

Ideological Discourse Analysis of Oduduwa Secessionist Twitter Narratives

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

*Oduduwa Agitators,
CDA,
Twitter,
Ideology and Resistance
Discourse*

ABSTRACT

The Oduduwa secessionist agitators are a group of social actors with the resolution of seceding Nigeria. Meanwhile, in spite of their reminder that Nigeria's nationhood is still highly contested, there appears to be very little or no linguistic research on discourses produced by this emerging group of activists. Therefore, this study analyses the Oduduwa agitators' tweets to uncover their prevailing ideologies and highlight their strategies for representing themselves and those they oppose. An analytical and qualitative research design is used to interpret the data selected. From the corpus of 10,000 tweets on Oduduwa secessionist agitators, a few tweets are purposively selected and analysed in this study. With insights from van Dijk's model of Critical Discourse Analysis, findings reveal that Oduduwa secessionists' Twitter posts (tweets) are protest discourses, with positive 'we' in-group representations and negative 'they' out-group constructions imprinted on them. The agitators apply linguistic strategies such as code-switching, foregrounding, and hashtags to express their solidarity as well as establish social interaction. The study concludes that Oduduwa secessionist agitators' tweets are effectively used to describe the identities of the actors, express their arguments and demands, enunciate their activities and goals, and offer information updates to the agitators and supporters.

1. Introduction: Oduduwa Campaign in Nigeria

Despite the fact that Nigeria gained independence from the British in 1960, the country was rife with ethnic strife. When the British colonial authority left, ethnic tensions arose across Nigeria's political landscape. During colonial authority, the Yoruba people were pitted against the Hausa people, who were regarded as the British's favourites and consequently controlled the political and military elite. Worse yet, the military government led by Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (a Nupe – a northern Nigerian tribe – man) annulled the "credible" 1993 Presidential election on June 12 and incarcerated Moshood Abiola (a Yoruba). This resulted in the formation of the Oòdua People's Congress (OPC) in August 1994. The organisation was established with the primary goal of defending, preserving, and promoting Yoruba interests (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2006). Nonetheless, the military regime that succeeded it, commanded by General Sani Abacha (a Kanuri — a northern Nigerian tribe –

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Cite this article as:

Aminu, P. G. (2022). Ideological Discourse Analysis of Oduduwa Secessionist Twitter Narratives. *Journal of Advanced Research in Social Sciences*, 5(3): 32-46. <https://doi.org/10.33422/jarss.v5i3.776>

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man), constrained this organisation. General Sani Abacha was accused of harassing and imprisoning certain senior members of the OPC based on allegations that they had committed acts of violence. The head of the Oòdua People's Congress, Frederick Fasehun, was one of those imprisoned in 1996 (Ajayi, 2021).

The Oòdua People's Congress had determined to federate the Yoruba people of Delta, Edo, Ekiti, Kogi, Kwara, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo States. However, as the organisation grew, a schism occurred, dividing it in 1999 between the 'Moderates,' who supported Frederick Fasehun, and the 'Radicals,' who supported Gani Adams. While Frederick's faction resolved to stay out of the agitations, Gani's faction had other plans. In any case, according to Agboluaje (2021), the National Oòdua People's Congress Secretary, Kayode Ogundamisi, declared (in 2000) that the organisation's campaigns aspired to lead to either "an autonomous South-Western territory in a friendly Nigeria or an independent Oduduwa Republic in an unfriendly Nigeria."

The Oduduwa secessionist group began operating in 2020, believing that the Fulani and Hausa people, including President Muhammadu Buhari's administration, have marginalised the Yoruba people. For activism, the group largely relies on social media (such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp) and online radio (such as Oduduwa Grand Alliance Radio, Oduduwa-Voice Radio Station, Omo Oduduwa Radio, and a variety of others). These platforms have attracted followers and supporters from all across the world.

Following President Muhammadu Buhari's actions, such as the administration's alleged silence on Fulani herders' rural grazing activity across the country, the Yoruba Nation Rally against the administration began on October 1, 2020, across several countries. Sunday Adeniyi Adeyemo (also known as Sunday Igboho) is the current leader of the Oduduwa separatist group, endorsed by Gani Adams and several other Yoruba leaders. Although not all of the agitators in the Oduduwa campaign are Yoruba, most of them come from the six South-West Nigerian states – Kwara, Kogi, Edo, and Delta, where there are large populations of indigenous Yoruba. Members of the Oòdua People's Congress can be found in African countries such as Benin, Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, as well as in other countries such as Brazil, Germany, Jamaica, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2006).

2. Problem Statement

The political, historical and sociological perspectives of the Oduduwa separatist agitations in Nigeria have been examined by scholars (see Jega, 2000; Poroma et al., 2019; Onyibe, 2021). However, despite the fact that Oduduwa agitators have a widespread sense of alienation and dissatisfaction, a situation that has exacerbated mistrust and fuelled separatist activities, there has been very little or no linguistic research on it. Thus, there is the need to apply a discourse analytical approach that would unravel and explain the role of language in current secessionist agitations and provide a plausible solution(s) to Nigeria's secessionist issues.

