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ONLINE RESISTANCE IN NIGERIA: LEGITIMISING THE ODUDUWA NATION SEPARATIST MANDATE THROUGH LANGUAGE

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Abstract: This article explores the online discourse of the Oduduwa nation secessionist movement in Nigeria, which seeks the independence of the Yoruba ethnic group from the Nigerian state. Using critical stylistics as a framework, the study analyzes how online participants use language to express their resistance and legitimize their cause. The empirical data consists of Oduduwa nation-related posts from Nairaland, a popular Nigerian online forum, collected between September 2020 and September 2021. The study adopts a qualitative approach and identifies the dominant themes and linguistic strategies that characterize the discourse. The discursive engagement of the Oduduwa republic movement is surrounded by discourse issues, such as the amalgamation pact of 1914, the perceived ethnic oppression of the southern region, and the lingering Biafra nation secessionist agenda. The findings reveal that the online participants use various linguistic-stylistic strategies, such as naming and describing, negating, representing actions and events, equating and contrasting, exemplifying and enumerating, to construct their identity, challenge the status quo, legitimise their activities, and mobilize support for their movement. The study also reveals that the discourse is influenced by the historical, political, and social contexts of Nigeria; such as the colonial legacy, the ethnic diversity, and the security challenges. As the burning issue of secession continues to resurface in Nigeria's political landscape, its intense contestation in online space poses a threat to nationhood because cyberspace can be harnessed to sustain the propagation of separatism and national disintegration. The study contributes to the understanding of online civic engagement and social activism in Nigeria and highlights the role of language in shaping and reflecting social movements.

Keywords: critical stylistics; cyberspace discourse; Oduduwa nation agitation; Nairaland; secessionist narrative.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Resistance is a reaction to an unfavourable situation or status quo. Individuals who believe that there is an immediate need for change, whether that change is gradual, rapid, or spontaneous, are more likely to exhibit resistance. Over the years, media – both traditional and new media – has been a veritable platform for sponsoring, peddling and sustaining resistance ideologies. Digital media and technological advancements have created platforms for knowledge sharing, debates and contestations and have also enabled seamless and swift conveyance of information to target audiences within seconds, thus making activism easier [Mutsvairo, 2016]. According to Shirky [2011], social media is being used nearly universally to organise political protests and other global movements. People who live in linked communities today have greater access to information, more chances for group action, and an increasing freedom to call for change. The early period of the 2010s was remarkably marked by the revolutions targeted at oppression, political manipulations, a poor standard of living, and other humanitarian debacles in North Africa and the Middle East. The collective resolve of protesters to oust this socio-political malaise birthed a series of protests, uprisings and armed conflicts, first in Tunisia before spreading to other Arab nations, a movement dubbed «the Arab Spring» [Chiluwa, 2015]. The strategic role played by the digital media in the Arab Spring movement paved the way for the revolutionisation of social activism in Africa [Chiluwa, 2015]. Since the Arab Spring, social activism in Africa has been on the rise. Attesting to this, Opeibi [2016] notes that Nigeria, for instance, recorded a rise in web-based conversations and social interactions through online platforms from about 2% to about 68% between 2001 and 2014, a strong testament to the increase in access to the Internet and data services in Nigeria. This, however, laid the foundation for civic engagement and participation in socio-political movements via social media and other digital platforms, as evident in the conduct of social protests (#OccupyNigeria, #EndSars), resistant movements (the Niger-Delta crisis, Boko Haram insurgency), secessionist movements (Biafra nation agitation), advocacy movements (#BBOG), among others.

