

Constructing undesirables: A critical discourse analysis of othering of Fulani nomads in the Ghanaian news media

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Abstract

The activities of Fulani nomads in Ghana have gained considerable media attention and engendered continuing public debate. In this paper, we analyze the prejudiced portrayals of the nomads in the Ghanaian news media, and how these contribute to an exclusionist and a discriminatory discourse that puts the nomads at the margins of Ghanaian society. The study employs a critical discourse analysis framework and draws on a dataset of 160 articles, including news stories, editorials and op-ed pieces. The analysis reveals that the nomads are discursively constructed as undesirables through an othering process that centers on three discourses: a discourse of dangerousness/criminalization, a discourse of alienization, and a discourse of stigmatization. This anti-nomad/Fulani rhetoric is evident in the choice of sensational headlines, alarmist news content, organization of arguments, and use of quotations. The paper concludes with a call for more balanced and critical news reporting on the nomads, especially since issues surrounding them border on national cohesion and security.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, Fulani nomads, Ghana, media representations, minority groups, othering

Introduction

In the last two decades, research on the discursive construction of non-dominant and/or minority groups has attracted ample attention in the (critical) discourse analysis (CDA) literature. These studies, aimed at highlighting the inequality in social structures as well as the concerns of marginalized, disempowered or oppressed groups, have focused on migrants (Ladegaard, 2019), refugees or asylum seekers (Phipps and Kay, 2014) and issues of gender and sexuality (Yu & Nartey, in press), ethnicity and race (Teo, 2000), religion (Al-Hejin, 2015), and indigeneity (Parkinson and Jones, 2019). This scholarship illustrates the activities and attributes typically associated with minority groups, especially in the media, and the dominant roles and identities that emerge from these associations. The research has also examined the discursive strategies of (de)legitimation used in the representations and evaluations given to minority groups, bringing to the fore the role of language in identity construction, argumentation, and the reproduction of ideologies. Despite this burgeoning research, there is a paucity of studies in the African context, even though discourses on especially ethnic minorities are predominant in the media given the

ethnically heterogeneous nature of Africa's populations (Ajide et al., 2019). The work of Innocent Chiluiwa on the Niger Delta crisis (Chiluiwa, 2011) and herder-farmer conflict (Chiluiwa and Chiluiwa, 2020) in Nigeria touches on ethnic minorities issues, but does so indirectly as the focus is on conflict and the language of aggression. To fill the gap with respect to research in the African context, this paper examines the representations of Fulani nomads in the Ghanaian news media.

Existing research on Fulani nomads in Ghana adopts a sociological, anthropological or ethnographic approach (see Tonah, 2000; Bukari and Schareika, 2015). Arguing that state and local policies subtly discriminate against the Fulani and often exclude them from the body politic, these studies examine policies against the nomads, local prejudices, and the national expulsion of Fulani nomads from Ghana in 1999/2000. They also draw mainly on interview data, focus group discussions, the observations made by researchers, and only occasionally do they refer to media reports as a secondary source. The present study departs from existing scholarship in its utilization of a discourse analytic perspective, and its focus on media texts as the primary data to be analyzed. By establishing how and why the media represent Fulani nomads in the way they do, and thereby contributing to the reproduction and maintenance of hegemonic and discriminatory social relations in Ghana, it will be possible to make recommendations for more ethical news reporting on disenfranchised groups in general, and the Fulani nomads in particular. This will in turn help to inform government interventions and might influence how the nomads are treated in Ghanaian society. The dehumanization of marginalized groups is accomplished through text and talk, making it necessary for discursive work to continue to be at the forefront of media studies. This study therefore contributes to the body of knowledge on the role of the press in shaping attitudes towards ethnic others in a setting under-researched in the literature.

Context: Fulani pastoralists in Ghana

The Fulani are one of the largest ethnic groups in West Africa and the Sahel, widely dispersed across the region especially in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, (South) Sudan and Côte d'Ivoire (Oppong, 2002). Their number is estimated to be between 18 and 20 million, and more than 90 percent of their population are pastoralists, making them the world's largest nomadic pastoral community (Bukari and Schareika, 2015). Apart from being (semi-sedentary) pastoralists who herd cattle, some Fulani are engaged in other professions such as business, trade, religious learning, and politics. In countries where nomadic Fulani live, they

are often minority groups both in terms of power and population, and their settlements are usually spatially separated from the indigenous population.