This study, therefore, acknowledges that discursive choices, ideological constructions and representational techniques have implications, especially because meaning is not only explicit but could be implicitly encoded. Since identity constructs and ideological stances are predominant products of language use within social interactions, it becomes essential to investigate their manifestations, influences, and implications within communicational processes. This study considers online discourse as a rich site for investigating identity and ideology in discourse. This is premised on the discursive nature of the interactional processes on Twitter, as they serve as remarkable resources that allow for considerable uninhibited expressions of opinions. Moreover, Twitter is particularly utilised for this study because it

serves as a significant social media platform through which Oduduwa agitators protest. This study attempts to provide answers to the following questions:

- ✓ What ideological discursive element(s) illustrates the identity construct and self-representational techniques of the Oduduwa agitators in their tweets?
- ✓ What discursive strategies are reflected in the Oduduwa agitators' tweets that reveal the socio-political ideology of the Muhammadu Buhari administration and Oduduwans?
- ✓ How do the stylistic features in the tweets represent the socio-political relationship between the Muhammadu Buhari administration and the Oduduwa movement?

3. Twitter as a Platform for Social Movement

Citizens have been forced to take to the streets in a public protest in response to bad governance. However, the intervention of Twitter has resulted in a significant drift from public protest to online campaign. Activists and citizens on Twitter have become increasingly vocal and engaged in political debates in recent years, asking crucial questions and demanding social justice when and where necessary. In fact, Twitter is the fastest and most efficient campaign tool for reaching and mobilising people online (Vergeer and Herman, 2013).

The use of Twitter has become commonplace in many nations of the world, and Nigeria is not an exception. Its role in socio-political discussions has received a significant increase over the years. Twitter requires the creation of a handle and a profile – for example, @AminuLee – after which users can send and receive tweets via computer and mobile networked devices. Searching on Twitter involves using keywords, often identified by user-defined hashtags. Through these hashtags in the activist context, social actors communicate their opinions to spread social awareness and information on social justice (Bergstrom and Belfrage, 2018). Hence, social actors of social movements (i.e., Oduduwa) have resisted perceived injustices and victimisations through vigorous campaigns on Twitter. As a tool of communication, Twitter allows the exchange of ideas among people interested in a similar topic(s) as well as provides the avenue for critical discussions and debates.

Rosell-Aguilar (2018) asserts that Twitter is a platform for the concurrent use of both formal and informal language. However, Robbin (2020) argues that Twitter users utilise more informal language, which he describes as *slanguage* – for example, a considerable number of discourses on Twitter are marked by the use of shortened words (such as 'bcus' for 'because') and lettered words (such as '2' for 'too'). Notwithstanding, regardless of the style or form of language, Chiluwa and Bouvier (2019) posit that Twitter is a digital community that supports the free flow of information and ideas, and it has shown significant promise in reshaping the structure of socio-political discourses toward the development of public debate(s).

In Nigeria, Twitter has stimulated a considerable number of protests, socio-political agitations and campaign movements. The 2012 #OccupyNigeria movement, which drew millions of people worldwide, is a good example. This protest began in response to President Goodluck Elebe Jonathan's administration's increase in petrol prices on the 1st of January 2012. Another significant campaign movement that drew millions of supporters on Twitter is the #BringBackOurGirls movement. The Boko Haram terrorist group kidnapped 276 female students from the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State, on the 14th of April, 2014. Millions of Twitter users all over the world participated in this protest. A large number of tweeters took part in the 2019 #SayNoToRape online protest. Many tweeters were drawn to this protest after Busola Dakolo made a stunning rape claim against Pastor Biodun Fatoyimbo, the Senior Pastor and Founder of the Commonwealth of Zion Assembly (COZA), in June 2019. The 2020 #EndSARS demonstration, which drew millions of tweets from all over the world, was another Nigerian protest that was galvanised and planned on Twitter. In fact,

the protest was stimulated on Twitter and quickly grew to include millions of people across the world.

In a similar vein, numerous Nigerian secessionist campaigns have been organised on Twitter – for example, the *#Oduduwa* campaign movements, the *#Biafra* campaign movement, the *#Arewa* revolutionary campaign, and the *#NigerDelta* campaign receive tremendous attention on Twitter; thus, *trended* across the globe with millions of interactants (or agitators). These campaigns are carried out not only in order for social actors to have their voices heard but also to have their demands met.

