rise to the agitation as "petty differences" to justify the 'glossing over' it has received thus far.

Report V: 'Nigeria: At 56, Nigeria's Unity Not Negotiable—Oshiomhole' *Leadership*, October 2, 2016

At the 56th independence anniversary of Nigeria, the *Leadership* newspaper sought the views of then Governor of Edo State, Comrade Adams Oshiomhole, on Nigeria's journey as an independent country. The headline of the story bore a striking resemblance to other headlines we have examined thus far. This speaks to the news value of consonance in news reports (O'Neill & Harcup, 2009). O'Neill and Harcup (2009, p. 164) explain that news selectors may be able to predict, due to experience, events that are newsworthy, "thus forming a 'pre-image' of an event, which in turn increases its chances of becoming news. This story, like previous ones, mobilized the media discourse surrounding the re-negotiation of Nigeria's unity, with key actors portraying it as an illegitimate and invented issue. Here, this demand was portrayed as "sponsored acts of sabotage." Despite acknowledging Nigeria's current problems, Oshiomhole maintained that "no nation in the world is perfect." Universalization is an important strategy for mobilizing ideology. Given that no nation is perfect, we should not attempt to rectify a dysfunctional state. This action led to the naturalisation of an imperfect nation. Still advancing the notion that the agitation was sponsored, Oshiomhole directed his warning to the alleged sponsors: "If things go wrong as Karl Marx taught us, the masses will have nothing to lose. The political elite will have everything to lose." Putting the "national interest over and above our personal interest" affirms the belief that selfish ambition motivated the agitation. The statement, "Our political frustrations cannot be an excuse to sponsor people to... intimidate the state," reinforced the claim that political motivation drove the agitation. The British powers constructed the amalgamation of the two protectorates as "ordained by God," and therefore, man should not question it. A transitivity analysis revealed the active involvement of Governor Oshiomhole through (i) relational processes: "All of us must put the national interest over and above **our** personal interests." "Our political frustrations be an excuse." We stand by our President." "I know of no nation." I want to reiterate, "I am among those who have faith."

Report VI: Restructuring: NLC, Sultan, Oshiomhole, and Others Say Nigeria's Unity Is Non-negotiable (*Leadership,* August 24, 2017)

This *leadership* story was a consequence of a colloquium on the restructuring of Nigeria. The opening sentence of the story "Prominent Nigerians" gave away *Leadership*'s focus on the story. In practice, personalities such as the Sultan of Sokoto, Sa'ad Abubakar III, and former Edo State governor Adams Oshiomhole had the opportunity to discuss Nigeria. These were the people. The debate included these voices, excluding those advocating for The Sultan of Sokoto repeated the same line of argument from previous actors: those advocating for the re-negotiation of Nigeria's unity were acting selfishly, which led to his advice that "Nigerians must place Nigeria first before any other thing." The transitivity analysis reveals the framing of "prominent Nigerians" as possessing agency. Prominent Nigerians are commonly characterized by phrases such as "He said," "I say," "saying," "I support," "I believe," and "I think." Despite portraying the ruling class as open to dialogue ("it is good to sit down and dialogue"), no Nigerian leader has shown the courage to permit such dialogue without imposing conditions that render the entire exercise ineffective. The 2014 National Conference exemplified this, as they regarded the negotiation of Nigeria's unity as untouchable. Once again, they treated the amalgamation of Southern and Northern Protectorates as an act of God. This is why the Sultan argued that, "If God doesn't want such a thing as Nigeria to happen, nobody could ever have made it happen." Though documented evidence suggested that it was financial expediency that necessitated the two protectorates coming together, people who called renegotiation were depicted as challenging God. A consistent line of argument was that God created Nigeria, and that is why there was false equivalence of re-negotiation to 'challenging God.'

**Concluding Remarks**

This study investigated the non-negotiable unity of Nigeria's mantra, which was advanced by Nigerian leadership in the *Vanguard* and *Leadership* newspapers. The research delved into how the press defined the issue in their news reports. We applied Fairclough's CDA method to analyse the unity of Nigeria at three levels: description (textual analysis), interpersonal (production and consumption context), and explanation (the socio-political and historical context of the text's production).

