

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF DISCRIMINATION IN HOST-MIGRANT COVID-19 DISCOURSE

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it the attendant need for nations to reduce vulnerability and protect their borders. However, this also poses challenges for migration and globalisation. This study therefore critically examined discursive expressions of discrimination in Nigeria-China relations in 2020 following the COVID-19 outbreak. Specifically, it investigated whether discursive representation of migrants could have an impact on globalization. Data were purposively drawn from twenty (20) media reports gathered from: *Premium Times*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *The Guardian*, *Aljazeera*, *Africa news*, *CNN*, *BBC*, *Global Times*, *DW*, *The Africa Report*, and *Channels Television* between January to June, 2020. The data were analysed drawing on insights from van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The qualitative analysis of the data revealed that discriminatory construction of migrants was achieved through the use of inclusive/exclusive discourse. Furthermore, it was observed that discourse strategies of polarization, criminalization, emotional appeal/victim discourse, blame avoidance and legitimation were deployed to achieve positive/negative representation of the hosts and migrants. The study suggests that there is the need for nations to adopt anti-discriminatory perspective to the discourse of global migration in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, in order to strengthen world interconnectedness and development. However, the construction of migrants' rights such as those analysed in the Nigeria- China COVID-19 media discourse suggests that it may impede international relations among nations.

KEYWORDS: CDA, discrimination, host-migrant, COVID-19

Introduction

The concept of global citizenship reflects the United Nations' (UN) goal of encouraging the people of the world to voluntarily connect beyond national and geographical borders. This UN effort is aimed at enhancing the development of communities, cultures and economies through world interconnectedness. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has recently motivated migration restrictions as nations have been forced to adopt the policy of border and citizen protectionism rather than multi-lateralism. Of course, a major implication of this move is that it could hamper international cooperation.

The COVID-19 crisis is reported to have started in Asia in 2019 and since then the virus has

spread all over the world except Antarctica, taking on a pandemic nature. Indeed, in about two years, over 3.24 million deaths have been recorded all over the world due to the COVID-19 disease. One major implication of this is that at individual and societal levels, the pandemic has significantly altered human interactions and relationships. In a bid to save citizens' lives, various countries have put in place precautionary measures to limit the spread of the virus. One of these measures is restrictions on mobility to limit human-to-human transmission of COVID-19. Thus, free flow of people has been invariably affected through strict migration restriction measures as countries try to control migrants' and refugees' entries (UN, 2020).

China-African relations predates the independence of most African countries, Nigeria inclusive. Over the years, the relationship between China and Africa has grown particularly in the area of trade from \$10bn to slightly below \$200bn from the early 2000 to 2019. Chinese investment in Africa has also increased significantly, with a record of \$75m in 2003 to \$2.7bn in 2019. As should be expected, this relationship has also increased migratory activities between China and the African continent. Indeed, it is suggested that about 500,000 Africans reside in China while about two million Chinese live and work in Africa.

In spite of this positive side to the relationship between Africa and China, there have also been reports of racial discrimination between them. For instance, it has been reported that Chinese who work in Africa, do not only bring along their labour but also their culture and political perspectives and these sometimes fuel cultural conflict characterized by discrimination (*DWnews*, November 9, 2018). In addition, there have been reports of instances of discriminatory treatment of Africans living in China. For instance, in 1988, it was reported that Chinese students in the city of Hangzhou claimed that African foreign students were carriers of the AIDS virus, though foreign students had to test negative to the virus before being allowed entrance into China. In addition, in 1989, more than 2,000 Chinese students boycotted classes in protest against Africans dating Chinese women (Marsh, 2021). In 2020, more than two decades later, there were reports of coronavirus-related discrimination against Africans in China. Africans living in the southern city of Guangzhou province which has the largest African community in China, were reported to have been subjected to forced coronavirus testing and arbitrary 14-day self-quarantine, regardless of their travel history. Many of these migrants were evicted by landlords and rejected by hotels. In other words, many Africans living in Guangzhou province were left homeless. Unsurprisingly, this incident was widely reported in the media and generated public outcry among Africans, particularly Nigerians.