4. Methodology

An analytical research design is utilised in this study. The data in this study consist of text-based posts on Twitter. The study's data consist of 10,000 tweets, 700 of which were purposively chosen for qualitative discourse analysis. The 10,000 Facebook narratives were shared by both official OPC organisations and supporters; however, the 700 posts chosen for this study were shared exclusively by official OPC groups between 3rd November, 2021 and 18th January, 2022. This period involved massive agitations and protests in Lagos over Sunday Igboho's arrest and continued detention in Benin Republic by the Nigerian government. The 700 tweets were obtained using Python programming software. The Twitter Application Programming Interface (API) was used to do this. The software allowed the researcher to filter out undesired contents and begin selective crawling. 'Oduduwa,' 'Oduduwa Today,' 'Oduduwa Nation,' 'Oduduwa Republic,' 'Oduduwa Now,' 'One Nigeria,' 'Yoruba Nation,' and 'Sunday Igboho' were used as parameter settings to scrape tweets related to the Oduduwa secessionist agitations.

Although it is difficult to conclude that all tweeters are Nigerians because non-Nigerian sympathisers with the Oduduwa agitators could be included among the writers, all tweets in the data were posted by at least one of the official Oduduwa Twitter accounts. The accounts were chosen based on the fact that they were run solely by OPC members and had a large following of at least 2000 Oduduwa secessionist agitators who engaged in frequent discussions on the accounts. The Oduduwa secessionists' tweets are largely multimodal. However, posts employing visual or other semiotic modalities are not included in this study. This is because attention is paid to how words and lexical references are used to establish identity and form ideological attitudes.

5. Theoretical Framework: CDA as Theory and Method

As a theory, critical discourse analysis (CDA) explains the functional use of language in the social and political contexts – how language is used to make sense of political reality, construct social experiences, relationships and identities, drawing largely from Halliday's (1983; 1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). As a method of 'doing' analysis, CDA analyses social problems by examining ideologies that institutionalise and sustain social inequalities, racism, power asymmetry, prejudices and gender discrimination. The analysis of representation in discourse takes into account how vocabulary, grammar and textual structures are all interrogated (Fairclough, 2009; Chimunya et al., 2018). In the current study, van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to CDA is adopted as a method of doing analysis.

Teun van Dijk's socio-cognitive discourse approach examines how discourse is represented in 'text or talk' (Chiluwa, 2018). This method focuses on how mental representations or processes influence speech generation and interpretation, as well as common information, ideologies, and beliefs. By analysing members-groups, actions-processes, context-social structure, and

personal and social cognition, this approach bridges the gap between micro- and macro-analysis. Van Dijk's (2004) framework includes two main discursive ideological strategies: positive 'we' or self-representation (i.e., 'we' as the Oduduwa campaign agitators) and negative 'other' representation (i.e., the President Muhammadu Buhari administration/Northerners/Hausas/Fulanis).

The socio-political discourse in this study, therefore, illustrates van Dijk's (1998) ideological square (i.e. the emphasis of the positive actions of the 'we' in-group and the negative actions of the 'they' out-group). This square simply involves:

- i. Emphasising 'our' good properties or actions;
- ii. Emphasising 'their' bad properties or actions;
- iii. Mitigating 'our' bad properties or actions; and
- iv. Mitigating 'their' good properties or actions.

In essence, meanings are structurally manipulated by the principle of in-group preference and out-group denunciation. These discursive meanings, according to van Dijk (2011), structurally manifest information that expresses:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| a. Self-identity description | b. Activity description |
| c. Goal description | d. Norm and value description |
| e. Position and relations description | f. Resource description |

In this study, however, this socio-political discourse is viewed as a medium whereby Oduduwa agitators resist the *unjust* and *oppressive* practices of the President Muhammadu Buhari administration against them. Hence, the ideological discursive strategies identified in this study for analysis include:

- ✓ **Self-identity and Actor description/representation**, which involves the neutral or positive 'we' in-group description and the negative 'other' out-group representation, highlighting the negative attributes of 'others' and being silent or minimal about the negative description of 'our' group.
- ✓ **Main Arguments** involve the formal presentation of 'our' case and 'we' having the right to be heard.
- ✓ **Activity and Goal description** deal with what 'our' tasks are and how they have been affected by the goals of 'others.'

These form the framework for the analysis.

6. Data Presentation and Analysis

6.1. Self-Identity and Actor Description/Representation

As highlighted earlier, self-identification or actor description in the Oduduwa agitation context is a feature of ideological (socio-political) discourse. This is where the identity of the actors in the discourse is defined, i.e., where they reveal who they are, where they come from, what properties they possess, their differences or distinctive features, what qualifies membership of the group and who constitutes their friends or enemies (van Dijk, 2011). In this study, the actors are classified into 'we' and 'they.' This polarisation is illustrated as 'we' – *Oduduwas* versus 'they' – *the President Muhammadu Buhari administration*.

'We' is identified and represented as "Oduduwas" (T3), "Omo Oduduwa" (T4), "Ooduas" (T12), "Sons and daughters of Oduduwa" (T13), "Descendants of Oduduwa" (T25), "Yorubas" (T26) and "Ogo Yoruba" (T28). The 'we' actor is mirrored in the tweets that follow.

