

ETHNICITY AND FRAMING OF RURAL GRAZING RESERVES (RUGA) IN SELECTED NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the framing of the controversial Rural Grazing Reserve Scheme (Ruga settlement) in selected Nigerian newspapers. Through the reports in "Daily Trust", "The Sun" and "Nigerian Tribune" newspapers, the study examined the influence of ethnicity and geographical location on the framing of the Ruga scheme. The study draws theoretical relevance from Erving Goffman's framing theory. Following the methodological guidelines of Critical discourse analysis, the study found that the newspapers tilted their reports in favour of the ethnic groups of their publishers as well as their host communities. They largely echo the sentiments of the major ethnic groups in the locations where their headquarters are located. The study concludes that

Introduction:

Ethnic interest and influence are central themes in Nigerian politics. Nigerian newspapers are used to influence public opinion for and against ethnic nations. The support for or against the interest of an ethnic nation depends on the operational base of a newspaper as well as the ethnic nationality of the publisher (Okpe, 2005 and Onifade, Jonah & Sule, 2019).

Although objectivity is a cardinal principle in journalism, it is difficult to avoid subjectivity in the coverage of events and framing of reports because

there is mutual suspicion among the major ethnic groups in the country and the suspicion is traceable to precolonial times. The study also concludes that the major ethnic nations that make up the Nigerian state are prepared for a civil war and possible disintegration.

Keywords: *Ruga, Ethnicity, Nigerian newspapers, Framing, Critical Discourse Analysis*

Of ownership, political and environmental influence on the psyche of reporters and editors. Newspapers support regional ethnic groups through their framing of news stories. From their use of language, it is possible for critical readers to identify the ideological position of Nigerian newspapers on controversial national issues. For instance, at the peak of the debate over the proposed rural grazing area (Ruga settlements), *The Sun* newspaper published a story with the headline “Insecurity: Critics of RUGA, ranches are selfish –Anthony N. Z. Sani, ACF General Secretary” (Sunnewsonline, July 13, 2019). The headline suggests that the Ruga settlements would be beneficial to the northern region hence the support of the Arewa Consultative Forum for the programme. Eight days after this story was published, another one was published by the same newspaper with the headline “Ruga: Don’t set Nigeria ablaze, Afenifere, Ohanaeze warn ACF, Northern youths” (Sunnewsonline, July 21, 2019). The deduction from the headline is that the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) and the youths from northern Nigeria are were stoking the embers of ethnic discord over the planned Ruga settlements while the southern ethnic pressure groups like Afenifere and Ohanaeze Ndi’gbo were the upright party.

Since *Iwe Irohin* went into circulation, the Nigerian political class has discovered the potential of the press and they have invested heavily in it over the years thus throwing up a “competitive struggle to influence and control popular perceptions of key political events and issues” (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2005, p. 106). Consequently, Nigerian journalism has flown on

political undercurrent which has never subsided since its birth (Golding & Elliot, 1979).

Nigerian media reflects the plurality of the Nigerian society. However, Agbaje (1992) opined that the media goes beyond reflecting the pluralities in the society to play them against one another. However, it is good to note that the media is a neutral tool which could unite or divide people depending on the goals and purposes for which it is put to use. The Nigerian newspaper industry has reflected the multitude of ethnic groups and regional power blocs which permeate the Nigerian political space over the years and the newspapers have historically been used for ethnic political gains. At independence, Nigerian media was sharply divided along party and ethnic lines. Omu (1978) noted that they were reckless, overzealous and irresponsibly partisan. This verdict has arguably remained the same since then.

While newspapers have contributed positively to the political and social development of Nigeria, the political elites “use the press to whip up emotions and recruit and mobilise lower classes as cannon fodders in their political warfare for state power and resources” (Oso, Odunlami, & Adaja, 2011, p. 20). This is done through the fusion of ethnic and other divisive primordial factors in the social discourse. The perennial conflict among the major ethnic nationalities in Nigeria is unavoidable because the ethnic nationalities that make up Nigeria were coerced by colonial Britain into statehood despite their different cultural and religious identities (Adegbami & Uche, 2015, p. 59). Since colonial days, there has been a struggle for political power and this has led to widespread national tensions. The newspapers of the colonial era was largely ethnic in orientation and operations and they have remained so till date (Okidu, 2011). Of concern is “the increasing tendency towards sub-national loyalties within the larger nation state and the seeming inability of the media to transcend such tendencies” (Okidu, 2011, p. 49).

This study therefore seeks to examine the influence of the ethnicity of the publishers of the selected newspapers on their reports on the selected issues; find out the influence of the geographical location (operational

base) of the selected newspapers on their framing of the issues under investigation; and investigate how the selected newspapers frame the proposed rural grazing reserves (Ruga Settlements) for Fulani herders.