In Ghana, the majority of Fulani nomads originally settled in the northern part of the country. But various factors, including ethnic conflicts, disputes over land, encroachment of cattle into farmlands, drought, and change in climatic conditions, made the herders migrate southward to seek pasture elsewhere. Their migration to the south and other regions of Ghana – notably the Afram Plains, the Ashanti Region and the Eastern Region – has resulted in tension in these areas owing to herder-farmer disputes, and accusation by the locals that the herders are engaged in a number of nefarious activities. This is what is commonly reported in the Ghanaian news media as ‘nomads-native stand-off’, ‘Fulani-indigene conflicts’, ‘nomadic herdsman and native farmers clashes’, ‘Fulani herdsman vs. indigenes’, and ‘a story of violent shepherds’ among others.

Even though Fulani pastoralists have been in Ghana for several decades, their exact or estimated number is unknown as they have not been listed in any national censuses, voter registration exercises or national identification exercises (Bukari and Schareika, 2015). It thus seems that, at both national and community levels, they are excluded from sociopolitical participation and have limited access to resources. Indeed, there have been national policies aimed at expelling Fulani pastoralists from Ghana using a strategy the police have termed ‘Operation Cow Leg’. This has been implemented several times (sometimes without success), the most recent one taking place in January 2018. In addition to state policies of Fulani pastoralists’ expulsion, their disputes with local farmers and limited access to land leases have often resulted in community attacks and counter-attacks (Bukari and Schareika, 2015). Thus, the relationship between the nomads and the local communities in which they reside is volatile. This situation, we argue, can largely be attributed to the stereotypes and prejudices reproduced and perpetuated in the media.

Critical discourse analysis and othering

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is the methodological approach adopted in this study (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1993). CDA examines the relationship between discourse and power and how discourse reproduces and maintains hegemonic and discriminatory social relations (e.g. homophobia, xenophobia, Islamophobia) that usually result in the marginalization of certain social groups. CDA has an explicit agenda as it aims to resist social inequality and expose the often-covert aspects of language that contribute to the dominance of one group over another.

Consequently, in this paper, we draw some conclusions on the media's role in the construal and interpretation of the representations of Fulani nomads among the (Ghanaian) public, and make certain recommendations.

A key component of CDA relevant to this paper is the notion of 'othering'. It is a process that 'serves to mark and name those thought to be different from oneself' (Weis, 1995). It provides a clarifying frame with which one defines and secures one's own identity by distancing and stigmatizing an(other), thereby reinforcing our own 'normality' and setting up the difference of others as a point of deviance. Dimensions of othering include, but are not limited to, religion, sex, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status (class), disability, and sexual orientation. Othering engenders marginality and persistent inequality. Hence, the person or group being 'othered' experiences this as a process of marginalization, disempowerment, and social exclusion, which subsequently leads to the creation of an 'us' vs. 'them' distinction. Given its reliance on binary, dualistic thinking that classifies people into two opposing categories such as 'I' and 'you,' 'we' and 'them,' 'self' and 'other,' otherness constitutes a state of difference that is imposed rather than a status that people achieve (Udah, 2018). It produces a sense of isolation, apartness, and disconnectedness as well as a feeling of being on the edges or periphery, and thus constitutes a threat to the well-being and quality of life of those represented as the 'other'.

Discussing racism, van Dijk (2004) identifies two types of discourses involving the 'other': the first as being about the other and the second as being directed at the other. The first form usually manifests in groups, between members of the dominant group, in a negative portrayal of 'them', and is often combined with a positive self-presentation. The second form is directed at the other, and can be expressed by members of the dominant group via the use of (subtle or indirect) derogatory slurs and insults during interactions with members of the non-dominant group. The othering process found in the Ghanaian media which is analyzed in this study is mainly of the first type. Grove and Zwi (2006) discuss various mechanisms used to construct the other, including the language of threat, the use of negative frames, obscuring their agency or silencing their voice, and portraying them as a nuisance. Drawing on the insights above, the present study demonstrates how the Ghanaian media's representation of Fulani pastoralists realize a form of systematic othering.

The data used for this study comprise 160 articles about Fulani nomads in the Ghanaian news media between 2010 and 2020. This period was chosen because the activities of the nomads

have gained increased attention in the media and generated intense public debate in the last decade. The majority of articles were news reports (151); however, few included editorials (2) and op-ed pieces (7). They were selected after examining their title and lead using key phrases such as ‘Fulani(s)’, ‘Fulani nomads’, ‘Fulani pastoralists’, ‘Fulani herdsmen’, and ‘nomadic herdsmen’. The data were sourced from major online news portals in Ghana, including peacefmonline.com, citifmonline.com, myjoyonline.com, adomonline.com, ghanaweb.com, graphic.com.gh, thechronicle.com.gh, and modernghana.com. To expose the discourses of exclusion, moralization, and minoritization, our analysis focuses on metaphor, lexical choice, discourse structure, organization of argumentation and use of quotation, the presence of explanatory background information, and the overall selection of newsworthy topics.