The Oduduwa Nation Movement (also called Yoruba Nation or Oodua Republic) is a self-determination and secessionist mandate that aims at achieving political and geo-territorial independence for the Yoruba tribe, who are residents of southwestern states in Nigeria. This struggle for self-determination is anchored on the historical antecedents of the various nationalistic movements that sprung up in the Western region following Nigeria's political independence in 1960. The creation of *Egbe Omo Oodua* in 1949, *Afenfere* in 1966, and the *Oodua People's Congress* (OPC) in 1993, nationalistic movements in the southwestern region, took cultural, political and military dimensions. At the height of these nationalistic movements, the notion of «Oodua nation» was birthed following various political upsets, recurring military coups and counter-coups, and an increasing Biafra nation secessionist movement [Ajala, 2009]. This is why the history of secessionist campaigns in Nigeria can be traced to the Nigerian Civil War (also called the Biafra War) of 1967–1970. Just as the Biafra nation secessionist mandate has been piloted and sustained so far by groups such as Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and, in recent times, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), the Oduduwa nation secessionist movement has equally been steered by groups such as *Ilana Omo Oodua*, Yoruba World Congress (YWC), Disciples of *Oodua* Republic, and Yoruba One Voice (YOV), while also charting the path of media awareness with the activities of Omo Oduduwa Radio, Oduduwa-Voice Radio Station, and Oduduwa Grand Alliance Radio [Aminu & Chiluwa, 2022]. A Professor of history and leader

of the *Ilana Omo Oodua* pan-Yoruba group, Professor Banji Akintoye, is known to have been a frontline leader and vanguard of the secessionist campaign. Similarly, Sunday Adeniyi Adeyemo, also known as Sunday Igboho, the leader of the separatist group, has been charged with employing hate speech, stirring up violence with inflammatory statements, aggravating racial animosity, and amassing illegal weapons [Akinrefon, 2021].

The literature is expanding in inquiries into resistance movements and secessionist narratives in Nigeria in different humanistic endeavours [Buhari, 2018; Unya & Omaka, 2021; Sunday et al., 2021]. Significant efforts have gone into linguistics-based research on resistance movement discourse in foreign nations [Juarez-Mira, 2018; Alrefaee et al., 2019] and within Nigeria, such as the Niger-Delta militancy [Aghedo, 2012; Ononye, 2017], Biafra nation agitation [Chiluwa, 2018; Abioye & Ajiboye, 2019; Kamalu & Atoma, 2019; Ajiboye, 2020; Osisanwo & Iyoha, 2020; Igwebuike and Akoh, 2022, 2023], Arewa Republic [Auwal, 2018] and Yoruba or Oduduwa nation agitation [Aminu & Chiluwa, 2022; Osisanwo & Akano, 2023]. Chiluwa [2018] provides new insights into the complexities of the Nigeria-Biafra conflicts and demonstrates how it's feasible for social movements to actively support discourses that could undermine or even negate their own goals. The study concludes that Biafra is a nation divided against itself and that its people are incapable of creating the separate nation they long for. This conclusion is supported by the pragmatic consequences of discourses that reflect competing and conflicting ideas and by the diverse ideological perspectives held by group members. Igwebuike and Akoh [2022] prod into self-legitimation and other-delegitimation strategies in IPOB's supreme leader, Nnamdi Kanu's online radio broadcasts. The study uncovers how Kanu used justification, moralisation, and rationalisation to support his abrupt flight from Nigeria, demand Biafra's self-rule, and call for a boycott of elections as well as to refute claims of the president's cloning, electoral fraud, marginalisation of the Igbo, corruption, and brutality among security personnel. Self-glorification, pronominalisations, polarisation, pejorative nomination (labelling), and hyperbolic expressions are some of the linguistic manifestations of these discursive structures that Kanu deploys to frame the IPOB movement as a just cause.