Media and politics in Nigeria

Media play huge roles in the society. The media are both agents of change and agents of preservation of the status quo. The purpose for which they are used depends on the power dynamics in any society in which the media operates. In egalitarian societies, “media function both as transmitters of political communication which originates outside the media organisation itself, and as senders of political messages constructed by journalists” (McNair, 2001, p. 11). This indicates that the media operations in democracies is a complex and delicate phenomenon.

The media is crucial to the development and sustenance of political systems. It thrives more in democratic settings. Nigerian media played a key role in the return of the country to democratic rule by fighting successive military governments that ruled the country since the coup of December 31, 1983. As one of the midwives of our present democracy, Nigerian media therefore has the task of sustaining and improving on the democratic achievements recorded since the return of civil rule to the country. As presently constituted, the mass media industry is not running at maximal capacity and therefore, cannot fulfil its constitutional role of holding the government accountable to the people among other functions. Nigerian media workers are among the lowest earners globally and they cannot put in their best efforts to sustain democracy while they live in an environment of pressing economic insecurities (Santas & Ogoshi, 2016, p. 83). With improved training and welfare, their predisposition to be motivated by the need for “stomach infrastructure” in the discharge of their professional duties will be reduced (Adibe, 2015).

The media hold the potential to cause harm to the polity through their reports and analysis. In recognition of this potential danger, there have been calls for regulatory bodies to sanction media practitioners and organizations that abuse their privileged position in the society. It is

believed that such sanctions could restrain the “centrifugal pulls of media institutions with irredentist inclinations” (Santas & Ogoshi, 2016, p. 83). However, sanctions are not justifiable when media workers are not provided with basic professional environments for the discharge of their duties.

Nigerian newspaper industry and by extension the media industry is a product of politics. It grew out of missionary and colonial invasion by agents of Western governments “whose interests were economic imperial or ecclesiastical. It is not surprising therefore that the early media establishments in the country were owned by missionaries” (Maho, 2019). These missionaries and colonialists used the newspapers to promote the interests of their religious and political philosophies. Early nationalists quickly learnt and understood the politics of newspaper operations and they established their own newspapers to counter the influence of the colonial government. Herbert Macaulay, Ernest Sessei Ikoli, H.O Davies, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo are prominent nationalists who made effective use of newspapers for political warfare.

While the early nationalists used their newspapers to wage a racial political war against the colonial government on one hand, they used their platforms to lay the foundations of today’s ethnic political warfare. Daramola (2013) traced the roots of Nigeria’s divisive ethnic politics to the formation of pre-independence political parties. Following the establishment of the Nigerian Youth Movement in 1934, Ernest Ikoli (an Ijaw man), the proprietor of *Daily Service* contributed so much to the growth and stability of the party. He sought the presidency of the party in 1941 but, Nnamdi Azikiwe (an Igbo man), the publisher of *West African Pilot* did not support Ernest Ikoli because of the rivalry between their respective newspapers. Nnamdi Azikiwe promoted the candidacy of Samuel Akinsanya (a Yoruba). However, H. O. Davies and Obafemi Awolowo (both Yoruba men) supported the candidacy of Ikoli who emerged victorious in the elections. Following the victory of Ernest Okoli, Nnamdi Azikiwe withdrew his membership of the movement alongside his Igbo supporters citing his ethnicity as the reason for Akinsanya’s loss at the

polls (Daramola, 2013, p. 41). This action by the Azikiwe arguably set the tone for ethnic politics in Nigeria.

Omu (1978) confirmed this when he stated that, the hostility between Azikiwe's *West African Pilot* and Ernest Okoli's *Daily Service* on one hand and Samuel Akintola on the other hand between 1938 and 1944 greatly contributed to regional loyalty and ethnic resentment which have become mainstay in Nigerian politics till date (Omu, 1978, p. 247) in Nigeria. The ethnic tension in the Nigerian Youth movement and its consequent fragmentation into many political parties cost Nigeria an early political independence (Ayatse & Iorhen, 2013, p. 188).

Following independence, a pattern of ethnic and local affinity, patronage and coverage of newspapers emerged in Nigeria. The mass media in the first republic lacked harmony. They exhibited sectional biases in their reportage of events across the country thus leading to the delineation of Nigerian newspapers along geographical lines. This brought about the sobriquet "Lagos/Ibadan press" (Galadima & Enighe, 2001, p. 67). Upon the emergence of a nationwide matter in the Nigerian public space, the media organizations take sides by supporting the region from which they operate (Iwokwagh, 2011) and government policies are attacked and defended by in the media along ethnic or regional lines.