In the light of the foregoing, this paper critically investigated the discursive expressions of discrimination in the COVID-19 media discourse on Nigeria-China relations. The critical approach adopted in the paper was aimed at finding ways of addressing discriminatory tendencies latent in the treatment of international migrants and thus mitigating its adverse implications for globalisation and world development.

Globalisation and COVID-19 Pandemic

The idea of globalisation involves higher levels of international relations manifest in increased human interactions and movements between different regions and populations around the world. Particularly, from the 1980s, efforts to encourage globalisation have involved targeted moves of the well-established nations of the world to support developing countries through interdependence of economies, cultures and populations (Guttal, 2007). Nonetheless, globalisation has also been criticized for benefiting corporations rather than those who work for them; not reflecting any significant improvement in poverty alleviation in most developing countries and associated with political turn to

the emergence of more extremist parties (Milner, 2018). In addition, rising populism and nationalism within some nations of the world in the last two decades, and particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis have resulted in a retreating sense of internationalism and thereby posing a challenge to globalisation (Amanuel, et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, China is one of the nations of the world that has benefitted immensely from globalisation. It has been able to achieve this by encouraging international relations in order to establish itself as a modern economic power. Over the years, China has built strategic partnerships with countries rich in natural resources in Asia and Africa, providing foreign aid and cancelling interest-free loans owed to it. China's interest in sourcing for Africa's natural resources and its acceptance of the economic and political elites of the continent as part of its embrace of globalisation, has resulted in a significant shift of Africa's focus on the West to a more receptive embrace of China's mode of capitalism (Ansah, 2008).

China's re-entry into the world started in 1978 with its market reforms, and since then migration activities both in and out of the country have continued to grow. Since 1978, China has been exporting its investments, citizens and consumption, among others to Europe, Africa and other parts of Asia. In spite of its homogenous nature (about 92% of China belongs to the Han ethnic group), China has encouraged migration activities by opening its borders to people from other parts of the world who travel to China for diverse reasons ranging from trading, to scholarship and investment (Pieke, 2004).

Nigeria-China Relations

The Sino-Nigeria relationship was established about 50 years ago in 1971 when the two countries signed the Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations. However, between 1999 and 2006, diplomatic visits increased significantly, to the level where Nigeria has come to be considered as the most pro-China nation in the world, particularly in the area of trading and export (Ogunkola et al, 2008). Nigeria's close ties with China is viewed in some quarters to have grown due largely to Western world's hostility and disapproval of military dictatorship between 1970-1998. In 2020 however, the cordial relation between the two countries experienced a setback when Nigerians living in China were reported to have been subjected to discriminatory treatment during the COVID-19 pandemic global lockdown. This invariably generated public discourse some of which were expressed via international and local media. Thus, this study critically examined some of the discourses produced and circulated in the media during this period in order to examine social actors' expressions of racial discrimination.

Critical Discourse Analysis and Discriminatory Discourse

Racial discriminatory practices, particularly those enacted via text, talk and communication are often produced in form of power abuse and domination at the micro and macro levels. Sometimes they manifest in everyday conversation and in some other instances, they are produced by dominant groups, organisations and institutions (van Dijk, 2015). Discourse plays a central role in the learning and entrenchment of racial discrimination in society since racial ideologies are mainly produced via communication. It is not surprising then that, expressions of racial discrimination are often produced, resisted or delegitimised discursively (Wodak and Reisigl, 2015). Discrimination may be discursively enacted through strategies of polarization, criminalization, legitimation and emotional appeal among others. For instance, Wodak (2008) notes that topi of criminality and abuse of social welfare systems are among standardised themes often deployed by political actors to justify and legitimize discriminatory opinions. In addition, van Leeuwen (2018) observes that all social practices require legitimisation particularly when they are in the process of being established or changed. Polarisation

is another important strategy deployed in political discourse for constructing varied perspectives on issues. Indeed, Chilton (1996:147 cited in Hart, 2018) notes that polarization operates as a principle of division' in which an image schema is produced to enact a discourse of Us and Them'.