Furthermore, Aminu and Chiluwa [2022] examine how identity and resistance are re-invented in Facebook protest posts on the Oduduwa secessionist narrative. The study finds that the radical movement's online discourses accurately reflect their total separatist ideology and commitment to their self-actualisation struggle, in addition to explaining the function of protest discourse in the group's agitations for a separate state. The study further demonstrates that, as a marginalised community, the Oduduwa separatist movement strongly articulates its cultural ideology. It shows how online posters evince a negative attitude towards netizens who oppose the mandate through socio-cognitive models and a positive attitude towards those who express their solidarity. In the same vein, Osisanwo and Akano [2023] undertake a study on the various discursive constructions of the Yoruba nation agitation in some Nigerian digital communities. Using Martin and White's appraisal theory and socio-semantic model of critical discourse analysis, the study discovers that labelling, negative comparison, appeal to emotions, expressions of hatred, and flaming are frequently used to portray Oduduwa agitators as terrorists, cowards, and advocates of violence, while others positively portray the agitators as organised strategists. Also, some participants view the secessionist mandate as a danger to the nation's sovereignty and unity, while others see it as an opportunity for people to break free from oppression. Despite these scholarly attempts, the Oduduwa nation secessionist movement still appears to be inadequately explored and scantily researched, especially within linguistic and discourse studies. Unlike what previous studies did not explicitly

do, this study, therefore, uncovers, brings to the fore, explicitly highlights and critically examines specific and advancing discourse issues and pressing socio-political occurrences that surround the Oduduwa Nation secessionist narrative. Attention is given to how online participants advance their resistant ideology through linguistic and stylistic choices.

The study is aimed at revealing the dominant discursive issues that characterise the secessionist narrative in Nairaland and analyzing the linguistic-stylistic strategies that netizens deploy to evince resistance disposition.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative approach and a top-down analytical model for content analysis and interpretation of the data. Data for this study consisted of Oduduwa or Yoruba nation-related posts and comments that were generated as discursive threads on *Nairaland*, a popular Nigerian virtual platform. Founded by Seun Osewa in 2003, *Nairaland* is one of the earliest online discussion forums and a digital community that provides a platform for Nigerians residing in the country to express their opinions [Chiluwa & Odebunmi, 2016]. *Nairaland* is a platform consisting of various sub-forums that cater for a wide range of topics where Nigerians, including recent and long-term migrants, as well as outsiders who are interested in Nigerian culture and linguistic practices, come together [Heyd, 2014; Hey & Honkanen, 2015]. The involvement of Nigerian participants in the diaspora has great importance due to their recognised contributions to the political and economic advancements of Nigeria, especially because some Nigerian websites controlled by Nigerians residing in the UK and US, focus solely on matters that appeal to Nigerians living outside of Nigeria [Chiluwa & Odebunmi, 2016].

Nairaland is preferred to other digital communities because its membership is restricted to participants of Nigerian identity. It is a well-known cyberspace that boasts over 2.9 million registered users, in addition to a large number of people who are not registered and are labelled as guests [Osisanwo & Akano, 2023]. The platform was selected because of its high level of user engagement, its popularity among the general public, the diversity of its users' backgrounds, and its emphasis on ease of use. The digital platform was also selected because of the great degree to which its members engage in conversations about national issues and topics spanning religion, politics, education, and everyday life. Oduduwa nation posts made between September 2020 and September 2021 were manually culled from *Nairaland* and subjected to thematic and critical stylistic analyses. This period was marked by massive social media awareness about Oduduwa nation rallies that were staged within this timeframe in different southwest states. Most of the posts, culled in their crude and unadulterated forms, were rendered in non-standard English forms of spelling, abbreviations, tense use and grammatical construction. Out of over a thousand posts generated on this platform, eighteen (18) posts that synchronised with the study's objectives were purposively sampled as representative texts for analysis. These purposively selected posts also reflect on the dominant discursive issues that surround the online engagement of the secessionist narrative. The posts were labelled P1–P18 for ease of reference.

The theoretical and analytical framework of Jeffries' [2010] critical stylistics was used to support the inductive analysis of thematic issues drawn from the data. Critical Stylistics stems from the theoretical orientations of Critical Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It is an emerging paradigm that strives to equip language analysts with critical thinking and interpretative abilities that empower them to look beyond the grammatically obvious and unearth ingrained and

