

Original Research Article

Discursive Representation of Minority in Political Speeches: The Case of the Mbororo People in Cameroon

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Abstract: The present study examines the discursive representation of the Mbororo people, a minority group in Cameroon, in political speeches. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and postcolonial theory, it explores the linguistic and rhetorical strategies used by political leaders to frame the Mbororo community. The study investigates how these representations reflect power dynamics, cultural stereotypes, and systemic marginalisation, while also interrogating the implications for minority rights and social inclusion in Cameroon. The analysis focuses on selected political speeches that address issues of minority, identity, cultural integration, and socio-political rights. Through a qualitative approach, the article identifies key discursive strategies, such as framing, stereotyping, exclusion, and the use of rhetorical tools like metaphors and euphemisms. The Paper reveals that political discourse often portrays the Mbororo people in ways that reinforce cultural otherness and hierarchical relationships, positioning them as passive subjects within Cameroon's broader nation-building agenda. The findings suggest that these representations are not neutral but serve to maintain existing power structures, highlighting a tension between rhetorical commitments to inclusivity and the realities of socio-political exclusion. Furthermore, the study emphasizes how these discourses shape public perceptions of the Mbororo people, influencing their access to political participation and their recognition as equal citizens. By shedding light on the intersection of language, power, and identity, the study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on minority representation in political discourse. It advocates for more inclusive and equitable communication practices to foster meaningful representation of marginalised groups in political decision-making processes. The article concludes by calling for further research on the discursive treatment of minority groups across Africa and its implications for governance and social cohesion.

Keywords: Minority, Critical Discourse Analysis, Mbororo, Political Discourse, Cameroon, Discourse.

1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary political discourse, the representation of minority groups remains a critical issue, particularly in multicultural and postcolonial states where questions of identity, power, and inclusion are often contested. Political speeches, as significant tools of communication, play a central role in shaping public perceptions of marginalised communities and influencing policies that affect their lives. The study focuses on the discursive representation of the Mbororo people, a minority pastoralist group in Cameroon, to explore how political rhetoric reflects and perpetuates broader socio-political dynamics.

The Mbororo people, part of the larger Fulani ethnic group, are a semi-nomadic community primarily engaged in cattle herding. Despite their cultural and economic contributions to Cameroonian society, they have historically faced marginalisation, cultural stereotyping, and socio-political exclusion. Their identity as both a minority group and a pastoralist community places them at the intersection of cultural diversity and rural underdevelopment, making their representation in political discourse particularly significant. Political speeches, which serve as platforms for legitimising

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state authority and framing national unity, often reveal implicit biases, stereotypes, and power imbalances in how such groups are portrayed.

The present study seeks to address three core questions: How are the Mbororo people represented in Cameroonian political speeches? What linguistic and rhetorical strategies are employed in these representations? And what do these portrayals reveal about the broader power structures and socio-political priorities of the Cameroonian state? By employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and postcolonial theory, the study examines selected speeches to uncover the ways in which political language constructs and reinforces the marginalisation of the Mbororo people.

As background to this study, it is worth noting that the Mbororo community, known as one of the ethnic minority groups in Cameroon, is an indigenous community situated in the borderlands of Cameroon and in neighbouring areas of Central African Republic, Chad, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. They are spread all over the country but mainly concentrated in six regions (Far North, North, Adamawa, East, North West and West), with the majority based as pastoralists in the Savannah of the North West. Fage (1962) says the Mbororo are people from West Africa, numbering approximately 14 million but are now scattered throughout the area of the Sudan from Senegal to Cameroon. Dognin (1950) posits that they are characterised by a common history of civilisation, language and culture. However, a number of factors seem to have reinforced the community's exclusion. Besides their apparent culture of "self-isolation" seems to have discouraged some Mbororo from engaging with state structures and very low levels of schooling, resulting in parts from their geographic isolation and pastoral lifestyle, Mbororos find themselves at the peripheries of mainstream Cameroon society. This isolation has meant that they have very limited contact with authorities at a local and national level. Due to their limited contact with public authorities, it has been observed that they are most often underrepresented by politicians in their discourses.

2. Theoretical Framework

The present study makes use of Critical Discourse Analysis and Postcolonial theory. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an analytical paradigm that is interested in the demystification of ideologies and power through the systematic and reproduceable investigation of semiotic data (Wodak and Meyer, 2008). Semiotic data in this regard refers to writings or recordings. Van Dijk (2001) advances that Critical Discourse Analysis is dissident research which allows analysts and researchers to take explicit positions in their quest to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality. Furthermore, he posits that, CDA is a method of research which primary focuses on the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. It focuses on how language influences power and how power influences the use of language within a social context. Taiwo (2007) says that, by focusing on the relationship between power and language use, CDA reveals the way discourses are used for the development of new knowledge. CDA goes beyond the surface to examine the socio-political, economic and cultural undercurrent that led to the visible linguistic pattern. In essence, CDA shows deep interest in the study of complex social phenomenon (Wodak and Meyer, 2008).