T3 “Happy New Year to Oduduwas and Biafrans!”

T4 “Awon *omo* Oduduwa, shey eti badura fun comrade wa, Oloye Sunday Igboho?” (Children of Oduduwa, have we prayed for our comrade, Chief Sunday Igboho?)

T12 “Dear Ooduas, if you are not ready to flaunt yourself in line with the ODUDUWA REPUBLIC/BIAFRA struggle of you are scared of being picked. Drop the agitation this year. Because 2022 we are going all out with massive campaigns for the new NATIONS.”

T13 “Sons and daughters of Oduduwa, we shall remain faithful to ODUDUWA REPUBLIC and BIAFRA struggle, and we will not betray our leaders Oloye Sunday Igboho and Mazi Nnamdi Kanu that have sacrificed so much for the emancipation of the new Nations.”

T25 “We are obligated to work for the creation of a sovereign Yoruba state, a peaceful home for the descendants of Oduduwa.”

T26 “We are Yorubas, we are not Nigerians”

T28 “Awa ni ogo ile Yoruba.” (We are the glory of the Yoruba land).

In the preceding data, there is a general topicalisation of the ‘we’ in-group, which makes ‘us’ the focal point. This has the potential to draw the readers’ attention to the ‘we’ in-group and perhaps, sway their opinion to ‘our’ side, particularly by emphasising the positive aspects of ‘us’.

The ‘we’ in-group regard language and tradition as eminent so much so that their identity is generally more Yoruba-related than English. The Oduduwa agitators share a sense of belonging and emphasise social intercourse among themselves, as there is a sense of *Yorubanness* in the names they identify themselves with. For instance, notice T3, T4, T12, T13 and T25, where there is the use of “Oduduwa”. Since they regard Oduduwa as the father of their tradition, the use of “Oduduwa” plays a role in reminding them of their traditional and ancestral belonging.

Furthermore, there is an identity the Oduduwa agitators share with the Biafra agitators. An examination of T3, T12 and T13 illustrates the fact that the relationship between the Oduduwa and Biafra agitators goes beyond tribal and cultural differences. Their synonymous aims, objectives and experiences provide a platform for their unity. For instance, not only do they have plans of secession but their leaders were intercepted and arrested for the same cause. While Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of the Independent People of Biafra, was intercepted on the 29th of June 2021 in Kenya, Sunday Igboho was arrested on the 19th of July 2021 in Cotonou, Benin Republic.

On the other hand, ‘they’ out-group, in this context, is referred to the President Muhammadu Buhari administration as well as the northerners. There is the assumption that not only does the Nigerian government show unjustifiable favour to the Fulanis, but its most significant offices are occupied mostly by the northerners. The Buhari-led administration is constructed and represented by the Oduduwa social actors as sentimental, nepotistic, morally deviant and politically inefficient. It is in this light that the ‘they’ group is identified and represented as “omo ale” (T2), “Fulani government” (T20), “Philistines of Ligeria” (T27), “Fulani” (37), “Buhari’s brothers” (T38), “useless elders” (T49) and “criminal in power” (T60). The ‘they’ or ‘other’ actor is described below:

T2 “Omo ale ni Lai Mohammed!” (Lai Mohammed is a bastard).

T20 “Tell the north and their Fulani government that THE GAME IS OVER.”

T27 “These Philistines of Ligeria will suffer this year, there’s no place for pampering in 2022.”

T37 “IPOB don’t kill, Fulani do!”

T38 “If by now, you don’t still know that the unknown gunmen are Buhari and his brothers and Fulanis are the criminal ravaging the BIAFRA land, parading themselves as unknown gunmen, your education is questionable.”

T49 “God will punish the north and their useless elders.”

T60 “They thought we are tired, they don’t know that we are strategizing. It will shock the criminals in power.”

Notice T2, where Layiwola (Lai) Mohammed is described as an illegitimate child (of Oduduwa). This is because although Lai Mohammed’s native language is Yoruba, his activities and speeches show obvious support and commitment to the Buhari administration. Any Yoruba, according to the Oduduwa agitators, that takes sides with the Buhari administration is considered a betrayer and enemy of Oduduwa’s children (the Yoruba people). This is to say that although the Buhari administration is characterised by multi-ethnicity and political divergence, any Yoruba who shows commitment to the Nigerian government, according to the Oduduwa agitators, is considered a betrayer and, therefore, illegitimate to the Yoruba land. It is noteworthy, however, that for personal reservations, official appointments and so on, some cabinet members of the Buhari government could be silent about their opinions.

