

Nigeria's Settler/ Indigene Question: A Critical Study of COVID-19 Media Discourse

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Abstract

There is an age-long dichotomy and struggle among Nigerians on the basis of settler/indigene status. Section 147 (3) of the 1999 Constitution (Amended) also indirectly legitimises this dichotomy. This has often led to communal strife, marginalisation, political exclusion, disunity and lack of national cohesion and integration. The challenge has persisted despite government's effort such as review of the Land Use Act, social justice and implementation of recommendation of some government white papers. The COVID-19 pandemic and its attendant migration challenges again reawakened the indigene/ settler controversy and the media served as a platform for the expression of discriminatory discourse. Using the media reports on COVID-19 pandemic as a springboard, the study therefore examined the discursive construction of citizens' access to rights with a view to unveiling opaque media's role in the ideological (re)production of unequal power relations among the citizens. Data were drawn from purposively selected 50 media reports on Covid-19 posted on some Nigeria's media's websites from February to June, 2020. This period covers the inception of the outbreak of COVID-19 in Nigeria to the total lockdown of the country and gradual easing of the lockdown. The data were analysed drawing on insights from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The analysis of the data revealed that the construction of settler/indigene dichotomy was achieved through four discourse strategies: polarization, criminalization, emotional appeal/victim discourse and legitimation. The study concluded that there is the need to resolve the issues of citizens' rights in Nigeria since the country has the potential to attain national integration.

Keywords: *Settler, indigene, media, discourse, COVID-19*

Introduction

Globally, migration is a fact of life and it is also primordial in nature. Therefore, the history of pre-colonial sub-Saharan Africa and the different social groups who occupied the area that is now known as Nigeria reflects appreciable level of migration activities. Human mobility within this space during this period, and also later under colonial administration was driven by factors such as trade, security, employment opportunities, among others. In addition, relations among the social groups could largely be described as peaceful co-existence and ethnocentrism was rarely associated with migration and settlement.¹ However, the British indirect system of governance which brought about reorganisation and restructuring of traditional societies, and the birthing of a multi-ethnic Nigerian state through the 1914 amalgamation of previously autonomous groups and people are some of the major reasons linked to the persistent threat to Nigeria's integration and cohesion.² As it is common with multi-ethnic nations, each sub group in Nigeria still lays claim to a particular area in the country which they regard as their homeland on the basis of ancestry. The loss of any part of this geographical area is often viewed by citizens as the loss of their ethnic identity.³

¹Ikwuyatum, Ode Godwin, "Migration as a Threat to National Security: The Case of Nigeria in Boko Haram Era". Annual International Conference of the Royal Geographical University of Edinburgh, 2021.

²Maiangwa, B., Suleiman, M.D. and Anyaduba, C.A. "The Nation as Corporation: British Colonialism and the Pitfalls of Postcolonial Nationhood in Nigeria". *Peace and Conflict Studies*, 25 (1). 2018.

³Nzongola-Ntalaja, G. "Citizenship and Exclusion in Africa: Indigeneity in Question". *Citizenship and Indigeneity in Nigeria*, 20-39. 2012.

Nigeria's 1999 Constitution has not also helped matters as it suggests assent to autochthony or indigeneity as a key condition for attaining citizenship status in the country. This is reflected in Section 25(1) of the Constitution which accords citizenship status primarily to: 'Every person born in Nigeria before the date of independence, either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents belongs or belonged to a community indigenous to Nigeria'. The implication of the phrase 'belongs or belonged to...' when used in reference to a dweller in a state suggests that, in relation to internal migration, there are two classes of citizens in Nigeria. They are: citizens who simultaneously belong to federal and state by virtue of being indigenous to the latter and those who belong to the federal and subnational entities but are classified as settlers because they reside in states or Local Government Areas (LGAs) where their ancestral origins are not traceable to.⁴ Thus, Nigerian citizens could be classified into rightful indigenes and migrant settlers (non-indigenes). From observation, indigenes appear to possess the rights to the resources of a particular geographical location while the non-indigenes are susceptible to marginalisation.