Framing

Framing theory was developed by Erving Goffman, a sociologist. The theory is related to the agenda-setting theory but it goes a step further than the agenda-setting theory. While agenda-setting is preoccupied with the salience of topics, framing goes further to focus on the crux of the issues pushed to the top of the agenda of public discourse. The fundamental argument of framing theory is that "the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning" (Utwente.nl, 2019). The placement of events in the field of meaning is a guide to the public on how to process the events in their minds.

The core assumption of framing theory is that besides drawing the attention of the public to certain topics, the media also decides what the

public think about the topics. Although the idea that the media tells us what and how to think is not absolute, it is arguably true with members of the audience who are not media literate.

Framing is a cognitive concept and the frame of a story refers to its organization and presentation by media gatekeepers. It influences the perception of the media audience especially the uncritical audience. Frames “serve to organize or structure social meanings. Frames influence the perception of the news of the audience, this form of agenda-setting not only tells what to think about, but also how to think about it” (Utwente.nl, 2019).

According to Goffman, the concept “frame” refers “to a specific set of expectations used to make sense of a social situation at a given point in time” (Baran & Davis, 2012, p. 332). Framing theory is directed at identifying the systems in which individuals perceive the world. Goffman “argued that interpretive designs constitute central elements of cultural belief systems. Goffman called these interpretive designs frames that we use in our day-to-day experience to make sense of the world” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009, p. 407). Frames are helpful in the understanding of the world. Through frames, complex issues are simplified and reality is reconstructed. This is against the background that the meaning which humans make of the world is based on their knowledge, experiences and belief systems.

Framing has undergone conceptual refinement over the years. Focus is shifting from general framing to specifics like “those around elite discourses because many news stories favor the perspective of the powerful societal stakeholders. Others have focused on slant or content frames that identify ways in which framing favors one side over the other in a dispute” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009, p. 408).

Nigerian ethnic elites engage media professionals to produce favourable frames for their ethnic groups and negative frames for other ethnic groups in their reports, columns, editorials and advertorials. To do this, they use media houses and media practitioners who have similar ethnic orientation or those sympathetic to their cause from minority tribes. For instance, the position of Yoruba elder statesmen on national politics would be given

positive frames by Yoruba reporters writing for a newspaper like *Tribune*. The same newspaper may report the actions of Hausa/Fulani elder statesmen on same issue using negative frames. In the same vein, Daily Trust and Leadership which are headquartered in the north and owned by northerners will give positive frame to the position of northern elder statesmen on issues while giving negative frame to the position of elder statesmen from southern ethnic groups.

Methodology

This study employs critical discourse analysis to achieve its set objectives. Two news stories are selected from each of the selected newspapers (*Daily Trust, The Sun* and *Nigerian Tribune*) for analysis. The texts are analyzed in relation to the ethnic, historical and political contexts in which they are produced.

The Sun

The first entry from *The Sun* newspaper is titled “Ruga: Don’t set Nigeria ablaze, Afenifere, Ohanaeze warn ACF, Northern youths”. The story is a reaction of Ohanaeze Ndi’gbo and Afenifere to the Arewa Consultative Forum’s support for the controversial Ruga settlements (Vincent, 2019). The story is examined here:

Pro-south socio-cultural organisations, Afenifere and Ohanaeze Ndigbo have warned their counterpart in the north, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) that their support for the establishment of the controversial Fulani herdsmen settlements popularly called Ruga across Nigeria is capable of setting the country on fire. They also warned that the endorsement by the Northern elite group for Miyetti Allah’s proposal to set up vigilante groups in parts of the country is capable of destabilising the polity.

The extract above is the lead of the story and it reports a warning by the southern ethnic groups to their northern counterpart (Arewa Consultative Forum) against their continued support for the Ruga policy of the federal government. Their position is that the policy could set the country on war path. They also challenged the proposal of the Fulani pressure group

(Miyetti Allah) to create vigilante groups across the country as a panacea for the recurrent clashes between Fulani herdsmen and farmers from southern ethnic groups.

Yinka Odumakin, said “these people are baying for a war. They want to set Nigeria on fire, ablaze. Let us warn them loud and clear, the coalition that fought the civil war between 1967 and 1970 has collapsed forever. They should not think that they can go and fight anybody now and win. We know history even in 1967; we know where victory came in that war. They should be careful the way they are going. They should let us live in peace and harmony on the basis of true federalism, but if they think that they can lord it over the rest of the country because they hold temporary power for four years, they are playing with fire.

“There was a country called Soviet Union; there was a country called Czechoslovakia and there was a country called Yugoslavia; those countries are no more on the world map today, so, they should not let that be the fate of Nigeria the way they are going;...To say that they want Ruga settlements implemented all over the country is a declaration of war on the rest of us.