The discursive construction of Fulani nomads

The analysis reveals three mechanisms by which the media portray the nomads as ‘undesirables’ in Ghanaian society. Often alarmist and uncritical, the news articles employ various forms of othering, ranging from differentiation to discrimination and criminalization, and this is directed not only against the herdsmen but, by extension, to the Fulani ethnic group. We argue that the representations the media give to Fulani pastoralists culminate into the production and naturalization of moral panic, which, according to Cohen (2002: 9), is ‘a condition, episode [in which] a person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the media’. In what follows, each of the three processes by which the Fulani pastoralists undergo othering in the Ghanaian news media is discussed in detail.

Fulani nomads as a threat or dangerous other

Through topic selection, emphasis on what is considered newsworthy, and the exclusion of the voice of the nomads in the news articles, the media depict Fulani herdsmen as a threat to the peace of Ghanaians, the livelihood of individuals (especially farmers), the local economy, and to national security. This provides the basis for them to be treated as outcasts and/or the ‘demon other’. Such discriminatory and potentially polarizing discourse is not only reflected in the news content but also in sensational headlines such as the following:

- i. When Fulanis become a nuisance in society (Ghanaian Chronicle 11/10/2011)
- ii. This Fulani menace spells more doom if not contained (Modern Ghana 12/06/2016)

- iii. Dealing with the nuisance of Fulanis (Myjoy Online 06/08/2010)
- iv. Anti-Fulani demo held in Volta Region (GhanaWeb 22/05/2018)
- v. Blame Kwakye Darfour for Fulani menace – NDC (GhanaWeb 05/11/2017)
- vi. Criminal Fulani herdsmen will be wiped out from Kwahu – MP fumes (Adom Online 31/10/2017)
- vii. Kill them! MP orders action on Fulani cattle (Peacefm Online 29/01/2014)
- viii. Fulani herdsman gun down colleague (GhanaWeb 26/04/2018)
- ix. Fulani herdsmen more dangerous than Boko Haram – DCE fears (Myjoy Online 04/02/2016)
- x. Fulani herdsmen were killing and raping Agogo women – Deputy Minister (GhanaWeb 24/01/2018)

These headlines present Fulani nomads as enemies of Ghanaian society. The preponderance of negative nouns (such as ‘menace’ and ‘nuisance’) and adjectives (such as ‘criminal’ and ‘dangerous’) in the headlines above, and throughout the data in reference to or in close association with the herdsmen, can ‘prime’ readers into treating them as outcasts and a dangerous threat that ought to be eliminated. A recurring pattern in the headlines is that the nomads are often referred to as Fulani(s), giving the impression that they represent the entire Fulani ethnic group. Such homogenization illustrates how the media produce, reproduce, and disseminate discriminatory thinking through language, representation, and discourse (van Dijk, 1991). The ethnic profiling by the media against the Fulani has been pointed out by members of the ethnic groups. For instance, a member of the group who is a popular journalist in Ghana writes in his opinion piece: ‘[The othering/social exclusion] is so widespread that even in Accra where I work among very well-educated members of the society; people find delight in shouting FULANI whenever I am around with the intent to ridicule me. Call it victimization and you wouldn’t be far from right’ (Citifm Online 07/11/2017).

In addition to the wording and structure of the headlines, the thematic organization of the news content and the absence of counter-arguments in the stories reinforce the prejudiced discourse associated with the nomads through their construction as a threat. Themes such as irrationality, backwardness, strangeness, and savagery, which construct the nomads as a social and

an economic nuisance, are prominent and given credibility owing to the absence of counterviews to balance the information about the nomads.

- (1) According to Abass Fuseini Sbaabe, the nefarious activities of the nomads make them more dangerous and destructive than the notorious militant Islamist group Boko Haram who have killed dozens and destroyed properties in Nigeria and other African countries. “These Fulani herdsmen in the country are also not different from deadly Boko Haram militant group in the West African sub-region,” Abass Sbaabe stressed. (Myjoy Online 04/02/2016)
- (2) The Fulani menace has, since 1986, threatened the very existence of residents of Agogo. Many lives and huge quantities of property have been lost but all interventions, including evacuation attempts; have failed to yield desired results. Fulani herdsmen and their cattle continue to terrorize local farmers and ravage their crops. People have had to go to farm with police escort, as former Member of Parliament for Asante Akyem North, Kwadwo Baah Agyemang, points out. (Myjoy Online 26/01/2017)
- (3) Primarily, farming is predominant in Ghana, meaning that if the activities of the Fulani nomads and their prized cattle endanger the farms (and the main source of livelihood for the impoverished Ghanaian farmers), they won’t be tolerated. Folks, we have said a lot already about the threat posed to national security by the activities of the Fulani nomadic herdsmen that are being fiercely resisted by Ghanaians in the affected areas all over the country. ... The residents of Agogo resisting these Fulani nomads and indicating their resolve to do all they can to secure their sources of livelihood that are being destroyed by the cattle reared by the Fulani nomads. (GhanaWeb 11/02/2016)