The Federal character principle and quota system are also provisions of the 1999 Constitution which, although included to give a sense of belonging to every ethnic group in the country have become problematic in implementation, as they tend to encourage discriminatory practices against Nigerians who reside in states where they are not indigenes⁵. Thus, Section 147 of the Constitution⁶ which states that citizens could be appointed as ministers: "*Provided that in giving effect to the provisions aforesaid the President shall appoint at least one Minister from each state, who shall be an indigene of such state*", could also be interpreted as suggesting that Nigerians who are not indigenous to the states where they reside cannot be appointed as minister to represent such states no matter how long they have lived there.

⁴Ejobowah, J. B. Ethnic Conflict and Cooperation: Assessing Citizenship in Nigerian Federalism. *The Journal of Federalism*, 43(4), 728-747. 2013.

⁵Ibrahim, J. and Hassan, I. (2012). Introduction. Citizenship and Indigeneity in Nigeria. *Citizenship and Indigeneity in Nigeria*. 6-19.

⁶The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) CAP 23 LFN 2004.

The tensions generated between the provisions in the Constitution on citizenship rights and the practical application of these rights have in turn resulted to competition between indigenes and settlers for limited/ scare resources, occupation of political office, access to land, education and jobs. Consequently, several clashes with attendant loss of lives and destruction of property have been linked to tensions generated by struggle among settlers/indigenes in the country. For example, the conflicts between Ijaws and Itsekiris in Warri, May 1999; Hausas and Yorubas in Shagamu, July 1999; the Hausas and Ibos in Aba, February 2000; Ifes and Modakekes, March 2000; Tivs and the Jukuns in Wukari, October 2001; Hausas and Yorubas in Idi Araba Lagos, February 2002, farmer/ herders' clashes in the Middle Belt and other parts of the country since 2016 up till date, etc.

In addition, typical ethnic discriminatory discourse such as: 'Trace your roots before it is too late'; 'Because we gave you a chance to stay here doesn't mean you have a say'; 'We are the REAL owners of the land', are often deployed by citizens during these crises to assert/challenge indigenes'/ settlers' rights to state resources respectively.⁷ The COVID-19 pandemic again brought to the fore the challenge of Nigeria's indigene/settler dichotomy in recent times. The Corona virus pandemic which first emerged in Asia at the end of 2019 induced health crisis as well as socio-economic crisis globally. Nigeria was not also spared. Right from the time the first index case of the disease was first confirmed in the country on February 27, 2020,⁸ the country has faced diverse challenges on how best to manage its spread. By 29th of March, the Federal government announced cessation of movements in three major states of Lagos, Ogun and Abuja while other restrictions were placed on interstate and international movements.⁹

⁷UNDP Strategic Conflict Assessment of Nigeria, 2016

⁸Nwafor, S.: Breaking: Lagos Records Nigeria's First Case of Coronavirus". *Vanguard*, February, 28, 2020

⁹Adoyi, A. COVID-19: "President Buhari Announces Total Lockdown in Lagos, Abujá". *Daily Post*, March 29, 2020.

In all of these, the Nigerian media played a crucial role in disseminating information with regards to federal and state governments' efforts to curb the spread of the virus and mitigate the challenges of a national lockdown which was deemed necessary to save the lives of the citizens. This paper therefore investigates the discursive expressions of settler/indigene dichotomy as manifested in Nigeria's COVID-19 media discourse with the aim of finding ways of addressing discriminatory tendencies occasioned by the contradictions in Nigeria's Constitution on citizenship status. Accordingly, key variables were conceptualized and relationship between them established.

The United Nations' 10th Sustainable Development Goals¹⁰ (SDGs) targets significant reduction of ethnic or racial inequalities by 2030. Against this background, Nigeria's settler/indigene dichotomy continues to encourage politicization and discrimination of citizens' rights to state resources on the basis of descent. Although, as signatory to the UNDP SDG goals, Nigerian government has shown some commitment to equity among its diverse ethnic groups through constitutional reviews, Judicial white paper reports, military and security clampdown, provision of amenities to achieve national cohesion; however, the issue has remained largely unresolved. In addition, the media plays a crucial agenda setting role in this matter. Indeed, during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, some of the Nigerian media news reports once again resonated the problem of migrant settler/indigene dichotomy in the country.

Thus, the specific objectives of this study are to: (a) Identify the discursive forms of Nigeria's Covid-19 media's settler/indigene discourse (b) Critically discuss the construction of settler/indigene's access to social welfare in the discourse, and (c) Relate the discourse to the socio-political realities of their production.