underlying ideologies in texts [Jeffries, 2010]. Critical Stylistics (CS) connects stylistics with critical discourse analysis to serve as a framework that uncovers ideologies enacted consciously or unconsciously in texts and how power relations are textually crafted. Both CDA and CS aim to reveal ideologies and power relations in discourse, although they are slightly different. While CDA views access to knowledge and the media as tools of hegemony in discourse, CS is more interested in text analysis to identify and expose power relations at the textual level [Jeffries, 2010]. Jeffries put forward some critical stylistic tools that can be deployed to interrogate texts: naming and describing, representing actors/events/states, equating and contrasting, exemplifying and enumerating, prioritising, implying and assuring, hypothesising, negating, presenting the speech and thoughts of other participants, and representing time, space and society [Jeffries, 2010]. These strategies considered toolkits of critical stylistics, uncover ideologies embedded in texts and these ideologies are conceived to be part of a conscious and unconscious process [Ojoawo, 2019].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, attention is given to how some critical stylistic devices are deployed to explain advanced burning social issues that are attached to the online engagement of the Oduduwa nation secessionist narrative in Nigeria's political landscape.

3.1. Aggravating Insecurity and Violence in Nigeria

The rising index of insecurity in Nigeria has consistently served as a bane to national cohesion, growth and development at the political, social, economic, cultural, and environmental fronts. In the past seventeen years, there has been a sporadic increase in the statistics of insecurity in Nigeria. The Boko Haram terrorism, ethno-religious tensions, kidnapping, cybercrime, ritual killings, banditry, the farmers-herdsmen crises, religious fundamentalism and intolerance, community confrontations, and electoral violence, among others, are some of the defiant manifestations of insecurity Nigeria has had to battle with over the years. As the protection of the lives and properties of the citizenry stands to be the primary function and most fundamental duty of the government, this has not satisfactorily materialised within Nigeria's security system. The Oduduwa nation secessionist agitation is particularly spurred by the uncontrolled and indiscriminate ethnic killings of Yoruba dwellers in the southwest by supposed herdsmen [Aladekomo, 2021]. However, the call for secession is grounded in the general realities of insecurity in the country.

P1: *Say no to the slave contraption called Nigeria. Nigeria at 60 yet no progress but same problems of 1970's, retrogression and 2nd recolonization by the Fulani and massive ethnic cleansing of Indigenous land owners by herdsmen, boko haram and other Islamic mercenaries... Oodua nation is coming and Muric has failed in his assignment to divide Yoruba across religious line [Nairaland, September 23, 2020].*

P2: *Buhari divided this country with his nepotism and ethnic agenda. You feign ignorance while your kinsmen masquerading as herdsmen kill Nigerians. And to make matter worst, the security apparatus of the country which is under you were also blind to this atrocities. We are not all fool the Nigerian govt thought we are. We won't die in silence [Nairaland, October 1, 2020].*

P3: *As long as this shit hole called Nigeria is concerned, the only lawful groups are; herdsmen, bandits from the North and Boko Haram. Aside the groups listed any other group should be treated in the language they understand; one Nigeria will kill whoever is busy supporting it at the expense of lives of innocent people the so called unity is taking* [Nairaland, June 15, 2021].

The call for secession is backed by both discourse participants from the Yoruba tribe and those from other ethnic groups. Text producers of P1–P3 above express lamentation over the depleting security system and the alleged nepotistic disposition of the Nigerian government towards it. P1 resorts to the *negating* strategy (*«no progress»*) to express pessimism and disappointment while also submitting that despite the attainment of the Diamond Jubilee, insecurity has only brought retrogression to Nigeria as it was in the '70s. The consequence of such retrogression is constructed with the *naming* stylistic strategy (*«slave contraption»*) through the use of a nominal group that instantiates negative labelling of Nigeria's nationhood. The *representing actor* strategy is instantiated in P2 as the actor (*«Buhari»*), Nigeria's former president, is represented as an anarchist who initiates the material process of division (*«divided»*), hence, aggravating the prevalent insecurity in the country through ethnic bigotry. As further claimed in P2, the government *«feigns ignorance»* of the onslaughts carried out on innocent Nigerian citizens by the herdsmen. The stylistic device of *assuming and implying* is deployed by the poster, as this is expected to trigger an implicature in the minds of other online participants that Buhari has been largely pretentious about his reactionary measures that usually followed incidents of killings, arson, displacement of locales, and other violent acts perpetrated in southwestern states. The security apparatuses are called out for negligence in the effective dispatch of obligations. It is further affirmed that how the government has chosen to address the operations of *«Islamic mercenaries»* and *«Boko Haram»*, has ethnic undertones. The nepotistic stance and sense of judgement of the federal government, as perceived by interactants, strongly imply endangerment of the attacked ethnic group, especially since the evil-perpetrating herdsmen are adjudged to be Fulani, and, invariably, kinsmen of the Nigerian president. Taking to the *enumerating* strategy, P3 sarcastically identifies *«herdsmen, bandits from the north and Boko Haram»* as the only lawful groups in Nigeria. In essence, they have constituted a menace and have continued to frustrate Nigeria's unity. The poster enumerates these groups to otherise and disassociate them from the peace-loving South. On this basis, secession is assumed to be the right call to end every form of ethnic tension.