In the examples above taken from a news report (1) and an op-ed article (2, 3), the perceived wickedness of Fulani pastoralists and the alleged threat they pose to Ghanaian society is expressed by their association with designators such as ‘nefarious’, ‘dangerous’, ‘destructive’, and ‘notorious’, as well as verbs such as ‘threatened’ and ‘endanger’, suggesting that they are on a mission of wanton destruction. The activities attributed to them and the pejorative evaluation they are assigned not only construct them as disruptors of the status quo (i.e. Ghanaian society), but also as violent people who figuratively contaminate and despoil the moral order (Murray, 2003). Thus, it does not suffice to describe the nomads as dangerous and destructive; the discourse is structured such that they are constructed as terrorists and murderers via a reductionist mechanism that compares them with Boko Haram. Given that readers are acquainted with the activities of Boko Haram as a jihadist terrorist organization based in northeastern Nigeria but also active in Chad, Niger, and northern Cameroon, the direct connection established between them and the nomads in conjunction with an expression like

‘terrorize local farmers’ (2) evokes fear and (moral) panic which legitimize the prejudiced discourse that is produced. It is important to note that in his speech, the District Chief Executive quoted in (1) equates the activities of the nomads to those of Boko Haram; yet, the news article reports that ‘the nefarious activities of the nomads make them more dangerous and destructive than Boko Haram’. This assertion reinforced by the adverb ‘more’, which illustrates a news value of ‘superlativeness’ (Bednarek and Caple, 2017) in conjunction with similar instantiation like ‘The Fulani menace has threatened the very existence of residents of Agogo’ (2), realizes a discourse of sensationalism and can be analyzed as an emotionalization of facts/arguments to promote an ideology.

As Richardson (2006: 65) argues, ‘it is in the reporting of various social out-groups – ‘racial’ or ethnic minorities, criminals, and mental health patients in particular – that hyperbole can take on a more sinister dimension’. To give credibility to the negative representations ascribed to Fulani pastoralists, quotations are used: a District Chief Executive is quoted in (1) and a Member of Parliament is cited in (2). However, a close examination of the articles reveals that the voice of the nomads is absent. This echoes the findings of previous studies on ethnic minorities, especially migrants, which show that there is a tendency to exclude the voice of minority groups in news discourses that show prejudice against them (Banda and Mawadza, 2015). This paper thus supports Del-Teso-Craviotto’s (2009) argument that the media play an instrumental role in the social structuring and exclusion of minority groups by concealing subtle and nuanced forms of discrimination as neutral or objective language of public discourse.

The representation of Fulani herdsmen as a threat or dangerous ‘other’ is heightened by their correlation with crime, so much so that the news articles are awash with stories that give the impression that the word ‘Fulani’ is synonymous with various types of crimes. Previous work on migrant ethnic minorities (e.g. Dingeman and Rumbant, 2010; Banda and Mawadza, 2015) has discussed such criminalization of minority populations.

- (4) The outgoing Eastern Regional Minister, Antwi Bosiako Sekyere, said the Fulani menace was becoming a major concern in the region and must be dealt with immediately. He said apart from the Fulani’s activities of grazing their cattle on farmland and forest reserves, the herdsmen are also alleged to be into all sorts of crimes including armed robbery, rape, stealing, burning of farms and, worst of it all, killing of farmers. (Peacefm Online 17/02/2016)

- (5) “The town is empty now. Everyone has relocated as a result of the presence of Fulanis. Many of the houses have been washed away”, says Nana Ansong. I travelled to the communities which have been under siege by nomads who unleash terror on indigenes, destroying crops, raping, and killing innocent people. (GhanaWeb 16/11/2017)
- (6) Listen to Dr. Michael J.K Bokor: ... “Most of these Fulanis are accused of committing crimes such as cattle rustling, murder, rape, plain theft, and complete disregard for our laws wherever they go”. (GhanaWeb 29/09/2011)
- (7) The nomads have raped, killed and maimed residents who have confronted them over the destruction of farms due to grazing by their herd. (Myjoy Online 04/02/2016)