¹⁰United Nations (2021). The Sustainable Development Goals Report.

The Concept of Indigene-Settler in Nigeria

Alubo¹¹ defines indigene as one that is linked to a geographical space by lineage and not by birth or prolonged stay in a place. He also defines settler as anyone born outside her/his native home land with no provision of converting to an indigene. Oyewole⁸ postulates Indigene Settler Dichotomy (ISD) as primordial arrangement of society where natives with same traditional, linguistic and cultural criteria discriminate against people or settlers who moved from other areas in terms of unequal access to political power, employment and resources of the society.

Kyernum and Agba¹² asserted that the term indigene is often used to describe an individual who can trace her/his ancestry to a particular place. These definitions are somewhat different from the way indigenes and settlers are perceived in many parts of the world such as the Americas, Australia and Southern Africa where European settlers invaded the territories, displaced and disposed the indigenous or autochthonous communities and largely oppressed them. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, indigene-settler dichotomy reflects societal mindset which endorses natives' rights of access to resources (social, political, economic, labour, etc.) of particular states in Nigeria and invariably deny other citizens such privileges no matter how long they have settled in those states. In this case, indigene-settler dichotomy entails a culture of exclusion or denial of one group by the other.

Media Discourse and Nigeria's Settler/Indigene Ideology

Tsegysu and Dogara¹³ describe the mass media as, "all the avenue through which information can be passed from one person to numerous, scattered and heterogeneous audiences". Kadiri, et al¹⁴ describe the mass media as, "sources of information in the various media vehicles such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television and so on that reaches and influences large number of people from different heterogeneous background".

¹¹Alubo, O. Ethnic conflicts and citizenship crises in Central Nigeria, Ibadan, The Programme on Ethnic and Federal Studies University of Ibadan. 2011.

¹²Kyernum, N. and Agba, A.S. The Indigene-ship question and its implication on the socio-economic development of Nigeria. *Journal of Social Sciences and Public Policy*, 5(2), 2013, 119-130.

¹³Tsegysu, S. and Ogoshi, J.O. An Appraisal of Mass Media Role in Consolidating Democracy in Nigeria". *African Research Review*, 10(1), 73-86, 2016

¹⁴Kadiri, K.K., Yinusa, A.M., Addullateef, R. Mass Media for Sustainable Democracy and Development in Nigeria". *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 17(2), 52-64, 2015.

These definitions implicate the mass media as devices which could be used in achieving far reaching effect in information dissemination.

In addition, discourse is conceived as, 'a form of social practice' rather than a mere linguistic system.¹⁵ In other words, language use is not abstract, neutral or merely employed to describe or represent entities in the world but constitutive, socially determined and often deployed by institutions such as the media in different contexts to (re)produce or change world realities. Van Dijk¹⁶ asserts that discourse expresses ideologies indirectly through social groups' attitudes about issues and personal opinions about specific events. Thus, the use of language in mass media news is crucial to issues that affect national integration such as settler/indigene dichotomy because mass media discourse could be used to systematically shape the perception and ideologies of viewers or readers on issues of citizenship, discrimination and unequal power relations. Invariably, this could serve to heighten tension and stimulate discontent among the citizenry.

Studies on Nigeria's Settler Migrant-Indigene Question

It has been argued in some quarters that the indigene/settler dichotomy in Nigeria could be traced to colonialism. Some scholars have viewed the amalgamation of Nigeria by British colonial administrators as not aimed at fostering unity in diversity, nor meant to achieve a cohesive state. Therefore, conflicts arising from Nigeria's federalism, particularly settler/indigene dichotomy, sub national citizen status and struggles over geographical enclaves and access to state resources are areas which have attracted scholarly attention. Thematic research concerns in this regard include: challenges of Nigeria's federalism,¹⁷ Nigeria's citizenship¹⁸ and Nigeria's indigeneity question.¹⁹ These studies reflect similar observation that colonial influence plays a significant role in the complexities that have trailed citizens' co-existence in the country.

¹⁵Fairclough, N. *Language and Power*. Edinburgh, Longman. 2001.

¹⁶Van Dijk, T.A. *Society and Discourse: How Social Contexts Influence Text and Talk*. UK: Cambridge. 2009.