The extract above shows that Afenifere considers the Hausa/Fulani pseudo ethnic group as an aggressor. In the same vein, Afenifere alludes to the Hausa group as a weak group. The statement attempts to rearticulate Nigerian history by attributing the victory of Nigeria over Biafra to the Yoruba elements in the Nigerian army. There is an indication that the Yoruba nation regrets its role in the preservation of the Nigerian federation. The declaration that “the coalition that fought the civil war between 1967 and 1970 has collapsed forever” (Vincent, 2019) is a subtle way of saying that the Yoruba nation would never collaborate with the Hausa/Fulani in future. However this does not reflect the current reality because the current administration was installed through a political alliance between Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani political elites. They are expected to repeat the feat and install a Yoruba president in 2023. There is a threat of balkanizing Nigeria like the defunct United Soviet Socialist Republic and Czechoslovakia if there is persistent demand for Ruga

settlements across the country. This could lead to war as the Yoruba militias may be forced to defend their people against the Fulani invasion. Odumakin further said that, “the federal government through its body language, policy, action has turned sectional and that is why nothing is happening to these people making this hate speech. What did Nnamdi Kanu do that they charged him for treason? ...we are on the road to Kigali.

“This is just about conquest, domination, land grabbing, and forceful take over of territory; go back to history, the entire Hausa land today, Berom and Ilorin, they never have emirs, there is no town in Hausa land today that the Fulani built, but go everywhere; go to Zamfara, they have emirs everywhere. How did they do it?

The extract above shows Afenifere’s perception of the federal government. It portrays the federal government (especially the president) as a government of the Hausa/Fulani which protects Hausa/Fulani criminals and vilify genuine agitators and activists from the southern tribes. The threat of war is reiterated again through the expression that “we are on the road to Kigali”. This is an allusion to the Rwandan civil war and genocide. The extract also suggests that the perennial objective of the Fulani nation is to conquer and establish a political hegemony over other Nigerian ethnic nations just as they did with the Hausa ethnic group through the jihad led by Usman bin Fodio. The establishment of Fulani emirates in places like Ilorin, Wase, and Dass are historical evidence of this grand Fulani plan.

Ohanaeze through its national publicity secretary, Uche Opaga- Achi, said the positions of both ACF and the youth coalition, show the level of impunity they demonstrate or operate. “Nigeria is already on fire, and what was remaining is disintegration, which the action of these people is leading to... They have the backing of the federal government ... while the statement they have made is enforcing, heating the embers of disunity in the country.

“Our argument is this, the land in the north is by far much more larger than the one in the east or in south... Our argument is that you have the Sambisa forest that can contain all the cows in Africa and the insurgents are coming

in through that axis. Let them go and develop the forest and bring all the cows in Africa and put there.

The apex Igbo cultural group, Ohanaeze Ndi'gbo holds similar views to that of Afenifere on the issue of Ruga settlement. Its position suggests that the federal government tacitly supports northern interest groups and they consequently operate with impunity. They sow seeds of discord through inciting public statements that could lead to the disintegration of the country and the government ignores their statements while leaders of other ethnic groups are harassed, arrested, detained and jailed for similar or lesser crimes. The arrests of Nnamdi Kanu and Omoyele Sowore as well as the interrogation of Dr Obadiah Mailafiya are examples of the treatment meted out to non-Hausa/Fulani political activists.

Ohanaeze Ndi'gbo points out the fact that the north has a larger land mass than the entire south end there are large areas suitable for grazing or ranching in the northeast specially the Sambissa forest. It advises that the forest should be taken over from Boko Haram and Islamic State insurgents and converted into a livestock hub. This could put an end to the annual loss of lives in the unending herdsman/farmers conflict.

"In the alternative, the Sahara desert is wasting; you have oil in the south and you piped it to the north and you use it the way you want. So, the same way, you can also pipe water to the Sahara desert, as Governor Nyesom Wike suggested that they can pipe water to the desert, and Governor Dave Umahi also said that they can buy the grasses from the south. So, you can use the money you have and pipe water to develop the Sahara desert, water it and grass it.

In the extract above, Ohanaeze Ndi'gbo also suggests a creative way of growing livestock in Nigeria. It urged northern elites to transport water to the north just like they do with oil and the water could help create oases in the desert. Late Libyan leader Muamar Gadhafi showed that this is possible in his country which has harsher climatic conditions than that of northern Nigeria. The people of Israel have also shown that agriculture could thrive in the desert. Ohanaeze also suggested another business model which entails buying grasses from the south and transporting same to the north.

This would create more jobs for Nigerians across the north and south especially in the agriculture and transport sectors.

You see brothers and sisters fighting over land because the land is too small... and you want to bring in Fulani from all parts of Africa to come and flood here in order to continue with you Islamisation and Fulanisation agenda. Is there anything hidden about this thing; it is an open secret... It is the IPOB whose members were not armed was declared a terrorist group, but the terrorists that are busy killing people, damaging farms are walking freely without challenge.