An examination of the data presented above shows that vulgar and extremely negative words are used in representing the ‘other’ group. For instance, T2, T49 and T60 are characterised by negative expressions such as *bastard*, *criminals* and *useless*. T49 is an evil wish made by the Oduduwa agitators for the President Muhammadu Buhari administration. This exemplifies the vicious intentions the Oduduwa agitators have towards the administration. These excerpts are characterised by hatred and aggression. In T37 and T38, it is noteworthy that the Oduduwa agitators accuse the Buhari government as well as the Fulanis of committing dreadful crimes in the country, even though there may have been no thorough investigation in that regard. T27 explains the fact that not only have the Oduduwa agitators used malicious expressions on the Nigerian government, but they also antagonise the administration.

6.2. Main Arguments

There are certain specific arguments implied by the Oduduwa agitators’ Twitter discourse, which are identified in this section. First off, they argue that the crucial and sensitive offices in the Buhari administration are mostly occupied by the northerners. Similarly, Fasan (2020) asserts that 75% of the presidential appointees consist of northerners. The following data support this argument:

T22 “Even the VP justifies the indecent predominance of Fulanis in Buhari’s appointments. Omo ale!”

T30 “Buhari himself or whoever is in ASO ROCK is tired of one Nigeria. That is why all the appointments goes to Northerners.”

T33 “Buhari’s government is a lopsided government full of unqualified northerners. That is why the government thinks and talk like COWS in this century.”

Notice T22, where the Nigerian Vice President, who is Yoruba, is regarded as illegitimate. This is similar to the issue in T2. T30 – “Buhari himself or whoever is in ASO ROCK” – is a subtle exploration of the fact that many Oduduwa agitators believe that the President Muhammadu Buhari we see is not exactly the President, but a Nigerien acting as a facade. In Nigeria, there is a collocation of Fulani and herds of cows; hence, the use of the word ‘COWS’ to qualify the reasoning of the Nigerian government in T33.

The second main argument of the Oduduwa agitators is that they demand secession from Nigeria. This argument is mirrored in the following data:

T17 “As we discard 2021 few hours from now, so shall we discard NIGERIA in 2022 in the name of God.”

T23 “Being a Nigerian is shameful and disgusting. We all need a new identity. And that is Oduduwa Republic/Biafra.”

T53 “One Nigeria, One Rubbish and One Nonsense.”

T17 explains the fact the Oduduwa agitators not only work towards secession, but also pray to achieve that goal. In T23, Oduduwa agitators, in a quest for a new identity, find being Nigerian a disgusting attribute. On the 1st of November 2021, a 21-storey building in Ikoyi, Lagos State, developed by Femi Osibana, got demolished owed to its faulty foundation. These assertions provide implicit and explicit meanings that the Oduduwa agitators look forward to seceding Nigeria. Their use of vulgar and malicious expressions on Nigeria shows how much they detest the country and its leadership.

Thirdly, the Oduduwa agitators’ Twitter discourse illustrates that the Oduduwa agitators are uncomfortable with the favour the Buhari administration channel towards the northerners and, more specifically, the Fulani. This is illustrated in the tweets below.

T19 “A candidate endorsed by a terrorist is most likely a terrorist. Boko Haram continues to thrive under Buhari. He gave them university degrees and called them “repentants”. They continue to butcher people. Fulani cult also responsible for atrocities, and their leader is Buhari.”

T29 “Your Fulani President insists that grazing routes is a Presidential license to kill. By this declaration, Buhari and his stalwarts have issued a license to the Fulanis to kill anyone and we’ve seen it in #Zamfara as over 200 people were killed by Fulani terrorists in 5 communities. Support Oduduwa/Biafra!”

T48 “The Buhari administration speaks for the Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen.”

T55 “Buhari’s administration has failed to address the Fulani herdsmen/terrorists in Yorubaland. Lots of our people can’t go to farm again. Buhari is determined to give our lands to his Fulani brothers despite their huge land mass up north.”

The issue of unlawful cow grazing in Nigeria’s South-West has been a significant source of anxiety for the Oduduwa agitators, and the fact that the Buhari government allegedly exhibits little or no interest in the matter is even more concerning. This issue started in 2015, the year President Muhammadu Buhari took office (Onyemaechi, 2021). In the South-West, Fulani cow grazing was accompanied by incidences of murder, rape, theft, crop destruction and human abduction. The abduction of the former Secretary of the Federal Government, Chief Olu Falae, in 2015 aggravated the issue, prompting an emergency summit in Oyo State. During the summit, Yoruba chiefs urged an end to grazing and directed all nomadic herders to cease their operations in Yoruba land. They also demanded the swift arrest and conviction of those responsible for not just Chief Olu Falae’s abduction but also the slaughter and torture of Yoruba farmers. However, owing to the Buhari government’s alleged indifference towards the issue, significant protests against Fulani herders in Yorubaland occurred from 2020 to date.