Since the interest of this paper is in the critical discourse analysis of discrimination in Nigeria-China COVID-19 media discourse, the study is anchored on van Dijk's (2009) socio-cognitive approach to the critical study of discourse. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) adopts the social constructionist approach to the study of discourse and thus, views language use as ideological rather than a neutral reflection of the world, social identities and relations (Jorgensen and Louise, 2002; Blommaert, 2005). CDA focuses primarily on the study of the relations between discourse, dominance, abuse of power and social inequalities as manifest in text and talk. Ideological representations are not in most cases produced overtly. Rather, social actors present their ideology in non-ideological or commonsensical ways.

The investigation of opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifest in language, is therefore germane to CDA research (Wodak, 2001). According to Fairclough (1995), CDA aims to explain or make clear these naturalized ideological representations and more importantly analyse the social determinations and effects of discourse which are opaque to, or hidden from participants in communicative situations. It does appear that most CDA research are focused on the 'top-down' relations of dominance rather than 'bottom-top' relations of resistance and challenge. However, in this paper, a dual perspective is adopted in the analysis of the enactment and resistance of discrimination in Nigeria-China COVID- 19 media discourse. It is expected that this will provide a wider view on discursive expressions of discrimination in international migration.

Proponents of CDA adopt different approaches to the study of text and talk based on their peculiar research enquiries. However, three major approaches seem to stand out – Norman Fairclough's socio-cultural approach, Ruth Wolak's Discourse-historical approach and Teun van Dijk's socio- cognitive approach. This paper follows van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach which views shared knowledge or other beliefs which people in society have acquired over time as potential source of power which could influence discourse construction and mutual understanding in communicative which views-cognitive approach to CDA views ideology as a means through which members of a group or race understand the world better. It has however been observed that ideology could form the basis of discriminatory practices when it manifests from group conflict and struggle (van Dijk, 2000). In light of this argument, the socio-cognitive approach to CDA is considered useful in the study of the ways in which racial groups discriminatorily represent the in-group and out-group in typical -well versus -them media discourse. The potential of the media to set agenda and frame the perception of readers/ listeners on issues implicates it as a source of influence on society because it aids in the construction of social reality (Scheufele, 1999). In this paper, the notion of the media includes the print and electronic media through which far reaching information could be disseminated in global relations. In addition, media actors were conceived as including journalists, news writers, politicians and other social actors (Mey, 2001), who produced discriminatory discourses on Nigeria- China COVID-19 relations in 2020.

A Survey of Studies on Discriminatory Discourse

Discriminatory practices are aspects of society that continue to generate research concerns. Discursive expressions of discrimination in the areas of race migration, ethnic identity, etc., typically reflect dichotomization, exclusion and prejudice against settlers or migrants. The international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of 1969, describes racial discrimination as:

=any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life'. (January-Bardill, 2005:25)

Language serves as a tool for social practices which in most instances are discursively enacted. Thus, discrimination is an aspect of social and political relations that has attracted the research attention of discourse analysts. Some scholars examined expression of racial discrimination in media discourse (van Dijk, 1983; 1988b), discriminatory gender discourse (Oamen, 2019; Okon et al, 2018), discriminatory inclusionary/exclusionary ethnic discourse (Wodak, 2009; Agbakwuru and Opara, 2013). These studies reveal that linguistic and contextual resources are useful in the strategic construction of discriminatory in-group and out group discourse. In addition, they view differing forms of ideology (racial, patriarchal, ethnic, etc.) as means of maintaining and sustaining unequal power relations in society. While this paper is also interested in the study of discriminatory discourse, it however focused on the expression of discrimination in Nigeria-China COVID-19 media discourse.

No doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic is an aspect of global life that has attracted copious research attention in recent years. Scholars have examined the phenomenon from different theoretical perspectives. For instance, Imanche et al. (2020), studied the effect of COVID-19 on Nigeria-China political and economic relations. They applied a descriptive analytical approach to the study of the trade information between the two countries. The authors established that there was an imbalance in Nigeria-China economic relations. In other words, the study revealed Nigeria's overdependence on China and recommended a more balanced economic relationship between the two countries. Similar to Imanche et al's interest, this paper investigates Nigeria-China relations in the face of COVID-19 challenges. However, while Imanche et al, examined the economic implications of COVID-19 on Nigeria-China trade relations from a sociological perspective, this paper studies the relations between the two countries from a linguistic perspective.