From the extract above, it is clear that Ohanaeze also believes in the alleged Islamization and Fulanization agenda of the northern oligarchy which it calls “an open secret”. The text decries the invincibility of killer herdsmen across Nigeria and the tagging of members of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) as a terrorist organization even though they do not bear arms. While it is true that IPOB members do not evidently bear arms, it must be said that the group has contributed to the distrust among Nigerian ethnic groups through inciting media releases, interviews and broadcast on its guerilla radio (Radio Biafra).

The second entry from *The Sun* newspaper is titled “Ruga: Miyetti Allah fomenting trouble –Ohanaeze, Afenifere”. In the report, the spokespersons of Ohanaeze Ndi’gbo (Uche Achi-Okpaga) and Afenifere (Yinka Odumakin) accused Fulani pressure group Miyetti Allah Kautel Hore of inciting violence with its demand for Ruga settlements in every state of the federation (Kalu, 2019). The report is analyzed below:

In an interview with Saturday Sun, the National President of the cattle breeders, Abdullahi Bodejo, emphasised that in order to have enduring peace, every state of the federation should carve out a portion of land for the Fulani to settle, because it is the largest ethnic group in Nigeria.

The extract above provides the background against which the statements of the spokesmen from Ohanaeze Ndi’gbo and Afenifere were made. The demand for land for Fulani herdsmen as precondition for peace given by the president of Miyetti Allah expectedly elicited a reaction from the leading Yoruba and Igbo ethnic pressure groups. The reaction of Ohanaeze

Ndi'gbo and Afenifere is an indication of mutual suspicion and tension among the major ethnic pressure groups and by extension the ethnic groups which they represent.

According to Achi-Okpaga, "law guides everything you do on earth, and you don't just say everybody has the freedom to do whatever business he wants and by whatever means he wants to drive the business. You cannot come out to say you have a grazing route, you enter people's farm and call it, 'grazing route'. Grazing route at where? It is unlawful; trespass.

In the extract above, the spokesperson of Ohanaeze Ndi'gbo challenged the legality of the setting aside grazing reserves and routes for the Fulani nation across all the states of Nigeria. It is important to note that there were routes dedicated to the movement of cattle from the north to the south. However, these routes have been encroached upon by farmers as the country's population increased and infrastructural development occurred in urban and rural areas. It is important to stress that the laws establishing these grazing routes are obsolete and they have not been reviewed to reflect the present realities. To that extent, the roving herdsmen and their urban kinsmen are right to demand unhindered movement of their livestock across the country. However, the ethnic groups of southern Nigeria also have a right to protect their ancestral lands from outsiders.

Instead of the arduous migration on foot from north to south, livestock farmers should embrace the idea of ranching. However, land should not be taken from southern tribesmen and given to northern herdsmen. Rather they should follow the laws of demand and supply. It should also be open to businessmen from every tribe.

So, you are bringing foreigners to come and kill us and take our farms. They claim that the people killing us are not Nigerians, but foreigners and you want us to give our land to foreigners and to allow them to do their business anyhow to our own detriment? It's unfair, they are being economical with the truth, and their action tends to divide Nigeria; nobody is safe anywhere. They want us to leave our people to be killed.

The extract above captures one of the fundamental concerns of ethnic nations in southern Nigeria. Over the years Hausa/Fulani political leaders

have argued that the rampaging killer herdsmen are not Nigerians but Fulani from other countries. It is important to stress that it is difficult to separate Nigerian Fulanis from those from other countries. If that is the case, how can we ensure that those to be given lands in southern towns and villages are Fulanis from Nigeria?

There are fears that the federal government seeks to tactically take over the rest of Nigeria through the RUGA policy. This fear is given credence within the present political reality because the president is from the Fulani ethnic group. The takeover of Ilorin by the Fulanis in precolonial days also provides a historical perspective to this fear. Till date, the traditional political leadership of the ancient Yoruba city is ruled by Fulani. Before then, the Fulani nation migrated to northern Nigeria from Fouta Jallon and they waged a religious war on the indigenous Hausa people of northern Nigeria. They defeated the Hausa rulers and replaced the traditional political system with a theocratic one based on Islamic traditions. There are fears that the proposed Ruga settlements is a subtle way of creating Fulani hegemony over the rest of Nigeria.

Why wouldn't those who want to do their private business seek allocation of land and do their business. They just come from the North, enter our bush and take it over as if it is their land. Where is it obtainable in the world?

"The Fulani are not larger than the Igbo in Nigeria; they are not larger than the indigenous Hausa people, they are not larger than the Yoruba nation, why is it that they cannot allow people to have rest in their land, why must they coarsen people to take their land. There is no land in the Southeast for Ruga or whatever you call it. It cannot happen in the Southeast. They are just courting trouble.