P4: *Igboho incited people to protest about the killings in his region and also organised rallies when the federal government refused to act towards insecurity ravaging the country through his kinsmen. He was in his house when the federal government sent battalions of soldiers to his house to kill and maim at midnight. Hold on, what are you talking about? Also, they planted weapons and claimed they were taken from Igboho's residence. It's better for him to stay away for now in order to make up a new strategy* [Nairaland, July 16, 2021].

P5: *When were they when farmland were destroyed, the town (ibarapa) were massacred and the most hypocrite part of it is none of these guys have been arrested not to talk of prosecuted?* [Nairaland, September 15, 2021].

P6: *The Yoruba never agitated for marginalization. It's start with the Fulani invasion and the attack on farmers as the security agent turn a blind eye. Beside the security services as at today is been dominated [Nairaland, July 3, 2021].*

The Yoruba nation agitation was fueled by herdsmen's attacks and gruesome murder of Yoruba indigenes on their ancestral farmland and hamlets, even as the former set ablaze humans and properties under the guise of self-defence and a show of aggression [Nwanike, 2022]. The poster of P6 unequivocally states that the recurrence of these heinous attacks and the security agents' response of «turning a blind eye» to the disastrous events further widen the existing ethnic divide and tension between the Hausa-Fulani and the Yoruba people. Instead of tackling the unabating insecurity Nigeria is embattled with, the government is consumed with the ambition of taming the Oduduwa secessionist agitation, which spurred the set-up of Sunday Igboho, a frontline leader of the agitation, to accuse him, within the legal premise, of stockpiling arms. The government is alleged to have «planted weapons» in Igboho's residence (P4 refers to Igboho with the referent «he»). In P5, the participant lets out an outburst in the form of an interrogative over the indifference the Nigerian government has shown concerning the Fulani herders' attack on local dwellers, and the government's show of military force to cripple the Oduduwa secessionist campaign instead of arresting and prosecuting those who orchestrated the killings of some Igangan dwellers in Ibarapa, a town in southwest Nigeria. P4 maintains that Igboho was right to have «incited people to protest about the killings in his region» and also spearheaded the expulsion of the Northern nomadic herdsmen from Yoruba territories. In light of the foregoing, online participants appear to provide the ravaging insecurity as justification for the Oduduwa nation secessionist campaign.

3.2. The Amalgamation Pact of 1914

Nigeria's colonial history plays a major role in the Oduduwa nation secessionist narrative. Nigeria became a sovereign nation after the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 by Frederick Lord Lugard. Following this exercise, the historical occurrences of ethnic politics and the quest for regional representation at the centre foretold the ethnicity-motivated politics that were to bedevil the Nigerian political system. Gliding on shared knowledge of the historical antecedent of Nigeria, commenters express negativity towards the amalgamation of 1914 and a desirable dismemberment of what P1 labelled «slave contraption». The stance of these discourse participants aligns with Ugwuoke et al.'s [2020] perception of the 1914 amalgamation pact as a forced and fraudulent union.