Finally, Oduduwa agitators argue that the arrest of Sunday Igboho (and Nnamdi Kanu) is unwarranted and illegal. While Sunday Igboho (recently released) was apprehended in Benin Republic and charged with felony charges (Ejekwonyilo, 2022), Nnamdi Kanu was arrested in Kenya and repatriated to Nigeria, and he was still in detention as of March 2022, when this study was conducted, facing terrorism and treasonable felony charges. Data that support this argument include:

T5 “Sunday Igboho and Nnamdi Kanu are warriors fighting to liberate their people when there’s no one to help. Why was their arrest a priority? I just can’t wait for Oduduwa to happen.”

T24 “I wonder why the government and Northerners care more about the arrest of Nnamdi Kanu and Sunday Igboho when they should be more concerned about their region and the peace of this country.”

Oduduwa agitators find the arrest of Sunday Igboho and Nnamdi Kanu unjust and, therefore, protest against it.

6.3. Activity and Goal Description

The Oduduwa agitators’ activities or social actions take the form of social mobilisation and provide protesters with information updates (both online and offline). Their goals include: ‘Creating a sovereign Oduduwa State, ‘restoring the Yoruba nation,’ ‘uniting the Yoruba people,’ ‘fighting for the release of Samuel Igboho and Nnamdi Kanu,’ and ‘resisting Nigeria’s policies or policies by the Buhari administration – i.e., disallowing elections in the South-West.’” The Oduduwa agitations may have been encouraged by the Biafran agitations and the outcomes of Bangladesh’s secession from Pakistan in 1971, Timo-Leste’s secession from Indonesia in 1975, Eritrea’s secession from Ethiopia in 1993 and South Sudan’s secession from Sudan in 2011. The tweets below show that the protesters, in definite terms, demand a creation of a sovereign Yoruba country, which is their primary goal.

Tweet 11 “We have sworn to restore #YorubaNation. Self-determination is a must and Yoruba Nation is the answer.”

Tweet 36 “We have an obligation to work for the creation of a sovereign Yoruba State, a peaceful home for the descendants of Oduduwa.”

T42 “Our future can only be bright in the Yoruba Nation, and nothing will come between us and that dream.”

T59 “Nigeria z gone. Everyone shld jst prepare 4 d worst.”

The style and language in T42 and T59 appear to differ significantly. While they are both tweets, T42 is void of spelling manipulations and T59 illustrates the kind of ‘language revolution’ that is typical of digital communication. This is because tweets are in the form of text-based asynchronous communication, and participants adopt spelling patterns typical of text messages.

The second goal of the Oduduwa protesters is to unite the Yoruba people and preserve the Yoruba culture and tradition. Since the creation of the Oodua Peoples’ Congress, there has been an obvious division among the Yoruba people. This was evident in the fact that while some Yoruba people were members of Frederick Fasehun’s faction of the Oodua Peoples’ Congress, Gani Adam’s faction was supported by another faction. Also, as expected, the Oduduwa agitators believe that not all the Yoruba people are in support of the Oduduwa revolution. The Yoruba people’s contraction with the group could either be as a result of the benefit they enjoy from being ‘Nigerians’ or simply their disapproval of Sunday Igboho’s activities. The tweets below show a more practical illustration of this goal.

Tweet 1 “We have an obligation to unite the Yoruba people at home and in diaspora.”

Tweet 56 “There’s no better way to show love than by uniting the Yoruba race and restoring the heritage of the Yoruba people. And by doing so, creating Oduduwa Republic. Anyone who tells u dt #PMB is uniting d country is a fool!”

T64 “ONE PEOPLE, ONE TRADITION AND CULTURE KEEPS US GREAT TOGETHER – ODUDUWA REPUBLIC”

T70 “We Are Working Towards Uniting The YORUBA Race For The Pride And Heritage Of The Western Region.”

In lieu of their intention to preserve the Yoruba culture and tradition, the Yoruba language appears to be their official language. This is evident in their anthem, pledges and official language of communication during meetings. Further, we may take note of T28, T64 and T70, where different styles of capitalisation are utilised. This accounts for a graphological feature of tweets. While, for example, the T28 uses a sentence case, T64 uses uppercase and T70 uses a sentence with capitalisation on each word.

The third goal of the Oduduwa agitators is to protest for the release of Sunday Ighoho, Nnamdi Kanu and all other detained Oduduwa agitators. As stated earlier, there is the belief among Oduduwa agitators that Sunday Ighoho and Nnamdi Kanu were unlawfully intercepted, considering the fact that they were abroad when the Nigerian officials got them arrested. Hence, one of their primary goals is to protest for the release of their leaders. This is reflected in the tweets below.

Tweet 6 “We urge #Biafrans to join our Yoruba brothers to demand the unconditional release of one of our forefront leaders, Chief Sunday Adeyemo Ighoho, who is held in detention.”

T39 “We demand the release of Sunday Adeyemo Ighoho and all other detained Oduduwa agitators.”