The extract above shows that Ohanaeze Ndi'gbo is not averse to individuals and groups from other ethnic nations doing business in Igboland. They however expect the settlers to respect the laws of the land and follow economic principles and business models. The move becomes suspicious against the background of the ethnicity of president Buhari under whose administration the idea of Ruga is proposed. Ohanaeze Ndi'gbo also

challenged the erroneous claim by the Miyetti Allah that the Fulani nation is the largest ethnic nation in Nigeria. Indeed the indigenous Hausa people outnumber their Fulani overlords even though they have intermarried over the years to create a pseudo-ethnic group called Hausa/Fulani. Even on the strength of the assumed amalgamation of the Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups, they cannot emphatically claim to be the largest ethnic nation in Nigeria. There are several ethnic groups across northern Nigeria who speak Hausa language in addition to their indigenous languages. Although they are often lumped with the Hausa/Fulani pseudo-ethnic group for political and electoral conveniences, it must be stated that they do not belong to the Hausa or Fulani ethnic nations.

In the same vein, Odumakin said there is enough land in Sambisa forest, as well as the Northwest, and urged Miyetti Allah to go and establish their Ruga there.

“In our region, communities, they should perish any idea of any Ruga. Like we have said before, they have to conquer us militarily before they can set any Ruga in our land. What they are saying is an agenda in conquest and land grabbing...They are taking it too far.

The extract above captures the reaction of Afenifere to the idea of Ruga settlement. The spokesperson of the group Yinka Odumakin points out that there is adequate grazing land in Sambisa forest in northeastern Nigeria and the vast ungoverned territories housing bandits in northwestern Nigeria. These vast lands could take care of the grazing need of the herdsmen. This means that the forests could be developed into a commercial hub for the meat industry. Although he gave the advice with sarcasm, it is safer and less stressful for the herdsmen to graze their livestock in northern forests than to travel far south to do same. The group is evidently prepared for war if the government and northern ethnic groups insist on the implementation of the Ruga policy. This preparation brings the newly established Southwest Security Network (Operation Amotekun) into perspective. There have been insinuations that the security outfit was created as part of a larger secession plot by the Yoruba nation.

Daily Trust

The first entry from Daily Trust is titled “We Never Declared War On Fulani Herdsmen — Southern, Middle Belt Leaders”. It was published on July 18, 2019. The summary of the news story is that a coalition of leaders from the southern and middle belt ethnic groups have denounced the declaration of war on Fulani herdsmen by sections of southern and middle belt ethnic nations.

Southern and Middle Belt Leaders Forum (SMBLF) yesterday said there was never a time its governors and leaders declared war against Fulani herdsmen whom they said had lived with them for many years.

The group expressed shock at a statement credited to the chairman of the Northern Elders’ Forum (NEF), Prof. Ango Abdullahi, that the Fulani herdsmen should return home if they were no longer safe in the south.

The lead of the story above suggests that the ethnic nations of the southern and middle belt regions love and live in peace with the Fulani herdsmen and are uncomfortable with the suggestion of a northern elder statesman, Prof. Ango Abdullahi that the herdsmen should return home to the north if they feel unsafe in the south.

The Southern and Middle Belt Leaders Forum comprising Chief Edwin Clark; Chief Ayo Adebajo (Afenifere) Chief Nnia Nwodo (President General, Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo) and Dr. Pogu Bitrus (President General, Middle Belt Forum), said they were saddened by the statement created to Prof. Ango Abdullahi and the Coalition of Northern Groups. The forum reiterated that the Southern and Middle Belt leaders were not against the Fulani herdsmen as there were a large number of them living with them and doing legitimate businesses in their communities.

In the extract above, the newspaper attempts to fracture the cohesion of the southern and middle belt ethnic pressure groups who have vehemently opposed the proposed Ruga settlements for herdsmen across the federation. The inclusion of Afenifere’s Ayo Adebajo, Nnia Nwobodo of Ohanaeze Ndi’gbo and Middle Belt Forum’s Pogu Bitrus suggests that the leadership of the ethnic organizations are not vehemently opposed to the

Ruga project because the programme had long been in existence before the official proposal by the current administration.

“What we are against, is the Fulani herders who are armed with AK47 and other weapons and ammunitions, killing, rapping, destroying and causing mayhem. Even President Muhammadu Buhari has himself admitted that the Fulanis who carry these arms are not the legitimate herders, but those from other countries, and these are the ones the Ruga settlement is being planned for, and we say no to it, and will resist it... The forum called on President Muhammadu Buhari “to put a stop to the divisive actions of Prof. Ango Abdullahi and his youths because it will be very dangerous for us to return to circumstances that created the civil war...”