P7: *You might not be alive to see it happened. Were the people one before the British amalgamated them in 1914? Only 28 people signed it. 22 British and 6 people from what is called Nigeria today. This 6 were Hausas- Fulanis and Yoruba. None from Igbos and all other tribes in Nigeria [Nairaland, May 22, 2022].*

P8: *All what I know is that this bloody Fulani govt will soon set the country on fire. Self determination is a right of every nationality anywhere in the world. For we shall know the truth and the truth shall set us free. The end of Nigeria is knocking at the door and is fast approaching. Why are the northerners always afraid of breaking up from this good for nothing country? Nigeria is not one and it can never be one. One Nigeria is a monumental scam. The fulanis are born jihadist and we dnt share the same culture, beliefs, religion, orientation, education, exposure and upbringing. The 1914 Almagamation was a disaster that befell the country and the end shall justify the means [Nairaland, May 23, 2021].*

P9: *already this contraption animal forest called nigeria will not past 2023 na...its we that will divide this lord luggard experimentation.....* [Nairaland, June 22, 2021].

P10: *Nigeria was patched together in 1914 and will be divided whether you like it or not. In a few years, you will require a visa to come ride okada in Lagos* [Nairaland, July 3, 2021].

The text producers of P7–P10 conceive the 1914 amalgamation as a woe that befell the Yoruba nation and other marginalised regions. P8 registers discontent and disgust at the exclusion of the «*Igbos and other tribes in Nigeria*» from the signatories of the amalgamation. This alone speaks volumes about the unequal ethnic representation and the unsolicited and forceful joining of these tribes with the Hausa-Fulani and the Yoruba tribes. These are pointers to the causes of the Nigerian civil war of 1966 as the first call for secession, and the intensifying efforts towards the creation of the Biafra Republic through the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in recent times. P8 and P9 employ the *naming* strategy to construct Nigeria as a «*monumental scam*» and «*contraption animal forest*» which, again, is an instance of valence and a negative representation of Nigeria and the amalgamation pact as a fraudulent arrangement. To enforce this stance, P8 takes to the *describing* strategy to construe the 1914 amalgamation with the predicative «*disaster*». This description is premised on the notion that northern Nigeria's association with the Jihadist movement is essentially a domineering culture that is predisposed to subjecting all other tribes and ethnic groups to the religious reign of Jihadism. Based on the relayed orientation about the religious and political dominance of northern Nigeria, which is backed up by Nigeria's former President, the participant sticks to the *negating* strategy to declare that «*Nigeria is not one and it can never be one*». Furthermore, P10 also holds the view that the 1914 incident was an unfavourable arrangement. *Prioritising* is indexed in P10 as the text producer achieves this through the form of information structure, which is strategic to placing Nigeria as a subject that suffers the tragedy of «*was patched*». Through passivisation, «*Nigeria*» as a recipient of an action is brought to the fore as a victim of circumstance. Therefore, the text producer attempts to invoke empathy in other on-line participants, so that they would subscribe to this notion of a victimised Nigeria. Consequently, in P9 and P10, the *hypothesising* stylistic device is then indexed with the use of epistemic modal items «*will*» to express a sense of certainty and high possibility that «*Nigeria will not past 2023...*» and that «*Nigeria will be divided...*». Against this background, the conception of the 1914 amalgamation as a failed and prejudiced arrangement serves as a fillip behind the secessionist agitations of IPOB and the *Ilana Omo Oodua*.

3.3. The Perceived Marginalisation of Southern Nigeria

The call for secession is also informed by the perceived marginalisation of the southern region of Nigeria, inhabited by the Yoruba and Igbo ethnic majorities as well as other minority tribes. Before the boisterous demonstrations for the secession of the south, the restructuring mandate had been a strategic measure and narrative suggested to mitigate ethnic tensions, enhance equitable allocation and maximisation of resources, and clamp down on insecurity in different regions [Obiorah & Okoye, 2020]. For instance, the Niger Delta crisis dwells mainly on the federal government's control of oil wealth and the oil region, poor infrastructure and environmental hazards ravaging the oil region. Consequently, this has resulted in a high level of militancy, violence and protestations in the region. While the Niger Delta group have had their fair share of marginalisation, the Oduduwa nation group capitalises on this to demand the secession of the Yoruba people.