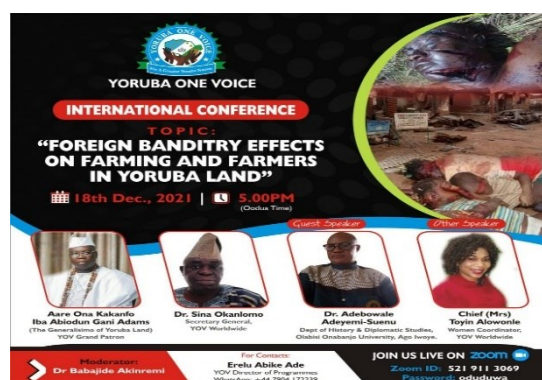
T45 “NIGERIA WILL BURN SOON, IF THEY REFUSE TO RELEASE INNOCENT MAN SUNDAY IGHOHO AND NNAMDI KANU. They are all freedom fighter. Go after BANDIT RAVAGING THE NORTH.”

T6 and T45 further illustrates the fact that in spite of the ethnic differences between the Oduduwa and Biafran agitators, their common interests serve as a cause for cooperation.

Lastly, the goal of the Oduduwa agitators is to protest vehemently against the suspicious activities of the Buhari administration. In this light, the Oduduwa agitators have not only been involved in physical demonstrations but also in the form of online (synchronous and asynchronous) resistance. The picture on the left is a banner inviting Oduduwa agitators for a physical protest. On the other hand, the picture is a flyer inviting Oduduwa agitators around the world for a virtual conference.



Source: Twitter



The data below reflects tweets that call for resistance actions against the Buhari administration.

Tweet 34 “A clueless nation ruled by a visionless leader, Buhari is EVIL! He permitted the use of *Twitter* because of the 2023 election. FOOL!”

T67 “Buhari shld jst kip borrowing money. Ligeria wud be sold soon.”

On the 5th of June 2021, the President Muhammadu Buhari administration imposed a Twitter ban. On the 13th of January 2022, however, the prohibition was lifted. The restriction was abolished, according to Oduduwa agitators, in order to make peace with Nigerians ahead of the 2023 elections. Another reason the administration relaxed the prohibition is said to be to commence a *Twitter* campaign ahead of the 2023 elections.

6.4. Linguistic and Discourse Strategies

Some linguistic and discursive strategies are applied by the Oduduwa agitators to describe themselves and their actions and (negatively) represent the Buhari government and Nigeria. Both explicit and implicit representations of the Buhari administration were achieved. The use of code-switching, coinage, foregrounding (by capitalisation), Nigerian-invented Twitter expressions, hashtagging, Nigerian English, frequent exclamation marks, Yoruba language and informal social media expressions are primarily the discursive methods employed by the Oduduwa agitators. These are mirrored in the following.

6.4.1. Code-switching

T9 “Awon Odu, e je ka badura fun Oloye wa – Oloye Sunday Igboho.” (People of Oduduwa, let us pray for our chief – Chief Sunday Igboho)

T10 “Nigeria ti jagajaga.” Nigeria has turned to rubbish

T15 “Odale number one ni Femi Adesina. (Femi Adesina is a real traitor). He will suffer the brunt of his actions!”

T15 is characterised by code-switching. The tweeter uses Yoruba ‘Odale’ (betrayal) and ‘ni’ (is) in an English sentence. T9 and T10 are also characterised by code-switching. This reflects the fact that many Oduduwa agitators are Yoruba.

6.4.2. Coinage

T21 “They asked Bokohari on national tv why he’s using the resources of his country (Fraudgeria) to build a railway for another (Niger)”

T41 “Ligeria must fall!”

T52 “While Bokohari and his gang give us gbas, we must show them gbos. No backing down. ODUDUWA/BIAFRAN NOW!”

The use of coinage (blending) is evident in T21, T41 and T52 – ‘bokohari’ (Boko Haram + Buhari), ‘fraudgeria’ (fraud + Nigeria) and ‘Ligeria’ (lie + Nigeria). The blending of Boko Haram and Buhari is associated with the belief of Oduduwa agitators that President Muhammadu Buhari is allegedly connected to the activities of the Boko Haram terrorist group. In similar vein, the terms ‘Fraudgeria’ and ‘Ligeria’ were coined out of the belief that Nigeria’s political system is characterised by fraudulence and built on the foundation of lies.

6.4.3. Foregrounding (by capitalisation)

Foregrounding by capitalisation is a major feature of the Oduduwa campaign discourse on Twitter. This feature is evident in T12, T13, T17, T20, T26, T30, T33, T45, T46, T52, T54, T57, T64, T69 and T70. The common words foregrounded are ‘Oduduwa,’ ‘Biafra,’ ‘Nigeria,’

‘Yoruba’ and adjectives used in qualifying the Buhari-led administration. This is done in order to highlight the theme(s) of the tweet. This is mirrored in the following tweets.