¹⁷ Auwalu, M. & Yusuf, M.A. Federalism and national integration: The indigene /settlerdichotomy in Nigeria. *Sokoto Journal of the Social Sciences*, 3(1), 57-76, 2013.

¹⁸ Odigie, B. & Nzeako, U. The search for the solution to the challenge of indignity to inclusive citizenship in Nigeria. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. 3(5), 79-88. 2018.

¹⁹Ejobowah, J. B. Ethnic conflict and cooperation: Assessing citizenship in Nigerian federalism. *The Journal of Federalism*, 43(4), 728-747. 2013.

Other scholars have also studied the role of the media in the escalation of ethno-religious and settler/indigene conflicts in Nigeria. Sule²⁰ and Katu²¹ for example adopted grounded theory and mediatisation theory respectively to account for how patterns of communication behavior shape information dissemination process among conflict audiences in Plateau State. Importantly, they examined how the mass media contribute to the escalation or de-escalation of ethno-religious crisis in Northern Nigeria. They found that the existing political and religious environment served as structural determinants of the crises as well as communication behaviour of the audience. Nsude and Elem²² and Akpoveta and Ogbemi²³ studied the role of the media in conflict resolution in Nigeria. They employed Culture Conflict and Agenda Setting and Social Responsibility theories respectively. These studies underscored the importance of the media in indigene/settler crisis in Nigeria. The authors therefore recommended that the Nigerian media set agenda on this in order to help the nation achieve harmonious co-existence of the various ethnic groups. The present study also examined the role of media discourse in the (de)construction of settler/indigene dichotomy in Nigeria. However, the point of divergence is that the study investigated Nigerian settler/indigene access to resources as demonstrated in COVID-19 media discourse.

²⁰Sule, Raphael Noah. "Ethno-religious conflicts, mass media and national development: The northern experience". A thesis submitted to the Department of Religion & Philosophy, University of Jos, 2015.

²¹Katu, N. N. Media, conflict audiences and the dynamics of information dissemination in Plateau State, Nigeria: Is the tail wagging the dog? PhD Thesis of the faculty of the Scripps college of communication of Ohio University, 2016.

²²Nsude Ifeyinwa & Stephen Elem. "The media, conflict resolution and indigene-non-indigene relationship in Nigeria". *The Nigerian Journal of Communication*, 17(2), 267-288, 2020.

²³Ogiten, Brickins Ogemi, Chudey Pride & Emmanuel Ogbemi Akpoveta, "Mass media, peace building, conflict prevention and management in Africa", *International Journal of Media, Security and Development*, 1(1),74-88, 2019.

Critical Discourse Analysis and Media Discourse

Since the interest of this paper is in the critical investigation of media ideological construction of settler/indigene dichotomy in relation to access to social resources, the study is therefore anchored on social constructionist theory and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The social constructionist theory is anchored on the classical work of Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* published in 1966. The basic argument of the theory is that human beings together create and sustain all social phenomena through social practices or social actions. It therefore takes a critical stance in relation to the taken-for-granted assumptions about the social world, which are seen as reinforcing the interests of dominant social group.²⁴ In relation to this paper, the media discourse revealed underlying group ideologies which have sustained settler/indigene discourse in Nigeria.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is one of the social constructionist approaches to language in use. CDA's fundamental interest, according to Wodak,²⁵ is to analyse opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifest in language. Thus, CDA research critically investigate social inequalities as it is expressed, constituted and legitimized by language use. The institutional discourse of the media has been identified as one of the popular domains of research for critical discourse analysts because it is a space where relations of power, of struggle and conflict are demonstrated. Therefore, the critical discourse analysis of this study is aimed at unveiling ideological expressions of power relations, dominance and resistance manifest in media discourse of COVID-19. In particular, focus is on discourses which centered on settler/indigene dichotomy in relation to internal migration during the peak of COVID-19 crisis.

²⁴Galbin, A. An introduction to social constructionism. *Social Research Reports*, Vol. 26, 82-92, 2014.

²⁵Wodak, R. 'What CDA is about – A Summary of its history, important concepts and its developments'. In R. Wodak. and M. Meyer, M. (Eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, London, Sage, 1-13. 2001.