P11: *If you want Nigeria to continue existing then let the government do the right thing by restructuring Nigeria economically and I mean resource control. This is the viable antidote to disintegration and obasanjo of all people should know that. If this issue is not addressed then division is very inevitable [Nairaland, August 27, 2021].*

P12: *You are entitled to your opinion sir but it is what we want. Nigeria based on its multilingual nature will always be difficult to manage not to talk of when there is corruption and lack of trusts among the cultural entities that constitute the country. Every region especially the southern ones are being constrained in this unproductive union, let everyone go their separate ways, I am sure this will lead to maximization of potentials [Nairaland, October 3, 2021].*

P13: *A movement that encompasses the South west, south east, south south and the middle belt will achieve a faster recognition from the UN and other foreign countries apart from Britain. The tempo should be sustained to show that the balkanization of Nigeria is a felt need of the peoples of what is now called Nigeria. The Ipobs part of the coalition should be kept under watch so that they do not exhibit their typical character. Oduduwa republic, time is now [Nairaland, September 15, 2021].*

P14: *It's not just about marginalisation
The Yorubas have realised they do not need to be in the same country with blood thirsty cannibals [Nairaland, October 1, 2020].*

The text producer of P11 harps on the equitable allocation of economic resources, one of the cardinal pillars of the restructuring mandate, as the hypothesised “viable antidote to disintegration”, and this again is a pointer to the perceived marginalisation of the South and regional enslavement. To systematically execute what P13 refers to as «*the balkanisation of Nigeria*», a coalition of the southern states in the south-west, south-east, south-south and middle belt is proposed, such that it will attract foreign intervention from international bodies like the United Nations and world powers such as Britain and the US. «*The maximisation of potentials*», which the text producer advances through *hypothesizing* and verbal elements («*will lead*»), can then be achieved following the divorce of the South from the North. In advancing this stance, the *naming* strategy is instantiated with the use of the nominal group «*blood-thirsty cannibals*» (P14) to describe the northern part of Nigeria. *Naming* is further used to derogatorily label and negatively represent Nigeria's nationhood as an «*unproductive union*» (P12) and the nation as a «*conquered territory and slave camp*» (P12). The text producers imply that the state of insecurity is bound to grow worse given the fact that the government that is saddled with securing the lives of its citizenry, by implication and assumption, is affiliated with terrorism. The text producers use negative labels to amplify the cognitive description of otherisation and polarisation. In essence, the *equating* stylistic resource is used to conceive an association and coalition of «*the southwest, southeast, south-south and middle belt*» as a formidable force that is pitched against the dominant north. On the strength of the above stance, the discourse participants are in full support of the secessionist campaign as a panacea to pacifying the aggrieved South who have, over the years, been victims of ethnic marginalisation.

3.4. The Lingering Biafran Secessionist Movement

The first attempt at secession in the history of Nigeria's politics can be traced to the civil war (Biafra War) of 1967–1970. The Nigerian civil war immediately followed the January 15, 1966, military coup and the July 29, 1996, counter-coup in the first republic. The war between the Nigerian government and major parts of the Southeastern region claimed millions of lives through

P15: *People like that half-breed Koiki are moles working to sabotage Yoruba struggle the moment he started making senseless and reckless statements that an attack on IPOB is an attack on the Yorubas, then I knew he was setting them up to fail. Why will any sane person say an attack on violent IPOBs that Wike, Uzodinma and co. are dealing seriously with is an attack on peace loving Yorubas.. such audacity to link a proscribed terrorist group from far away South East to the most progressive race on earth [Nairaland, August 16, 2021].*