CDA provides a valuable framework for analyzing the discursive construction of minority identities in political speeches. Fairclough (1995) emphasizes that discourse is not only a reflection of social realities but also a means of constructing and sustaining power relations. Through language, political leaders can naturalize certain ideologies while marginalizing others. In analyzing political speeches, CDA focuses on linguistic strategies such as framing, metaphor, euphemism, and omission. For instance, Wodak (2001) highlights how minorities are often framed as "the other," with political speeches employing metaphors that dehumanize or infantilize these groups (p. 67). This pattern is evident in Cameroonian political discourse, where the Mbororo are often depicted as either victims requiring state intervention or as obstacles to national development.

Postcolonial theory, on its part, provides critical insights into the representation of minority groups in postcolonial states like Cameroon. Spivak (1988) argues that the subaltern, or marginalised groups, are often excluded from hegemonic discourses, both linguistically and politically. In the context of political speeches, this exclusion manifests in the way minority groups are spoken about rather than spoken to, reinforcing their lack of agency.

The Mbororo people, as a minority group in Cameroon, exemplify the challenges of subaltern representation. As Pelican (2011) notes, the Mbororo are often framed as "cultural outsiders," whose pastoralist lifestyle is perceived as a deviation from the state's vision of modernity and progress (p. 12). This framing reflects broader postcolonial tensions, where minority groups are expected to assimilate into dominant cultural and political frameworks. Ahmed and Matthes (2016) further argue that political rhetoric in postcolonial states often perpetuates colonial hierarchies by framing minority groups as either loyal subjects or potential threats. In Cameroonian political speeches, the Mbororo people are frequently portrayed in ways that emphasize their dependence on state intervention, reinforcing narratives of paternalism and control. Such representations not only marginalise the Mbororo but also obscure their agency and contributions to Cameroonian society.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Jabiru (2017) looks at the Mbororos problem in North West Cameroon: a historical investigation. In his study, he shows that the 19th century Jihad movement and epidemic outbreaks force the Mbororos to move from Northern Nigeria to Northern Cameroon and from Northern Cameroon, they moved south and started penetrating the North West Region in the early 20th Century where they were warmly welcome by the host because their economic input reflected in the cattle they introduced in the Region. He also examines the problem faced by the Mbororos in an attempt to gain citizenship in North West Cameroon and be accepted by the local population. He also looks at the difficulty of their integration in the Region. He finds out that, farmer-grazier conflict kept on being a recurrent issue in the North West Region of Cameroon. This fact coupled with others had sustained xenophobic feelings towards the Mbororos. The paper is similar to the present study in that, it looks at the problem faced by the Mbororo in the North West Region. It is dissimilar in that it does a historical investigation of the problem faced by the Mbororos in the North West Region Meanwhile the present study focuses on the under representation of the Mbororos in political discourses.

Pelican (2007) focuses on Mbororo claims to regional citizenship and minority status: the case of the Mbororo in the North West Region of Cameroon. In his study, he advances that many Mbororos prospered over time and settled permanently in their grazing area. Conversely, the Grassfielders who constitute the local majority tend to perceive the Mbororo as strangers and migrants, while considering themselves their hosts and landlords. He further examines the discourses employed by MBOSCUA (Mbororo Social and cultural Development Association) and Mbororo individuals whereby they endorse their collective and individual claims to access to natural and state resources. While claiming to be an indigenous population group arguing that they have no other home. They also portrayed themselves as endangered minority whose cultural and economic rights have to be protected. This study is similar to the present study in that, it looks at the Mbororos in the North West Region and their discourses as regards their minority status. It is dissimilar in that, it looks at just the Mbororos in the North West Region and their discourses while the present study focuses on the underrepresentation of the Mbororos in political discourses in Cameroon.

Assana (2023) analyses the link between the waves of the Nomadic populations settlement and deautochtonisation basing our study on the indigenous Mbororo people in Cameroon. These waves of settlement, imposed by a combination of global and local factors, are accompanied by territorial and identity mutation and social renegotiations of access to political citizenship. Based on the theory of coloniality and documentary analysis, the results reveal that the deautochtonisation of the Mbororos is a consolidated and long-lasting trajectory. In this way, it establishes a new theoretical perspective on indigenous people. The study is similar to the present one in that, it looks at the Mbororos in Cameroon and it is dissimilar in that, they both used different theories in their analysis.