From the extract above, the newspaper attempts to create a contrast between Nigerian Fulani herdsmen and their cousins who immigrate to Nigeria from other parts of Africa. It suggests that Nigerian Fulani herdsmen are peaceful and law-abiding while those from other African counties are criminal minded; and they are the ones the Ruga programme is meant to resettle in southern lands. The story ends with a warning from the coalition that the actions and utterances of some northern elder statesmen and youth leaders could set the country on the path of war which would be dangerous to everyone judging historical lessons drawn from the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970.

The second entry from Daily Trust is titled “ACF Urges Dialogue On Ruga”. It was published on July 20, 2019. In the story, Arewa Consultative Forum’s coordinator for the South-south and South-east geo-political zones called for dialogue between the federal government and ethnic nations across the country on the Ruga project.

The South-south /South-east Coordinator of the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), Alhaji Musa Saidu, has advised the federal government to engage stakeholders in various states where it intends to establish Ruga settlements in meaningful dialogue to enable them understand the real intention of the project.

Alhaji Saidu...said the misconception people have that Fulani herdsmen are killers and trouble makers may have stained the genuine intentions of government.

Above is the lead of the story and it called on the federal government to engage the indigenous people, whose ancestral lands they plan to use for Ruga settlements, on meaningful dialogue so that they could understand the real intentions of the project. This portrays the Arewa Consultative Forum as a pacifist organization. It also suggests that other ethnic groups erroneously see Fulani herdsmen as killers and criminals and this perception has negatively affected the lofty plans behind the proposed Ruga project.

Saidu said meaningful dialogue with critical stakeholders such as traditional rulers, youths, non-governmental and faith-based organizations would facilitate mutual understanding of the project, adding that such dialogue is the only solution to the acceptability of the project.

.. the project is for the Fulani's to have ranches for their cattle's it's is a welcome development.

Above is the conclusion of the story. It recommends a parley with traditional, religious and youth leaders in order to facilitate the acceptance of the Ruga programme by the southern ethnic nations. This call is an overestimation of the influence of traditional rulers and religious leaders in the liberal communities of southern Nigeria. The ultimate beneficiaries are according to the newsmaker are the herdsmen who would have permanent grazing areas for their livestock and new land for their families.

Nigerian Tribune

The first entry from *Nigerian Tribune* is titled "Attempt To Re-Introduce RUGA System Will Amount To Constitutional Crisis – Ayo Adebajo". In the story Afenifere leader Ayo Adebajo condemned attempts by the federal government to reintroduce the shelved Ruga settlement project warning that it would lead to a constitutional crisis.

He stated this while reacting to a statement by Mr Garba Shehu, titled "President Buhari: Farmers will reap benefits of our policies," said the

Federal Government would be working with state governments to rediscover the lost grazing routes and reserves across the country as part of measures to end farmers and herders' clashes.

From the extract above, the elder statesman a media aide of President Buhari had stated that the federal government planned to collaborate with state governments to rediscover lost grazing routes and reserves across the country as a panacea to the incessant clashes between farmers and Fulani herdsmen (Kasali, 2020). The position of the government as framed in the story is one that is oblivious of current realities in the country.

All we are saying is that has he got the constitutional rights to do so? It is just going to cause a constitutional crisis. “Under the land use decree, he cannot. The Governor of the state has power. When we say the man is desperate to rule as a dictator, Nigerians thought we are joking. “All he is doing now is the plan made under the military regime by the section of the country controlling the country.

In the extract above, Ayo Adebajo questioned the legality of the president to appropriate lands for members of his ethnic group in the ancestral lands of other ethnic nations. The elder statesman ignored the fact that the presidential statement indicated that the presidency would collaborate with the state governments to secure the lands. However, the concentration of political and economic powers at the center of the Nigerian federation suggests that state governors could be bullied into giving up their lands for the Ruga project. This fear is further fuelled by the military background of President Buhari who had poor human rights record as a military ruler between 1984 and 1985.

“This is not our constitution but an imposed constitution. Unless they restructure the country now, the country will break. He is being defiant... “So, when we are talking about restructuring, people don't understand. We are saying go back to true Federalism, go back to the constitution the founding fathers agreed on before Independence and I could mention the constitution agreed to by Sarduana, Awolowo, Azikwe, Balewa.

While the bone of contention in the report is the Ruga settlement, the elder statesman used the platform to call for political restructuring of the

country warning that the federation could disintegrate if it is not urgently restructured. This is similar to the warnings by officials of Afenifere and Ohaneze Ndi'gbo that implementing the Ruga project could lead to civil war and possible disintegration of the country. However, the newsmaker defines his idea of restructuring as a return to true federalism rather than the balkanization of the country as demanded by some ethnic agitators. He calls for a return to the federalism enshrined in the independence constitution.