Some other studies examined discriminatory practices engendered globally by the COVID-19 pandemic. He et al (2021), investigated the possibility or otherwise of globalisation and immigration mitigating or intensifying discriminatory practices among native groups following the outbreak of COVID-19. Specifically, they surveyed discriminatory practices against Chinese citizens living outside China in 65 countries of the world. Their findings showed that stronger trade or immigration relationships with China were associated with less reported cases of discrimination. Wang et al (2020) also studied discriminatory practices stimulated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors studied expressions of Chinese migrants' resistance of discrimination and racism in France. The study revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic has forced young skilled Chinese new comers to France to become aware of racial discrimination. The paper however also showed that descendants of Chinese migrants in France were already attuned to discriminatory treatment before the outbreak of the virus. Ojebuyi et al. (2021), also studied media coverage of COVID-19 by investigating the pragma-semantic implicatures of the lexical choices employed in the headlines of some Nigerian newspapers. The findings on the 252 COVID-19 related headlines studied revealed that word choice had some pragma-semantic implicatures which could condition audience's cognition of the pandemic in Nigeria.

Yang and Wang (2020) investigated the ideological role of the media in the coverage of global public health emergency. Their critical discourse analysis of China-related news of COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 revealed that discursive strategies of a mini narrative and headlines as a moral lecture are adopted to construct China as epidemically paralysed. They therefore recommended a

fair-minded approach to media communication in order to effectively combat the COVID-19 challenge globally. Similar to Yang and Wang, this paper also adopts the critical approach, to the study of COVID-19 discourse. It however seeks to bridge the research gap, by investigating discrimination in Nigeria-China COVID-19 media discourse.

Hence, the specific objectives of the study are to:

Critically examine how discrimination is constructed in Nigeria-China media discourse of COVID-19,

Discuss the discursive strategies employed by social actors to represent the in-group and out group in media discourse on COVID-19, and relate the media discourse to the socio-political realities of their constructions.

Methodology

The qualitative method is adopted in the analysis of discursive expression of discrimination in Nigeria-China COVID-19 media discourse. The analysis focuses on the description, explanation and interpretation of twenty (20) news reports which were purposively selected from some local and international media's websites. The data were downloaded from 11 (eleven) media websites. They include: *Premium Times*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *The Guardian*, *Aljazeera*, *Africa news*, *CNN*, *BBC*, *Global Times*, *DW*, *The Africa Report*, and *Channels Television*. The purposive sampling strategy adopted helped in limiting data to only those which reflected racial discrimination in the Nigeria- China related COVID-19 media discourse produced at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The data therefore consist of written texts and audio-visual recordings. Verbatim transcription was carried out for one of the data drawn from *Channels Television*. The transcription was however limited to the verbal information of the recordings. For ease of analysis, the samples were labelled MDD1, MDD2, and so on (representing Media Discriminatory Discourse 1, 2, etc.).

Findings and Discussion

Some of the linguistic structures and strategies deployed by social actors in media discourse on Nigeria-China relations during the COVID-19 pandemic global lockdown exhibited a predilection for traditional discriminatory tendencies in host-migrant relationship. The institutional discourse of the media in most instances were deployed to achieve inclusive/exclusive representation of social actors and positive/negative representation of the in-group and out group (Wodak, 2009). These forms of representation were achieved through the following discourse strategies: polarization, criminalization, emotional appeal/victim discourse, blame avoidance and legitimation. Due to space constraints, the next sub section presents an examination and explanation of some samples that reflect discursive expressions of discrimination in Nigeria-China COVID-19 media discourse.

Polarization

The discourse strategy of polarization was employed in some of the media discourse samples in which group polarization reflected the typical -Us|| versus -Them|| discourse. In **MDD1** below, it was observed that social actors employed the cognitive-binary of positive/ negative representation of migrants/ hosts 'actions. To achieve this implicit comparison, labeling, pronominal and material processes were deployed to strategically produce exclude/include social actors.

MDD1

"Look how **they** are **treating us**, how **they forced** us out of our houses and forced us to self-quarantine," he told the BBC from a hotel in the city. "**They told me** that the [test] result is out and I am negative. Still they don't want me to go out."

(BBC, April 17, 2020)

MDD 2

As the **blacks** are **stopped** from entering a white shopper walks past the security, another white shopper tries to intervene but fails. –**Chinese government** says **black people** are not welcome, because they are the **cause** of the corona virus, another caption read.