4. METHODOLOGY

The present study is categorised as descriptive qualitative research. This study employs a qualitative research design to analyze the discursive representation of the Mbororo people in political speeches within the Cameroonian context. A qualitative approach is appropriate because it allows for an in-depth examination of language use, power dynamics, and the ideological implications embedded in political discourse (Fairclough, 1995). Specifically, the study adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its core analytical framework. CDA is particularly suited for this research because it "unveils the ways in which social power, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (van Dijk, 1993, p. 249). The decision to focus on political speeches stems from their significant role in shaping public opinion and institutional narratives. Political speeches are not merely rhetorical tools but also "sites of ideological production and reproduction, particularly concerning marginalized groups" (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 8). By analysing how the Mbororo people are depicted in these speeches, the study seeks to uncover the underlying discursive strategies that contribute to their representation as a minority group in Cameroon.

The population of study is the Mbororos in Cameroon and the analysis is done using the speeches of political figures and the Minister of social affairs. The speeches of the above personalities were chosen because it was observed that they most often represent in an insignificant way minority groups in their discourses. A purposive sampling technique was used to sample out speeches for the study. The purposive sampling was used in order to identify speeches where the minority groups were represented. The speeches were sourced from official government archives, political party websites, and publicly available video recordings. The primary data for this study comprises political speeches delivered by President Paul Biya and the minister of social affairs from 2015 to 2021. This time frame was chosen because it encompasses significant socio-political events, including debates on national unity, indigenous rights, and minority inclusion.

The selection criteria for the speeches were as follows:

1. **Relevance to Minority Representation:** The speech must explicitly or implicitly address issues related to minority groups, with specific reference to indigenous communities like the Mbororo.
2. **Prominence of Speaker:** The speaker must hold or have held a significant political position, such as the President, a Minister, or a party leader.

3. Language and Accessibility: The speech must be available in English or French, the official languages of Cameroon, to facilitate analysis.

A total of 25 speeches were identified both from President Paul Biya and Minister Pauline Irene Nguene, of which 10 were selected (8 for Paul Biya and 2 for Minister Pauline Irene Nguene) for detailed analysis based on their relevance to the research question. Table 1 below provides an overview of the selected speeches, including the date, speaker, and context. To complement the analysis of political speeches, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five experts in Cameroonian politics and minority rights. These experts included academics, activists, and representatives of Mbororo advocacy groups. The interviews aimed to provide contextual insights and validate the findings from the discourse analysis. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), "semi-structured interviews allow researchers to explore participants' perspectives while maintaining a flexible yet focused structure" (p. 65). In addition to primary data, secondary sources such as policy documents, reports from non-governmental organisations, and academic literature on minority groups in Cameroon were reviewed. These sources helped contextualise the discursive strategies identified in the speeches.

As indicated earlier in the Paper, this study employs Critical Discourse Analysis as one of the methods for examining the representation of these Mbororo people. CDA is a multidisciplinary approach that focuses on "analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in language" (Fairclough, 1995, p. 132). The analysis draws on Fairclough's three-dimensional model, which consists of:

1. Text Analysis: Examining the linguistic features of the speeches, including word choice, metaphors, and rhetorical devices.
2. Discursive Practice: Analyzing the processes of text production, dissemination, and interpretation.
3. Social Practice: Investigating the broader socio-political and cultural context in which the speeches were delivered.

The choice of CDA is informed by its emphasis on the interplay between language and power. As van Dijk (2001) argues, "discourse is not only a medium of communication but also a tool for enacting and legitimizing power relations" (p. 96). This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding how political speeches construct and perpetuate specific representations of minority groups.

Three key themes were identified:

1. Marginalisation through Omission: Instances where the Mbororo are excluded or mentioned only in passing.
2. Symbolic Inclusion: Cases where the Mbororo are rhetorically included to project an image of diversity and unity.
3. Stereotypical Representation: Depictions that reinforce stereotypes about the Mbororo as pastoralists or "backward" communities.

These themes were analyzed in relation to the broader socio-political context of Cameroon, drawing on Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic power to understand how language shapes social hierarchies.

Table 1: Speeches collected for the study

Speech	Date and source	Political figure	Place	Occasion
Speech 1	10 September 2019	Paul Biya	Yaounde	The Head of State message to the nation
Speech 2	31 December 2017	Paul Biya	Yaounde	Head of State's end of year message to the nation
Speech 3	2017	Paul Biya	Yaounde	Speech on land conflict and security
Speech 4	20 May 2020	Paul Biya	Yaounde	Head of State Message to the Nation on the eve of the National day
Speech 5	10 February 2025	Paul Biya	Yaounde	Head of State's message to the youth
Speech 6	May 2015	Paul Biya	Yaounde	Message on the occasion of the national unity day
Speech 7	2018	Paul Biya	Yaounde	Head of State's message to the nation reinstating his interest to stand for elections
Speech 8	2016	Paul Biya	Yaounde	Addressing the youth on the eve of the National youth Day.
Speech 9	6 August 2021	Pauline Irene Nguene	Yaounde	National Consultation on taking into account the specific needs of indigenous populations in Regional Development Planning
Speech 10		Pauline Irene Nguene	Yaounde	Launch of the 29 th Edition of the international Day of Indegenous peoples