Methodology

In sourcing the data for the study, 50 samples were drawn from some Nigerian media's websites from February to June, 2020. This period covers the inception of the outbreak of COVID-19 in Nigeria to the total lockdown of the country and gradual easing of the lockdown. The samples (which made up a corpus of 22,250 words) were purposively selected for the study. The purposive sampling strategy adopted helped to limit data to only those which reflected settler/indigene dichotomy in Nigeria's media discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. In addition, the data were limited to those that reflected citizens' migration challenges in the country. The data were downloaded from 15 (fifteen) Nigerian media websites. They include: *Premium Times*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *Sahara Reporters*, *The Punch*, *Daily Trust*, *Vanguard*, *The Guardian*, *The Nation*, *Eagle Online*, *TODAY*, *The Citizen*, *The New Telegraph*, *Daily Post*, *Naira Land*, and *Channels Television*.

The transcription was however limited to the verbal information of the recordings. The media were considered because of their online presence and far reach in news dissemination. However, ownership was also a salient factor which informed the assessment of the national representation of the media selected for the study. The data consisted of written texts and audio-visual recordings. Verbatim transcription was carried out for one of the data drawn from *Channels Television*. A qualitative analysis which included description, interpretation and explanation of the discursive components of the samples was carried out. The data analysis drew notions from Fairclough's²⁶ Member Resources (MR) and van Dijk's²⁷ Socio-Cognitive Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis. These approaches were considered useful for investigating and unveiling the hidden ideological shaping of power relations among Nigerian citizens as settlers and indigenes.

According to van Dijk²⁴, control of power is linked to a group's effective and manipulative use of discourse to influence the minds of people. A group's power is therefore closely tied to how much it can control the shared beliefs and knowledge of its members and others in specific social representations.

²⁶Fairclough, N. *Language and Power*. Edinburgh, Longman. 2001.

²⁷van Dijk. *Ideology and discourse: A multidisciplinary introduction*. Sage. 2011.

These shared beliefs which are located in social memory or MR in form of implicit assumptions about social behaviour, relationships, etc, could be drawn upon by social actors in a social event such as that of the COVID-19 pandemic to construct identities for different categories of citizens and thus shape their perception of issues of access to and control of resources within Nigeria's socio-cultural domain. The qualitative analysis therefore investigates the influence of opaque ideologies on the structuring and functions of media discourse on COVID-19. For ease of analysis, the samples were labelled MD1, 2, 3, etc. (representing Media Discourse 1, 2, 3, etc.).

Findings and Discussion

The linguistic structures and strategies deployed by social actors in the media discourse produced within the Nigerian socio-political domain during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown exhibit representational purposes. The institutional discourse of the media in most instances were deployed to achieve positive/negative self and others representation.²⁸ The representation was achieved through the discourse strategies of polarization, criminalization, emotional appeal/victim discourse and legitimation. The next sub section presents the examination and explanation of the findings.

Polarization

The first discourse strategy which was copiously employed in the construction of citizens' right to resources in the samples gathered is polarization. In MD1 below, it is observed that social actors employed the cognitive-binary of positive/ negative representation of settlers/ indigenes to produce and legitimise political actors' actions and indigenes' right to access of social welfare during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in Nigeria. To achieve these, labeling, pronominal and material processes were deployed to strategically produce typical we/they exclusionary discourse.

²⁸Wodak R. "The Semiotics of Racism: A Critical Discourse-Historical Analysis." In: Renkema J. (ed.) 2009. *Discourse of Course: An Overview of Research in Discourse Studies*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 311–326. 2009.

MD1

Coronavirus: Rivers Sends 150 Non-Indigene Vagrants to Their Home States

Rivers State Government has sent **150 non-indigenes** to their states of origin in the North, Ebonyi and Akwa Ibom as well as Niger Republic, **as part of measures to curb the spread of Coronavirus pandemic**. The Commissioner said the evacuation was meant to protect **River's indigenes** from the raving virus. Governor Nyesom Wike, in a state-wide broadcast on Monday, said: **"We have also directed the Commissioner of Social Welfare to round up and deport all vagrants**, including the almajiri, to their states of origin to **protect our people** from the **threat they** present to the transmission of this pandemic.