These extracts culled from news reports (4, 7) and editorials (5, 6) demonstrate that the media associate Fulani herdsmen and the Fulani ethnic group in general with crime, and signal that several communities in Ghana are suffering as a result of their anti-social activities. Hence, apart from phraseology such as ‘the herdsmen’ and ‘the nomads’ that specifically refers to the pastoralists, expressions such as ‘the Fulani’s activities’ (4), ‘the presence of Fulanis’ (5) and ‘these Fulanis’ (6) contribute to the media’s production and naturalization of a discourse of marginalization directed against an ethnic group. The use of topicalization in the extracts is instructive as it positions the nomads/Fulani as active agents of illicit actions such as rape, robbery, theft, and murder. Thus, by putting the actors (the nomads/Fulani) and their actions in the initial position of the sentences, the atrocities they are alleged to have committed are foregrounded in a way that (tacitly) reflects the ideological agenda of the media (van Dijk, 1991). Yet again, quotations are used to give credence to the representation and to make the discriminatory discourse appear neutral or objective by referring to a minister and chairman of the Regional Security Council (4), a chief (5) and an academic (6). We argue that the reference to these sources as custodians of moral boundaries (Cohen, 2002) feeds into a moralizing discourse that transcends mere compliance with rule of law. We note Davies and Harré’s (1990: 48) explanation of ‘positioning’ as ‘the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines’. However, in the news reports analyzed in this study, the voice of the nomads is not given any attention at all. Thus, their role and identity are determined by others (the media), giving them no opportunity to formulate their own alternative reflexive selves, or at least articulate their position. The absence of such dialogue

in the articles implies that there is ‘no counterweight in the balancing act of showing both sides of [the Fulani nomads’ narrative]’ (Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2009: 575), thereby making an exclusionist discourse seem to be credible and reliable (Tileaga, 2007).

It is important to state that we do not hold brief for Fulani nomads who (may) have committed offenses in their communities since we are aware of herder-farmer conflict in different parts of the country. If guilty, such individuals should be prosecuted like any other person who commits a crime. However, in the data analyzed in this study, there is no conclusive evidence that the nomads have been found guilty of a crime since most of their alleged offences are presented as accusations. Hence, we contend that the identification of all Fulani nomads and the Fulani in general as a source of fear for Ghana’s welfare, and their presentation as savages, do not augur well for national cohesion. Such depiction casts them in the mold of a deviant ‘folk devil’ whose actions must be neutralized to bring ‘normality’ to society (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994). We therefore submit that the problematization of Fulani nomads as posing multiple threats to Ghanaian society obfuscates governmental responsibilities to this population.

The alienization of Fulani nomads

The exclusionist discourse and marginalization of Fulani pastoralists is also discernible in their construction as aliens or non-citizens (Tileaga, 2005). Despite their contact with the Ghanaian population for several decades, they are discursively constructed as ‘outsiders’ (rather than ‘insiders’) and as ‘them’ (rather than ‘us’) via a polarizing discourse evidenced by membership categories such as ‘us’ versus ‘them’, in-group versus out-group, natives versus intruders, indigenes versus nomads, and farmers versus herdsmen.

- (8) If you monitor and analyze media reports on the activities of some Fulanis, especially in rural Ghana, you would realize that these aliens have now chosen to act as human pests, causing havoc and discomfort for indigenous people of the land. ... Anyway, let us come down to what happens in our country as far as the activities of these aliens are concerned. (Modern Ghana 11/10/2011)
- (9) We have had too much already from that area to know the depth of the anger against the Fulanis and the explosive nature of whatever their action begets as reaction from the indigenes. ... We are now being told

that the natives of the Krobo area are also angry at the Fulani nomads for herding their cattle there to destroy crops. (Modern Ghana 12/06/2016)

- (10) Just a niggling point here. At the National Farmers' Day celebration, which Fulani is recognized and rewarded as an accomplished cattle rearer? Over the years, awardees have been Ghanaian farmers and fishermen. So, where do the Fulani cattle rearers come in? I don't see it. (GhanaWeb 11/02/2016)

In the op-ed articles above, the origin and nationality of the nomads and the Fulani ethnic group are questioned. The ideological position expressed and the import of the message communicated is alienization – a mechanism that makes certain individuals and groups unassimilable and excluded from the national body (DeChaine, 2009; Tileaga, 2007). Thus, although Ghana's constitution does not attribute citizenship to ethnicity, the extracts above connote that the Fulani (nomads) are not Ghanaians since they are originally nationals of other African countries. Hence, even though they have lived in Ghana before the country's independence, have married, and there are Fulani in different sectors of the country, they are not given (any) due recognition. The choice of lexemes such as 'natives', 'indigenes' 'indigenous', and 'Ghanaians', in sharp contrast with 'Fulani(s)' who are referred to as 'aliens', highlights the notion of a category-pair or standardized relational pair (Leudar et al., 2004). This category pair performs a dual function of projecting a certain moral superiority, authority, and integrity onto Ghanaians while at the same time excluding the Fulani from the body politic and denying them sociopolitical participation. The use of 'aliens' in (8) is particularly noteworthy as it functions as a label that emphasizes the strangeness and peculiarity of the nomads. This is further heightened by characterizing them as 'human pests', echoing previous research on minority groups illustrating that they are invariably associated with negative metaphors that serve (de)legitimation purposes by exacerbating fears (KhosraviNik, 2010; Banda and Mawadza, 2015). The net effect of these descriptions, attributions, and representations is an exclusionist cum discriminatory discourse that will evoke negative emotions towards the Fulani (nomads) and make them feel isolated or estranged.