The six news articles selected for this study identified six participants: President Goodluck Jonathan, President Muhammadu Buhari, Gen. Yakubu Gowon, Governor Adams Oshiomhole, Senator Anyim Pius Anyim, Chief Emeka Ojukwu, and Patriot Abiona Desmond. In addition to the aforementioned individuals, we also made references to others. Puleng (2001) posits that news stories assign credentials (or titles) to elites whose voices they use, embodying their claims to news value. Examples of such accreditation included President Goodluck Jonathan, President Muhammadu Buhari, Gen. Yakubu Gowon, Governor Adams Oshiomhole, Senator Anyim Pius Anyim, Chief Emeka Ojukwu, the leader of the defunct Republic of Biafra, and Patriot Abiona Desmond. The rationale for this is that because the reader is likely to believe an 'expert' on a given issue, the quotes' voices were given some authoritative quality appropriate to legitimise the journalist's claim in the story (van Dijk, 1988a). The study's transitivity analysis of the participants showed that these six personalities were seen as having agency based on the things they did (material process), the things they said about other people or issues (verbal process), and the way they thought about the world (mental process). The analysis of intertextual practices also highlights the power dynamics between the journalist and

newsmakers, emphasizing that the journalist uses the latter's voice to express specific viewpoints because they are the ones responsible for authoring the news story.

These news stories created binary opposition by construing those opposed to the non-negotiable unity of Nigeria as possessing no agency through discursive practices like 'us' versus 'them'. The news stories depicted proponents of the non-negotiable unity of Nigeria in a positive light, while those championing the negotiation of Nigeria's unity received negative representation. There is a preponderance of negative words in the description of opponents of the non-negotiable unity of Nigeria. The description of the other group included the positive connotations of the words 'patriot' and 'conscientious'. Richardson (2007, p. 49) notes that the naming of individuals in news discourse can significantly influence their perception. By assigning negative names to those who oppose the non-negotiable unity of Nigeria, these news stories are attempting to delegitimize their stance.

In all the news stories, there was a deliberate attempt at attacking opponents of the non-negotiable unity of Nigeria as well as their actions instead of addressing the issue at the heart of the agitation. The conditions that gave rise to the demand for the re-negotiation of Nigeria's unity were variously defined as 'petty differences' and 'political frustrations,' thereby glossing over the real issue of systemic marginalisation of people of Eastern Nigeria. Political actors mobilized two media discourses, namely patriotism and nationalism, to maintain this relation of domination. This accounted for the negative evaluation of agitators as 'irresponsible elements', 'crisis entrepreneurs', and 'political mischief makers.'

Though the non-negotiable unity of Nigeria being popularised by the political elite in Nigeria dominates the media space, the digital space has made an avenue for counter-hegemonic narratives regarding Nigeria's unity. Using sociolinguistic CDA, Chiluwa (2012) examined how sociolinguistic issues such as virtual community, identity, language differences, and social interaction were used to advance self-determination efforts on social networking sites. In a related study in Zimbabwe, Moyo (2022) showed how *the uMthwakazi Review Facebook page was appropriated to propagate and construct the notion of the* Matabeleland nation. Ostensibly, social media spaces are increasingly seen as part of alternative channels in which marginalised groups find voices to challenge the current state of affairs.

The questions of power relations, who the newspaper is producing its discourse for, and its social effects on Nigerian society are central to any critical discourse analysis study. Fairclough (2001) argues that power relationships, which shape discourses, are the result of struggles and are established by those in power. The debate on Nigeria's unity negotiation included the voices of the political elite while excluding those of their opponents. As previously mentioned, the journalistic practice of incorporating the opinions of the power elite into their reporting places them in a dominant position to influence the discourse in a manner that advances their agenda, often to the detriment of their opponents. In the current study, the political elite established the parameters of truth in the non-negotiable Nigerian unity debate. The political elite repeatedly naturalized and framed Nigeria as a creation of God.

The current study's findings indicated the existence of alternative forms of media in society that can counteract the effects of print media and have sufficient power to do so. Given that the mainstream media, particularly the print media, largely silenced opponents of the non-negotiable unity of Nigeria in the debate, it's possible that the social media became a conduit for their agenda. Recall that during the peak of Biafra agitation, stories about Biafra and

evidence of her people's marginalisation flooded the social media. The influence of stories circulated through social media is worth exploring in this regard. Social media is increasingly serving as platforms for defining national issues, particularly at a time when Nigeria's unity has become a contentious issue.

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