(The Nation, April 29, 2020)

In MD1, the voices of the River State Commissioner for Social Welfare conflated with that of the State Governor, to frame the settlers as threats to the indigenes. First, they are labeled as **vagrants** which strategically frames them as nuisance and delegitimizes their migrants' rights in Rivers State. In addition, they are tacitly criminalized through the use of material processes: 'round up' and 'deport'. The move to send the sub-nationals away from the State is therefore accompanied by discourse strategies of appeal to emotion and blame avoidance: 'as part of measures to curb the spread of Coronavirus pandemic'. This discursive move echoes the position of advocates of middle position in migrants' rights who have argued that a legitimate state system must include rights to a fair process for determining migrants' rights, particularly concerning rights to admission and residence. However, they also note that such access to migrants should also be done with adequate attention given to the human rights of those already residing in the territory.²⁹

In MD1, this notion of, 'those already residing in the territory' refers to the indigenes who are identified exclusively as 'our people'. In addition, the phrase 'to protect our people' contains the material process 'protect' and pronominal 'our' which when contrasted with the label '**vagrant**' produces an exclusionary discourse which legitimizes politicians' discriminatory action against sub-nationals in the fight against the spread of COVID-19.

²⁹Brock, G. *Justice for People on the Move: Migration in Challenging Times*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2020.

Also, the binary representation of settlers/indigenes realized through the clauses: ‘the **threat they** present to the transmission of this pandemic’ and ‘to **protect our people**’, strategically presents the government’s action as motivated by concern for the people. This populist discourse therefore aids political actors’ avoidance of blame for the deportation of non-indigenes from River State. In addition, the material processes: ‘**round up**’ and ‘**deport**’ are deployed to tactically criminalise the migration activities of the settlers. This observation agrees with scholars’ submission³⁰ that Nigerian politicians sometimes employ ethnic discourse to gain the support of the in-group where national issues are concerned. Thus, within the Nigerian socio-political and multi-ethnic environment, it becomes easier to exploit people’s insecurities and enlarge them by producing messages that confirm their biases about the out group and directly produce anger against them.³¹

Criminalisation

In examining criminalisation as a discourse strategy deployed to positively/negatively represent the in-group and out group, the study investigated the ways media discourse on the COVID-19 pandemic constructed settlers in the shape of criminals. In MD2 below, unauthorized citizen migration is ideologically framed via the use of material processes: ‘escape’ and ‘recapture’ which ideologically constructs the migrants as criminals and threats to their host community. The material processes: ‘escape’ and ‘recapture’, also metaphorically convey the idea of war. This discourse thus represents the ‘deported’ *almajiris* (a term which refers to a person who migrated his home in search of Islamic knowledge) as traitors and deserters in the war against the virus.

In the global context, there is a concern that the use of metaphor of war by political leaders and the media in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic which is actually meant to appeal to citizens’ sense of duty and responsibility could be counter-productive in the long run. There are fears that the sustained use of war metaphor poses a challenge to the notion of citizenship and frames citizens more like soldiers.

³⁰Nwanegbo J, Odigbo J. & Ochanja N. C. Citizenship, indigeneship and settlership crisis in Nigeria: Understanding the dynamics of Wukari crisis. *Journal Research in Peace, Gender and Development (JRPGD)* 4(1): 8-14. 2014

³¹Bearman, S. Neill, K. & Avil, T. “The Fabric of Internalised Sexism.” *Journal of Integrated Social Sciences*, (1), 10-47. 2009.

It has been argued that the use of this discourse in relation to the COVID-19 crisis could lead to a shift towards authoritarian leadership globally.³²

In MD3 below, labeling, material processes and allusion to attribution of the traits of social groups were deployed by social actors (the President-General and Secretary-General of the Ohanaeze Youth Council) to criminalise settlers in the South Eastern part of the country. This argumentative discourse produced within Nigeria's multi-ethnic environment is capable of activating old schemas of inter-regional animosities, mutual mistrust and inter-ethnic fear of domination. Adjectives such as 'collaborative', 'rogue', 'nefarious' and discourse strategy of blackmail: '**activities of Northern Elders to export Coronavirus almajiris index cases to the South-East**' convey in effect in their discussion of the suspected role played by the Northern Elders in the illegal migration activities of some Northern Nigerian youth. The inclusive 'we' also presented the discursal self and completely responsabilised claim of malicious intent to the out group. In this way, an asymmetrical power relation between the South Eastern group and the Northern Elders on claim to rights over south eastern land is projected. This observation is supported by Suberu³³ who notes that inter-ethnic rivalry in Nigeria is largely due to the country's 'hyper-centralised' form of federalism and ethno-distributive structure which have served to exacerbate rather than mitigate ethnic competition.