(Africa news, 09 July 2020)

MDD3

The Association notes with grave concern that the Government did not take into consideration the extant laws regulating the practice of medicine in Nigeria as enshrined in the Medical and Dental Council Act. This is one circumstance where the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria should be consulted to grant necessary approvals to **foreigners** to interact with **Nigerian patients**.

(Premium Times, April 6, 2020)

In **MDD1**, the Nigerian student interviewed by *BBC* framed the action of the Chinese government and its officials as oppressive to migrants. The host community is tacitly criminalized through the use of material processes: treating' and forced'. In addition, the use of pronominals: they', us', I' produces a typical we/they exclusionary discourse which aids in the criminalization of the host community and presents migrants as victims of racism. In addition, the material processes: _stopped' and cause' as well as the labels: blacks', black people' are employed in **MDD2** to frame the host community as discriminatory and racist. Indeed, it has been argued (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2019) that the terms blacks' and black people' express and reinforce racial divisiveness in race relations. Similar implicit expression of racial discrimination is found in **MDD3**, where Chinese medics are referred to as foreigners.

The term foreigner constructs the Chinese medics as outsiders and also helps to excuse or explain the Nigerian Medical Association's (NMA) rejection of their access to Nigeria during the COVID-19 lockdown. The ideological basis for the rejection could however be better understood when **MDD3** is viewed against the NMA President's insinuation that the Chinese medical personnel posed a threat to the health and wellbeing of Nigerians: _The spike in cases and the death toll from COVID-19 in Italy coincided with the arrival of the Chinese in the guise of offering assistance'. It has been observed that one of the discourses copiously produced in the narratives on COVID-19 is that of the *Other* (Ivic & Petrovic, 2020). Thus, **MDD3**, demonstrates social actors' tendency to shift responsibility for the outbreak and spread of the disease to other nations of the world. In addition, the extract could be seen as reflecting van Dijk's (1992) observation that political actors sometimes mitigate discriminatory racial discourse by ideologically presenting the argument in the mold of common-sense values of realism. Therefore, to mitigate discrimination in **MDD2** and **MDD3**, the social actors strategically denied it by foregrounding the argument of national interest above values of tolerance or hospitality.

Criminalisation

In examining criminalization as a discourse strategy deployed in the media discourse, we investigated the ways migrants were constructed in the shape of criminals who have dangerous and deviant tendencies. It was observed that this strategy was deployed mainly by the host communities to avoid blame. In **MDD 4** below, labeling, material processes and allusion to attribution of the traits of social groups were deployed to criminalise migrants within an argumentative frame. Adjectives (overstaying', illegal') and discourse strategy of mitigation: the **conflict** over the virus test, is something of a **misunderstanding** people are **not hostile** to Africans in their mind' were deployed by some of the Chinese social actors to justify actions and debunk claims of racial discrimination. Thus, allusion to unauthorized migrants' activities (overstaying', doing some illegal things') was employed to ideologically construct migrants as criminals and threats to the host community.

Similarly, in **MDD5**, the idea of illegality in migrants' activities is deployed by the Nigerian host community to justify the threat of deporting some Chinese living in the country. The journalist's foregrounding of the phrase: Following the maltreatment of Nigerians in China', tacitly suggests that the government's proposed action was prompted by the alleged maltreatment of Nigerians in China during the COVID-19 pandemic. The material process: **'ordered'** presents Nigerian political leaders' actions in military term and thus, frames the perception of a war situation between China and Nigeria. **MDD4** and **MDD5** therefore support the perception in some quarters that the media plays a central role in the construction of migrants as criminals and deviants, thereby justifying host communities' application of criminal justice in cases of illegal migration (Brouwer, et al, 2017). In addition, there are cautions against the use of war metaphor in the fight against COVID-19 through media discourse. Some scholars (Panzeri, et al, 2021) have noted that the use of metaphor such as that employed in **MDD5**, could eventually shift nations towards authoritarianism in politics.