The media reports on herder-farmer conflicts reinforce the alienization of the nomads because they draw the battle lines between 'us' and 'them' as exemplified in the following news stories.

- (11) Two hundred military and police officers with the support of three military helicopters have arrived at Agogo, the theatre of clashes between Fulani Herdmen on one side and the security and the residents on another

side. ... Addressing a gathering of Chiefs and people of Agogo on Tuesday, after four security officers had been shot at and wounded by alleged Fulani Herdsmen, the Ashanti Regional Minister, Mr Simon Osei-Mensah assured the people the herdsmen would be flushed out. (Graphic Online 12/01/2018)

(12) Our people are losing their lives, our lands are getting degraded, our farmers are in fears and our farm products are being deteriorated by the influx of these Fulani herdsmen. (Ghana News Online 09/01/2018)

(13) Locals of the area insist the herdsmen have outlived their welcome and there is no way they can expect to enjoy the proverbial Ghanaian hospitality. (GhanaWeb 09/01/2018)

(14) “We will use every means available to us to get rid of the Fulani herdsmen completely from our land, we can’t continue to be their slaves in our own land”, [Supt. Ohene-Boadi] added. (Peacefm Online 24/01/2018)

The use of pronouns such as ‘we’, ‘us’, ‘our’ on the one hand, and ‘they’, ‘their’, ‘them’ on the other has been extensively discussed as a means of indicating in- and out-group status and negotiating interpersonal distance (see Ladegaard, 2011; Nartey and Ernanda, 2020). Through the personal pronouns ‘we’ and ‘our’, Ghanaians living in places where the nomads reside are reconstructed as ‘our people’ and ‘our farmers’, and the towns/villages are reconfigured as ‘our land’, ‘our lands’ (12), and ‘our own land’ (14). Conversely, the possessive pronoun ‘their’ in ‘their slaves’ (14) is used to depict the nomads as outsiders who endanger the national social order. The ‘us’ versus ‘them’ dichotomy created is intensified by lexical choices such as ‘locals’ (13) and ‘residents’ (11) as well as the phrase ‘the influx of these Fulani herdsmen’ (12), which underscores the burden put on Ghanaian society and its people by the nomads. The use of ‘our land’ and ‘our own lands’ is revealing given the importance of land in Ghana. Hence, by stating that the nomads do not own the land, the articles ‘strip’ them of a national or Ghanaian identity irrespective of how long they might have lived in the country and categorize them as ‘outsiders’. This finding is echoed in research on (domestic) migrant workers who are perceived as perpetually alien by their hosts no matter how long they have lived and worked in the community (Ladegaard, 2017). Further, the use of ‘we’ and ‘our’ can be interpreted to mean that the writer or the person quoted is concerned about the plight of Ghanaians and shares in their pain and suffering. The selection of these pronouns also contributes to the conversationalization of the discourse, thereby reducing the social distance between the news content and the Ghanaian audience who are represented as part and parcel of the harsh treatment meted out by the nomads. Given the alienization of the nomads, the media give the impression that their expulsion is warranted as extracts (13) and (14) suggest. As stated earlier, there have been state policies of Fulani nomads’ expulsion termed ‘Operation Cow

Leg', although most of these operations have been unsuccessful. According to Fabiszak (2010), when 'we' construe 'them' as alien to 'our way of life', whatever action is taken against 'them' appears legitimate. Jost and Banaji (1994: 10) also argue that 'Stereotypes serve ideological functions, in particular that they justify the exploitation of certain groups over others, and that they explain the poverty and powerlessness of some groups and the success of others in ways that make these differences seem legitimate and even natural'. Hence, the alienization of the nomads, as the news reports in (15) and (16) show, justifies any (drastic) measures and (draconian) laws that will be implemented to 'get rid of' the nomads as these measures/laws are presented to be in the supreme interest of the indigenous people.