P17: *Who would have believed that Yoruba would one day want Nigeria to break up. The same Yoruba that sided Fulani and MB to sabotage Biafra now wants Oduduwa. To love injustice is so bad. I still am awed with the paradox. Their love for free crude oil seems to have been minified by the blood of their people. So they now know that killing of one's kinsmen is enough reason to agitate for one's own country. But when Igbo were killed in the north, Igbo should not have wanted out of Nigeria. What goes around comes around. Anyway sha, I still will never take them serious because everything is politics to them. They may just be making noise to bring Fulani to negotiate and stop their plan of sending Tinubu to the gulag. Everyone should just keep looking at them because they'll always go behind and sell you out. The only genuine self-determination we are aware of is Biafra. When they wake up we'll know it is morning at their end [Nairaland, March 19, 2021].*

The Oduduwa nation campaign shares a similar secessionist agenda with IPOB. In P15 to P19 above, online participants discuss the Oduduwa nation's agitation in light of the current activities of IPOB. Some pro-Oduduwa nation discourse participants aligned with the Biafran movement due to the common goal of secession, while some, such as the text producer P16, distanced the Oduduwa nation movement from Biafra as a result of the ethnic sentiment and violent modalities of IPOB, which had been proscribed as a terrorist group by Nigeria's former president, President Muhammadu Buhari. Similarly, some participants who are not of the Yoruba tribe, such as P16, throw their weight behind the secessionist campaign while also suggesting a collaboration that can force secession. Conversely, some anti-Oduduwa nation participants, such as P18, ruled by ethnic sentiments, express negativity towards the discussed activities and conceive the Oduduwa nation secessionist movement as a «fake movement», arguing that «*Biafrans are those doing the doings*». Additionally, P17 urges other discourse participants to «*never take them serious*» because

«*the only self-determination we are aware of is Biafra*». In essence, issues surrounding the Biafra nation movement provide an intertextual base for discourse representations of the Oduduwa nation agitation.

4. CONCLUSION

The discourse of secession in Nigeria's political landscape continues to gather momentum, especially through the instrumentality of digital activism. The Oduduwa nation campaign recently resurged and became a global and local issue that rode on the wings of digital media technology. This study has undertaken a critical stylistic appraisal of some discourse and social issues that surround the discursive engagement and construction of the Oduduwa nation secessionist campaign in *Nairaland*. The study identifies aggravating insecurity in the country, the amalgamation pact of 1914, the perceived ethnic oppression of the southern region, and the lingering Biafra nation's agitation agenda as social issues that inform the online engagement of the Oduduwa republic movement. These issues are advanced by online participants as justification for the dismemberment of Nigeria and reasons why Nigeria's nationhood should be terminated.

Findings further reveal that online participants deploy critical linguistic-stylistic strategies such as naming and describing, negating, representing actions, equating, hypothesising, prioritising and enumerating as stylistic devices to project their resistance posture and to air their desire for the actualisation of the secession mandate. These critical stylistic resources are essentially deployed to otherise and dissociate from other Nigerians (either of the Yoruba tribe or other tribes) who do not subscribe to and support the secessionist campaign. These linguistic-stylistic strategies are significantly deployed alongside ideological orientations. On the one hand, they are used in a way that disfavours and delegitimises the otherised northern Nigeria while harping on the sentimental roles played by Nigeria's former president's administration and assumed affinity with the Fulani tribe, who are associated with different forms of socio-political malaise embattling the country. On the other hand, the strategies favoured and legitimised the activities and ideological beliefs of the Oduduwa nation secessionist crusaders as an opposition group. This resonates with Ajiboye's [2020] and Igwebuike and Akoh's [2022] idea that secessionist groups and their online and offline crusaders usually position themselves as non-conformists while also legitimising their oppositional activities against the government and political stakeholders. This is, therefore, reinforced by how online participants enact resistance and their staunch opposition against a united Nigeria. This, again, bolsters Van Dijk's [2009] stance that linguistic and discursive structures can express and project the cognitive positioning, mental models, and ideological standpoints of an individual or group on certain discourse issues. Consequently, as the burning issue of secession continues to resurface in Nigeria's political landscape, its rabid contestation in online space poses a threat to nationhood in that cyberspace can be harnessed to sustain the propagation of separatism and national disintegration.

Conflict of Interest

The author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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