MDD4

"If there is a problem, it may be that **some Africans** are **overstaying** and **doing some illegal things**. –The **conflict** over the virus test, I think it is something of a **misunderstanding**. It is not about racial discrimination. That's not the style of the Guangzhou people," he said. –People are **not hostile** to Africans in their mind, unless **some Africans are doing things against the local rules**," he added.

(BBC, April 17, 2020)

MDD5

Following the maltreatment of Nigerians in China, the House of Representatives at the resumption of plenary on yesterday **ordered** investigation into the **legality** or otherwise of Chinese nationals living in the country currently for possible repatriation back to China.

(This Day, April 29, 2020)

Emotional appeal/victim discourse

In analyzing the use of emotional appeal/victim discourse in some of the samples, interest was in the way's social actors strategically constructed host/self as victims. In **MDD6**, **MDD7** and **MDD8** below, this discursive strategy showed groups' attempt to achieve exclusionary discourse of humans' helplessness in the face of the pandemic and thus avoid blame for the spread and management of the virus. In **MDD6**, the writer demonstrates typical media actors' power to manage public perception by

assigning positive legitimizing values to self/ in-group and negative attributes to others. The emotive use of words by the chairman of northern governors' forum tactically categorized the actions of the Chinese and Nigerian authorities as negative/ positive respectively. While the actions of the Chinese authorities were described with the material process: kicked out'; adjective: sad'; phrase: inhuman treatment', the idiomatic expression: red carpet treatment was deployed to describe Nigerian government's hospitality to Chinese citizens. Framed in this way, the discourse helped to demonise the Chinese government's move to quarantine Nigerian migrants and emotively constructs them as victims of racial discrimination.

In **DDM7**, the writer deployed the persuasive strategy of pathos in the use of the adjective victim' to construct China as part of a helpless and challenged world, ravaged by COVID-19. Structured in this way, the discourse is tacitly employed to shift the blame of the outbreak and devastating consequences of the pandemic to COVID-19, which in this case is constructed as the common enemy of humanity: China, like other countries is a victim'. This strategic move agrees with Reyes' (2011) observation that one of the ways social actors justify their actions is to construct themselves as victims. In **DDM8**, the writer constructs African media groups who reported the alleged discriminatory treatment of migrants and the Western world in an inclusionary discourse which represented them as outsiders and perhaps enemies of China's congenial relationship with Africa. The writer deployed the ethos persuasive strategy through the use of adjectives such as: fragmented', partial', biased' and one-sided to argue against the credibility of some African and international media. In this way, these media groups are presented as unprofessional in their report of China's treatment of African migrants.

The material process: chose' also depicts the African media and the western world as deliberately attempting to sour the cordial relationship between Nigeria and China. In this way, the Chinese journalist in **MDD8** alluded to the idea that the African journalists and the western media who reported the maltreatment of African migrants were the real enemies of China-Africa relations. The direct naming of social media' and Twitter' in the rhetorical question: Who is behind the fragmented video clips and partial stories of discrimination that have suddenly surfaced on overseas social media, especially on Twitter? also helped to indirectly project the idea that the reports on migrants' situation in China during the pandemic were false and grossly exaggerated. **MDD8** is better appreciated when viewed against the background of the critical perception of social media as a news platform which could potentially serve as a means of disseminating unverified information. Indeed, it has been argued that the uncensored nature of the social media space makes it detrimental to political, security and health matters (Wada, 2018). Thus, by tactically naming social media' and Twitter', the writer indirectly activates Members Resources (MR) of the perceived categorisation of traditional media and the social media as sources of information. In addition, naming helps to activate the professional bias against the reliability of the information circulated on the social media. Following Fairclough's (2001) observation that Members' Resources (MR) cognitive and cultural schematic knowledge helps social actors to produce and interpret the surface structures and meaning of text, it could be argued that the structuring of MDD8, could help the writer to tacitly reframe a reader's perception of the report and thus debunk the claim of migrants' maltreatment in China.

MDD6

We begin this evening with this **sad** report coming in from China where **Nigerians** living there are **maltreated** by **Chinese authorities**. Perhaps it is time the Nigerian government gets its citizens out of China. As its suggested in the video **Nigerians** are being **kicked out** of their homes, they are being made to go through **inhuman treatments** in China and this could be the case in some other

countries. However, this is **sad** because the **Chinese citizens, foreign nationals in Nigeria** are given **red carpet treatment** in the country.