MD2

30 Almajiris Escape from Isolation Centre in Jigawa

Some 30 Almajiris, who are among the over 500 being isolated at the NYSC camp in Kiyawa Local Government of Jigawa State, **escaped** on Monday night. A source, who is part of the State's task-force on COVID-19, confirmed this to Channels Television. He added that all have been **recaptured** and brought back to the isolation centre.

(*Channels Television*, April 28, 2020)

³²Musu Costanza. "War metaphors used for COVID-19 are compelling but dangerous", *The Conversation*, April 8, 2020.

³³Suberu, T. Rotimi. "Federalism and ethnic conflict in Nigeria". *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 39(5), 2001.

MD3

Group Urges South-East Governors to Deport Almajiris in Region

The statement reads, “**We**, the Ohanaeze Youth Council, describes (sic) the interception of **Kano almajiris** at Enugu border by Enugu State COVID-19 Task Force as **collaborative rogue operations and nefarious activities of Northern elders to export Coronavirus almajiris index cases to the South-East**.

(Sahara Reporters, May 6, 2020)

Emotional Appeal/Victim Discourse

In this case, the analysis focuses on media discourse which constructs settlers/self as victims. First it is significant to note, that in this regard, out of the forty-eight (48) samples analysed, only three (3) (which represents 1.6%) are reports which cover settlers’ media expressions of discontent about lack of access to social welfare during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in Nigeria. This silence is significant because it indirectly indicates asymmetrical power relation between state governments/officials and settlers with regards to access to media discourse.

MD4

Abuja: ‘Palliatives Only for Indigenes’ – FCTA Officials Tell Residents Amid Chaos

In a chat with our correspondent, **a resident** and an eye witness narrated how the drama played out. **The Nigerian**, in his sixties, explained: “**We** had received information that the FCTA would share some palliatives on Monday. The truck that conveyed the food items arrived at the community Sunday night. Later, **Bhyazin Chiefs and FCTA people** announced that **they** would, from that point, share the food items to **indigenes** only. “According to them, at least they tried by giving **a few non-indigenes**, so we should be grateful. Imagine such comments from government workers and a so-called chief. The comment caused the atmosphere to get tense. “Security men and residents clashed. It was while this was going on that they hurriedly drove the truck away. That was how their palliative disbursement in Bhyazin ended. **Help us tell them that God is watching what every human is doing and we will all give account.**”

(Daily Post, April 28, 2020)

MD5

Lockdown Palliatives: Lagos Govt. Ignores Northerners

The Arewa Youth Consultative Forum (AYCF) has **accused the Lagos State Government of overlooking Northerners** in the distribution of palliatives. Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu had announced palliative measures to cushion the effect of the lockdown amid the coronavirus crisis. Yerima Shettima, AYCF National President, in a statement on Tuesday, **lamented** that the **Arewa community in Lagos** was being **neglected**. Noting that the situation was unacceptable, he reminded the government that the palliative is not a gift but a right of residents regardless of their ethnic background. **“We are appalled that the Lagos State Government has neither offered the palliative to the Arewa community nor made any official announcement about its plans for the Arewa community. “We wish to remind the Lagos State Government that it would be doing no special favour for the Arewa community by giving them what rightly belongs to them.**

(Daily Post, April 28, 2020)

MD4 and **MD5** demonstrate individual/group demonstration of resistance to settler/indigene dichotomy and access to state resources. The two excerpts however indirectly project settlers' as powerless in resisting ethnic discrimination and thus index settler/indigene asymmetrical/symmetrical power relations in issues relating to resource control. In both excerpts, pronominals: *we*, *they*, *us* and *them* are employed to achieve exclusionary discourse of deprivation and victimisation. On the one hand, **MD4** represents settlers as victims of state power and on the other hand, **MD5** demonstrates settlers' attempt to resist discrimination through the use of ethnic group power. Specifically, **MD4** expresses settlers' helplessness towards state hegemonic control. Rather, the participant draws on the power of the media through a request discourse: **'help us tell them'** to express citizens' discontentment with ethnic discrimination. However, the request is somewhat weakened by the speaker's submission to the power of divine authority: **God is watching what every human is doing and we will all give account.** **MD4** therefore discourse demonstrates settlers' sense of internalized discrimination and lack of confidence in their claims to state resources.