The second story from *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper is titled "No Peace Unless Herdsmen Move Freely —Northern Group". The story which was published on July 6, 2019 captures the reaction of a coalition of northern ethnic pressure groups to the suspension of the Ruga settlement project by the federal government following fierce opposition by southern ethnic groups.

AGAINST the backdrop of the suspension of the controversial Ruga settlement project by the Federal Government, the Coalition of Northern Groups (CNG) has declared that there will be no peace in the country if herdsmen are not allowed to move freely in any part of the country. The coalition, which had on Wednesday, given the Federal Government a 30-day ultimatum to rescind its suspension order and implement the Ruga initiative, also asserted that it was not afraid of the review of the "present union (referring to Nigeria) because what we have now is a collection of southerners and northerners, not Nigerians."

In the extract above, the coalition declared that there would be no peace in the country if herdsmen are not allowed free movement across the country. Free movement here refers to access to ancestral lands of other ethnic groups for grazing purpose. The coalition also gave the federal government an ultimatum to implement the Ruga project or face the consequences which could be a review of the statehood (Sabiu, 2019). This is a clear affront on the authority of the federal government. It must be pointed out that individuals from southern tribes (Omoyele Sowore and Nnamdi Kanu) who have made similar comments have been harassed and detained.

The spokesman of the CNG, Abdul Azeez Suleiman, in an interview with Saturday Tribune on Friday, said: “We are not withdrawing the ultimatum on the suspension of the programme by the government. You can’t deny some citizens their rights and think there will be peace in the country.” On the recent call by the apex Igbo socio-cultural group, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, on Igbos to defend themselves against any threat from any quarters, He said: “I think the two bodies are selfish and wicked.”

As shown above, the group was defiant in its ultimatum to the federal government to speedily implement the Ruga scheme or face a breach in public peace. It described southern groups calling on their people to defend themselves against Fulani invasion as “selfish and wicked”. In other words, it thinks people do not have a right to defend themselves against killer Fulani herdsmen who destroy their farmlands, rape their women and kill their men. This is against the law of self-preservation.

The statement reads in part: “The federal and state governments must adopt policies and positions which address the harassment of the Fulani and their cattle, de-escalation of inciting rhetoric and actions and short and long-term solutions to the problems which could damage the livestock industry, worsen community relations and threaten national security.”

The extract above is from a statement issued by Northern Elders Forum on the Ruga conundrum. It alleges that Fulani herdsmen and their cattle are harassed and urged the federal government to develop and implement policies that would reduce inciting narratives and protect herdsmen and their cattle from harassment. Failure to do so could have grave economic effects especially on the livestock industry and threaten national peace, cohesion and security.

The Plateau State chapter of Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBAN) has stated that those opposing the establishment of Ruga settlement in the country are enemies of progress who want farmers and herders clashes to continue for their selfish interests. It declared that no matter how loudly the oppositions cried, Nigeria must adopt Ruga to address the farmers/herders clashes.

The extract above shows the position of another section of the Coalition of Northern Groups. The Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) holds the position that opponents of the Ruga scheme are enemies of the Nigerian state. The text shows that the group considers the Ruga scheme as the only way to stop the clashes between Fulani herders and farmers from other ethnic groups.

Discussion of Findings

From the analysis of the six news stories, it is observed that the ethnicity of the publisher and the geographical location of the headquarters of the newspapers influence their framing of the Ruga controversy. While *The Sun* and *Nigerian Tribune* newspapers largely framed the Ruga project as an unnecessary project designed for the subjugation of other ethnic groups by the Fulani, *Daily Trust* newspaper framed the project as a largely misunderstood concept meant to promote peaceful coexistence, preserve lives and protect properties across the country.

The perceived positions of the newspapers projects the positions of the leading ethnic pressure groups from each of the major tribes. *Nigerian Tribune* and *The Sun* project Arewa Consultative Forum and other northern pressure groups as aggressors while portraying Afenifere and Ohanaeze Ndi'gbo as defenders of their ancestral lands. *Daily Trust* on the other hand projects the northern ethnic groups and tribes as misunderstood entities with good intentions while portraying the southern ethnic groups as people who deny other Nigerians their constitutional rights to free movement.

Conclusion

From the examination of the texts and the contexts within which they are produced, it is deducible that there is mutual suspicion and distrust among the various ethnic groups that make up the Nigerian state. This suspicion is a product of historical events which cut across pre-colonial, colonial, military and the present democratic era. The three major ethnic nations seem to be prepared for war and possible dissolution of the Nigerian union.

While the younger generations can be excused for beating the drums of war, the elder statesmen cannot be pardoned because they experienced the Nigerian civil war and they know its impact on the social fabric of the country. Therefore, they ought to dissuade younger ones from the production and the promotion of divisive rhetoric.

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