(15) Residents of Agogo are ecstatic over deployment of police-military reinforcement to flush out nomadic herdsman and their cattle from the area. The deployment follows a Joy News Hotline documentary "Violent Shepherds", a seven-month investigative piece which highlighted what has become national security issue. (GhanaWeb 15/01/2018)

(16) The Minister of State in charge of National Security, Bryan Acheampong has vowed to "wipe out" criminal Fulani herdsmen terrorizing residents at Kwahu East in the Eastern region. (Adom Online 31/10/2017)

The stigmatization of Fulani nomads

Apart from the process of criminalization and alienization, the anti-nomad/Fulani rhetoric reproduced and reinforced in the media is evident in various stigmata that subtly contribute to their exclusion and discrimination. This action of regarding the nomads as worthy of great disapproval, as shown in the op-ed articles below, is manifest in stereotypical characterization that puts emphasis on their alleged lawlessness, backwardness, strangeness, anti-social behavior, and poor personal hygiene.

(17) However, I find it extremely intriguing sometimes to comprehend why our Fulani friends cannot integrate themselves fully into our society and learn to live decent lives. Hardly a Fulani would be seen at social gatherings or involved in any regular communal programs. For personal and environmental hygiene, forget [it]! Whenever they get to say market places, it is evident that locales [sic] have a problem getting into contact with them because of the kind of bad body odor some of them emit and how shabbily they dress. (Modern Ghana 10/03/2015)

(18) I know of situations when owners of cattle that cause havoc are fined by the local chiefs and peace is restored. It is not so in the case of the Fulanis because of their intransigence/belligerence and bellicose posture. ... Such belligerence won't ensure peaceful co-existence. The question, then, is why are the Fulani nomads acting with so much impudence? (GhanaWeb 14/02/2016)

(19) Folks, it is now clear that wherever the Fulani nomads go, tension surfaces. While they move their cattle about to graze indiscriminately in the hope of reaping benefits, they disregard the economic activities and interests of the owners of farms that nourish their cattle. No one will tolerate this kind of callousness. (GhanaWeb 14/02/2016)

These op-ed articles communicate the view that the Fulani (pastoralists) are uncivilized, primitive, and dirty, providing a basis for their stigmatization and moral exclusion (Opotov, 1990). Even though the articles from which these extracts were culled are op-ed pieces, the fact that they have been published by the newspaper indicates that the media are willing to reproduce the stereotypes and prejudices expressed in the extracts. In the examples, the disparaging opinions and arguments made are semiotized as facts that cannot be challenged, and thus prime readers to have a negative disposition towards the nomads and the Fulani ethnic group. This process of describing the nomads as deserving condemnation is reflected in lexicalization such as ‘tension’, ‘indiscriminately’, ‘intransigence’, ‘belligerence’, ‘bellicose’, and ‘impudence’. Also, masking and boosting are linguistic devices strategically utilized here, each serving a different rhetorical function. On one hand, a disclaimer (‘Personally, I do not fancy making derogatory comments on the personality of my fellow human’ – 17) is used to mask the stereotypical characterization given to the nomads. The formation of this literal mask effectively presents the stigmatization and labeling of the nomads under the guise of public concern and sound advice. Masking can help a writer or speaker to objectify propositions and represent ‘reality mentally to himself or herself and to others as well as [maintain] a sense of reality over time’ (Ng and Bradac, 1993: 147). Thus, the masking effect functionally represents to readers the stereotype that the nomads are an alien group of people.

Unlike the objectifying effect of masking, boosting devices, on the other hand, intensify the force of a proposition or an assertion. Hence, expressions like ‘I know of situations ...’ (18) and ‘it is now clear’ (19) boost the force of the claims being made about the nomads and amplify the intended truth value of the overall message of discrimination directed against them. According to Tonah (2000), there is little appreciation of the rationale and importance of nomadic pastoralism by large sections of the populations in which the nomads reside. This makes their livelihood strategy to be viewed by many as an outdated tradition lacking potential for modernization, an understanding or a perception that is also projected onto the identity and personality of the nomads. Hence, how the media convey information about this group of people is extremely important since