This observation supports earlier submission made by Bearman, Neill and Avil³⁴ who posit that discrimination (which in their case was related to sexism) could become internalized by members of society when are exposed to such behaviours for an extended period of time.

In **MD5**, the participant draws on the global context to argue for settlers' rights to access to social welfare: **COVID-19 is a global problem and anywhere there is lockdown the authorities come forward with food and other essentials for the people of the communities.** In addition, he asserts group's collective power through the use of exclusionary discourse: **We wish to remind the Lagos State Government that it would be doing no special favour for the Arewa community by giving them what rightly belongs to them.**

Legitimation

In some of the samples, the political class attempted to justify their actions through the use of rationality, appeal to emotion and blackmail. **MD6** is an example of media discourse produced by political elites to manufacture consensus and legitimacy through autochthonous rights to state resource control. This was deployed to counter opposition from some civil rights groups against northern governors' decision to send settlers to their home states during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

MD6

Lalong Decries Politicisation in Repatriation of Almajirai

The Chairman, Northern Governors Forum (NGF), Governor Simon Lalong of Plateau State has decried **politicisation** in the **repatriation of Almajirai** to their respective state of origins. He said: "It is **disheartening** that this **noble and bold decision** is being politicised by **few people** who although claimed to abhor Almajiri system, choose for reasons best known to them to play to the gallery by pretending to be fighting for the human right of these **children.**" He stressed that the decision to carry out **the evacuation** was **a collective one** taken by **governors of the 19 Northern states** during the meeting of the Northern Governors Forum in order to guarantee the safety of these children who were exposed to many dangers including COVID-19.

(Nigerian Tribune, May 17, 2020)

³⁴Bearman, S. Neill, K. & Avil, T. "The Fabric of Internalised Sexism." *Journal of Integrated Social Sciences*, 1(1), 10-47. 2009.

The excerpt above reflects typical Nigerian political actors' move to manage public perception by assigning positive legitimizing values to self/in-group and ascribing negative attributes to social critics. Thus, the choice of words such as: 'politicisation', 'few people', 'noble idea', 'evacuation', 'children' are aimed at presenting the deportation of *almajiris* as desirable. Conversely, the words strategically construct critics of the decision as 'enemies of the state'. Importantly, while the news writer frames settlers' forced return to their home states as *repatriation*, Governor Lalong describes the action as 'evacuation'. In this way, he mitigated the situation by presenting it as a rescue mission to save lives rather than a discriminatory move to deprive some Nigerians of access to state resources. It is worthy of note that he also strategically weakened his individual responsibility and role in the action by using the adjective 'collective'. In this way, the speaker implicates all the Northern States' Governors in the act. In addition, he appealed to public sentiments through the use of group/self-glorification and self-praise discourse strategies. This is realized through the use of the adjectives: 'noble', 'bold' deployed to project the northern governors' action as altruistic. In addition, he strategically employed family discourse with the use of the nouns: 'children', 'families', 'homes', emotive adjectives: 'happily', 'excited', 'warm' and pronoun: 'their' to create the impression of affinity with the settlers and indirectly project the critics as outsiders.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this paper, a critical discourse analysis was employed to study Nigeria's settler/indigene question as manifest in COVID-19 media discourse produced particularly during the lockdown of the nation due to the pandemic. The aim of the paper was to investigate discursive expressions of dichotomy between settlers and indigenes in Nigeria in relation to access to state resources as manifest in media discourse. The findings revealed that discourse strategies of polarization, criminalization, emotional appeal/victim discourse and legitimation were employed in the discourses to (de)legitimise citizens' access to resources.

Such media discourse lend credence to the existence of certain factors that impede national cohesion/ integration in Nigeria which include: constitutional contradictions, lack of national policy on national integration and political will. Given the important role that the media plays in agenda setting and framing of information and construction of citizens' perception on issues, it is recommended that the Federal Government provides good governance by resolving the issues of citizens' rights through constitutional

review which emphasises residency rights rather than indigeneship rights. This should help to minimize, if not completely eliminate ethnic discrimination. The media also needs to provide more inclusive alternative discourse that will enhance citizens' sense of belonging in Nigeria while creating the requisite cultural reorientation towards nationhood and national integration.

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