(Channels TV, April 10, 2020)

MDD7

But a statement by the press secretary of the Embassy of China in Nigeria called the action **-frivolous** and **shoddy**. It argued that China put its best food (sic) forward at the outset of the pandemic and that it was equally impacted as any other nation. COVID-19 has caught the whole world by surprise. **China**, like other countries is a **victim**.

(Africanews, July 8, 2020)

MDD8

Who is behind the **fragmented video clips** and **partial stories** of discrimination that have suddenly surfaced on overseas social media, especially on Twitter? By digging into a large number of accounts that **hype up** the current tensions between China and African countries, the Global Times found that some African media, having been **deeply influenced** by **biased** reports from Western media, only **chose** to tell **one-sided** stories.

(Global Times, April 16, 2020)

Legitimation

The strategy of legitimation is employed in some of the media reports to justify the course of actions of social actors in migrant matters and perhaps sway the perception of the public in favour of self/in-group. In **MDD9** and **MDD10**, this is realized through linguistic elements of material process, emotive adjectives and persuasive strategies of logos and rationality. The strategy of legitimation adopted in the two extracts reflects Reyes (2011) argument that legitimation discourse is goal-oriented and one of the most common goals of this discursive strategy is to seek approval or acceptance by presenting one's potentially controversial action as serving a wider group or community. For instance, in the two extracts, the social actors attempted to position the discourse in a global context in order to construct the notion of exclusivity and thus indirectly avoid blame. In **MDD9**, this is achieved through the use of a generic term 'people' while in **MDD10**, the writer positions government's invitation of Chinese medics to Nigeria in the global context of the pandemic: This is a global pandemic and from wherever assistance comes, you cannot reject it'. In this way, human helplessness in the face of the pandemic is projected as the excuse for international migrants' access to the country during the lockdown.

The argument in **MDD10** could however be regarded as faulty and lacking in the force of logic since it is not in all cases that assistance could be accepted from anywhere, particularly in health-related matters. However, it also confirms observations (Oshodi, 2020; Atiya & Tenuche, 2019 to mention two) that have been made earlier about the need for a re-examination of the Sino-Nigeria unequal relations particularly in economic related matters.

MDD9

In his response, the said director stated that **people** needed to **work together to contain the possibility of a second wave** of the spread of the coronavirus. And that for some of these Nigerians to continue staying in China they needed to have **residence permits**.

(Premium Times, April 10, 2020)

MDD10

But the Director-General of the National Orientation Agency (NOA), Garba Abari, further clarified the reasons behind the proposed visit on Saturday. He said the Chinese medical team were only coming to **share experiences** with the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and **not to directly take charge** of the fight against COVID-19 pandemic in the country. –This is **a global pandemic** and from wherever assistance comes, you cannot reject it, the official noted.

(Premium Times, April 6, 2020)

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper adopted a critical discourse analytical approach to the study of discrimination in selected Nigeria-China COVID-19 media discourse. The aim of the study was to unveil discursive expressions of discrimination in host-migrant relationship between Nigeria and China during the global COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Data analysed included purposively selected reports drawn from the websites of international and local newspapers. The findings showed that social actors employed linguistic elements such as pronouns, emotive adjectives, material processes among others as well discursive strategies of polarization, criminalization, emotional appeal, victim discourse and legitimation in discriminatory discourse to achieve inclusive/exclusive representations of self/in- group and others. The paper also showed that mitigation and blame avoidance were strategically deployed by actors to sustain positive face for self/in-group.

Considering the need for interconnectedness of nations in the 21st century and beyond, the media discourse on Sino-Nigeria relations during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown demonstrates unequal power relations between China and Nigeria, particularly in citizens' mobility related activities. In addition, it is suggested that the discourse could impede the cordial relationship between the two nations. This invariably has implications for globalisation and nations' advancement. Thus, given the relevance of the media to the perception formation of the reader/viewer on issues, it is recommended that countries educate their citizens on the use of more liberal discourse in migration related matters. In addition, Africa in general and Nigeria in particular need to develop more economic independence. This invariably is expected to aid the growth of more equal power relations between China and Nigeria, and perhaps also enhance citizens' perception on host-migrant rights.

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