appropriate news reporting can enlighten the public and make them aware of the damaging impact of prejudiced discourses (Ladegaard, 2013). Even though there are Fulani who are traders, settled farmers, professionals, politicians, and entrepreneurs, many people in Ghana think that the Fulani are only pastoralists who take care of herds of cattle (Bukari and Schareika, 2015). Consequently, there is social categorization of the Fulani as a homogeneous group and a perception of their pastoral life as medieval, resulting in stigmatization. This paper argues that the various stereotypes and stigmata discussed above, which are first associated with Fulani nomads and then extended to the Fulani ethnic group, and which can also be found in everyday interactions in Ghana, are the creation of the media owing to their systematic reference to and construction of the Fulani as a homogeneous group that shares similar characteristics, backgrounds, intentions, and motivations. This discourse of exclusion and discrimination, as our analysis illustrates, is produced, reproduced, and reinforced by the media through unbalanced, uncritical, and sensational news content.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper uses a critical discourse analysis framework to examine the representations of Fulani nomads in the Ghanaian news media. We have identified outgroup stereotypes and prejudice against the Fulani and demonstrated how these contribute to a discourse of exclusion that puts the nomads at the periphery of Ghanaian society. The analysis reveals that the news articles about the nomads are uncritical and unbalanced, and they construct the nomads as undesirables – i.e. a social and an economic nuisance. This is realized by drawing on three discourses, or forms of othering, resulting in the production and naturalization of moral panic: a discourse of dangerousness or criminalization, a discourse of alienization, and a discourse of stigmatization. The analysis also shows that through the selection of alarmist headlines, sensational news content, organization of argumentation, and use of quotation, the voice of the nomads (or their representatives/advocates) is excluded. The quotations are further used for legitimization purposes, and they signal a role-cum-power structure in which the nomads find themselves voiceless at the lower rungs of society. It is important to state that although the nomads and those advancing their concerns (e.g. the Fulani Association of Ghana and chiefs of the Fulani community) are hardly ever selected for quotation, there are some stand-alone reports in our dataset that express the concerns of the nomads and/or give them a voice. These reports have titles such as ‘Pay us for killing our cattle – Fulani’, ‘Operation Cow Leg being abused – Grusah’ and ‘No herdsman has ravaged farms in the last two

years – Alhaji Grusah'. However, these reports are very few (14 out of the 160 articles analyzed) and rarely engage with the issue of othering from the perspective of the nomads.

While it may be argued that the newspapers simply report what has happened or what others have said, we submit that this does not absolve them of sensationalism and biased and alarmist reportage. It might also be argued that certain headlines and aspects of the content are couched merely to capture readers' attention or serve as a clickbait strategy. However, we maintain that such a strategy does more harm than good as it primes readers to have a negative disposition towards the nomads, more so when many people oftentimes read only headlines. It is therefore imperative for news articles on the Fulani nomads and other marginalized minority groups to be more balanced and critical through the careful selection of headlines and content, inclusion of the nomads' own voices, and being reflective of what to write as well as the ideological positions communicated in the discourse structures of the content. It is also important for media organizations to adhere to strict policies on which op-ed articles to publish in order to avoid using their platforms to disseminate prejudice and bigotry. This study contributes to existing research on marginalized groups and minority voices but extends the scope of such research by focusing on the African context which is underexplored in the literature. The insights gained from this study are also instructive in advocating the concerns of the Fulani nomads in Ghana, especially since these issues border on national cohesion and security.

In his research on the discursive representation of Romanis, Tileaga (2007) argues for the need to examine ideologies of moral exclusion to understand how and why certain minority groups become conceptualized as legitimate outcasts. Dehumanizing outgroup members involves psychologically removing them from the domain of moral acceptability (Bar-Tal, 1990). Opotov (1990: 1) explains the process as follows:

Moral exclusion occurs when individuals or groups are perceived as outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply. Those who are morally excluded are perceived as nonentities, expendable, or undeserving. Consequently, harming or exploiting them appears to be appropriate, acceptable, or just.

In order to identify how moral exclusion happens, we need to examine discursive practices in everyday (media) text and talk. Voicing prejudiced and demeaning discourses about cultural others, not least if these others are vulnerable groups like nomads or gypsies, migrant workers,

refugees, and trafficked sex workers, effectively contributes to their depersonalization and dehumanization (Ladegaard, 2017). By denying minority groups their humanity, they become abject and expendable, outside the moral values and boundaries that apply to the majority, and when that happens, it becomes legitimate to subject them to mistreatment (Jost and Banaji, 1994). Media racism does not exist in a social vacuum but taps into people's pre-existing fears and notions of ideological common sense (Hanson-Easey and Augoustinos, 2012). Thus, private and public discourses about marginalized groups work together to constitute a group that is 'culturally strange and socially disruptive' and therefore deserving of unfair treatment (Hanson-Easey and Augoustinos, 2012: 48). The dehumanization of Fulani nomads and other marginalized groups is accomplished through text and talk; therefore, discursive work should continue to be at the forefront of media studies (Ladegaard, 2013). It is also essential that stories of the Fulani nomads are framed in the wider global contexts in which they belong. The news media present us with fragmented and biased narratives about their lives, which obscure the wider issues of power, inequality, and exploitation. As scholars in applied linguistics and media studies, we need to address these issues, raise people's awareness of the damaging impact of prejudiced (media) discourses, and push for more socially and ethically responsible news reporting.

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