T46 “BUHARI IS A FULL BLOWN PANDEMIC. JOIN US ON THE STREET ON AUG. 05 TO QUARANTINE TYRANNY”

T54 “Fulani’s are striking everywhere now and you’re there speaking English about one Nigeria. You are MAD! ODUDUWA/BIAFRA NOW!”

T57 “Do you expect anything good from a cow that mehhhhhhhhhh? We focus on #ODUDUWA REPUBLIC NOW/BIAFRA NOW”

T69 “Two great men are in prison because of our freedom. They sacrificed so much for us so we too must reciprocate. #FreeSundayIgbohoNow #FreeMaziNnamdiKanuNow 2022 is for ODUDUWA REPUBLIC NOW/BIAFRA NOW”

6.4.4. Hashtagging (#)

T63 “People who complain daily about Nigeria’s irredeemable nature but attack #IPOB and #Oduduwa nation agitators for demanding a referendum for self determination probably need proper mental evaluation.”

T68 “We ODUDUWANS stand in solidarity with Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. Mazi Nnamdi Kanu must be released. #Yorubanationnow #BiafraNatiionNow”

Hashtagging is a prominent feature of Twitter discourse, and it is reflected in T6, T11, T29, T56, T57, T63, T68 and T69. Its use is owing to different reasons. While hashtags are used on Twitter to organise and sort tweets, they are also used to enable easy access to the right audience. The use of hashtags on Twitter makes tweets clickable and searchable. This is possible because the use of hashtags categorises search terms. When there are more than One Thousand, Three Hundred and Fifty (1350) tweets about the same topic or hashtags, they begin to trend.

6.4.5. Nigerian English

Oduduwa agitators’ discourse, being a typical Nigerian discourse, often comprises Nigerian English. Subjectless sentence, as posited by Igboanusi (2006) as a feature of Nigerian English syntax, is evident in T50, T63 and T65.

T50 “Eyin eniyan mi Yoruba, mo ki yin (My Yoruba people, I greet you). Am happy that the Nigerian government can see that the people are tired of Zoo Nigeria”.

T65 “Is only people with brains that can understand the damage Bokohari has caused. Nigeria has ended, but lies have blinded us.”

6.4.6. Yoruba Language

Many of the Oduduwa agitators' tweets are composed in Yoruba. T9, T10, T15, T28, and T35 reflect this. Their anthem and pledges are also performed in Yoruba. This emphasises the fact that the Oduduwa agitators are largely Yoruba people who use the Yoruba language as a major mode of communication.

6.4.7. Informal Social Media Expressions

There is copious use of informal social media expressions, such as the use of ‘u’ (you) in T56, ‘z’ (is), ‘shld’ (should), ‘jst’ (just) and ‘dat’ (that) in T59, and ‘kip’ (keep) and ‘wud’ (would) in T67. This is typical of the use of language on Twitter, and as expected, it is utilised in the Oduduwa secessionist Twitter discourse as well.

7. Conclusion

This study explicates the identity constructs and ideological stances employed by Oduduwa agitators using their tweets. Oduduwa agitators' tweets are effectively used to describe the identities of the actors, express their arguments and demands, enunciate their activities and goals, and offer information updates to the protesters. Oduduwa agitators construct themselves positively, while they represent the Fulani and Hausa people, as well as President Muhammadu Buhari administration, negatively. This is done by polarising their arguments on Twitter, and in doing this, Oduduwa agitators construct their discourses in ways which show that their identity is created, contextually motivated and achieved through Yoruba. The Oduduwa secessionist agitators, in a bid to disannul their identity as Nigerians, embrace an exclusionist identity.

As a result of the Oduduwa agitators' linguistic choices, there appears to be clear evidence of polarisation, identity construction and socio-cognitive representation. The analysis of the Oduduwa agitators' discourse in this study allows for the investigation of the features that are considered important in their descriptions of 'self' and 'others,' as well as the impact of their membership on social action. It is critical to understand the repertory of identities that Oduduwa agitators pull from in order to develop portraits of them, as well as their own interpretation and appropriation of mainstream labelling, and this study has offered a platform for doing so. This study also demonstrates the significance of Twitter's roles and functions in giving a forum for individuals and groups to express themselves, their perspectives, attitudes, and ideas on issues that concern them.

The fact that the Oduduwa agitators comprise Muslims, Christians, traditional worshippers and people of different religious groups yet, work in unison to achieve their goals implies that the primary source of wars and conflicts in Nigeria is not religion. Therefore, in order to restore a peaceful co-existence among all ethnic groups in Nigeria, it is important that all tribes are well-represented in political positions. Also, a referendum between representatives of Nigeria's geo-political zones (i.e., South-West, South-East, South-South and so on) and the Nigerian government is not negotiable. This referendum could potentially cease the idea of secession among the various agitating groups in Nigeria. It will also go a long way towards instilling a feeling of national identity and social interaction among Nigeria's various language groups.

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