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the study of political discourse, the language used by political figures in speeches serves as a critical tool for constructing, reinforcing, or challenging social identities and power dynamics. This study examines the discursive

representation of the Mbororo people in political speeches in Cameroon. The Mbororo, a pastoralist ethnic minority group primarily located in the northern and western regions of Cameroon, have historically faced marginalisation both socially and politically. The analysis of political speeches provides a lens through which the representation of this group can be understood, revealing both the overt and subtle mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. This section discusses the findings from the analysis of political speeches delivered by prominent political leaders in Cameroon, exploring how the Mbororo are represented and the implications of such representations for their social and political standing.

The Mbororo in Political Discourse

Political speeches serve as a reflection of broader societal narratives, often mirroring or shaping public opinion. For minority groups like the Mbororo, political speeches can either affirm their marginalized status or challenge it. In the case of Cameroon, the Mbororo's representation in political speeches is marked by a complex interplay of visibility and invisibility, inclusion and exclusion.

1. Stereotypical Representations and Marginalisation

One of the most significant findings in the analysis is the frequent use of stereotypical representations of the Mbororo in political speeches. These representations are often framed around their pastoral lifestyle, which is portrayed as primitive or outdated. In several speeches, political leaders have referred to the Mbororo as "nomads" or "herders," reducing their identity to a singular, static characteristic. For instance, President Paul Biya's 2015 speech on national unity described the Mbororo as "herdsmen with no fixed place of residence, perpetually wandering and out of touch with modernity" (Biya, 2015). This kind of rhetoric reinforces a narrative of the Mbororo as static, backward, and disconnected from the broader national development agenda.

The negative stereotype of the Mbororo as primitive is often juxtaposed with a vision of "modern Cameroon," in which progress is equated with urbanization, education, and economic diversification. In this framework, the Mbororo are depicted as an obstacle to national development, contributing little to the economic or social progress of the country. This framing aligns with what van Dijk (1993) terms as "othering" – the process through which minority groups are constructed as different, inferior, or less civilized in comparison to the dominant group. Such discourses perpetuate the marginalisation of the Mbororo by positioning them outside the realm of national progress and modernization.

2. Symbolic Inclusion and National Unity

While the Mbororo are often framed negatively, there are instances where political leaders attempt to symbolically include them in national narratives, albeit in a limited manner. In some speeches, political leaders have acknowledged the cultural diversity of Cameroon and emphasized the importance of maintaining unity among all ethnic groups, including the Mbororo. For example, in a 2016 speech, Biya remarked, "Cameroon is a land of diversity, where the Mbororo and other ethnic groups contribute to the rich tapestry of our national identity" (Biya, 2016). Minister Pauline Irene Nguene in one of her speeches says "...government whose presence at our side is a practical demonstration of government solidarity and the commitment of public authorities from all sectors to fight against the social exclusion of vulnerable categories". It is important to note here that one of the vulnerable categories mentioned by the Minister is the Mbororo. The above statements attempt to present the Mbororo as part of the nation, but it is important to note that such inclusions are often vague and lack substantive policy backing.

This form of symbolic inclusion is part of a broader political strategy that seeks to maintain national unity, particularly in the context of ethnic and regional tensions. However, symbolic inclusion often falls short of addressing the material and structural inequalities faced by the Mbororo. As van Leeuwen (2008) argues, symbolic inclusion is often used to placate minority groups without making any substantial changes to their social or political position. In the case of the Mbororo, this type of discourse fails to challenge their marginalized status or address the systemic discrimination they face.

3. Framing of the Mbororo in Terms of Security and Conflict

Another important theme in the discourse surrounding the Mbororo is their frequent association with issues of security and conflict. Given their pastoral lifestyle, the Mbororo have been involved in frequent land and resource disputes, particularly with sedentary agriculturalist communities. Political leaders often refer to the Mbororo in the context of these conflicts, framing them as both victims and perpetrators of insecurity. In a speech delivered in 2017, Biya stated, "While the Mbororo people are victims of land conflicts, they must also adhere to the laws of the republic and respect the rights of other citizens" (Biya, 2017). This statement reflects a dual narrative: the Mbororo are presented as vulnerable, yet simultaneously as actors who contribute to instability.

Such representations have significant implications for how the Mbororo are perceived by the broader public. By framing them in terms of security, political leaders reinforce a narrative that the Mbororo are inherently involved in conflict, thereby justifying a securitized approach to their issues. This framing can lead to the stigmatization of the Mbororo as a "threat" to national peace and security, which in turn facilitates their further marginalisation. According to Fairclough

(1995), the language of security in political discourse often serves to legitimize exclusionary practices and policies, framing the minority group as a problem to be managed or controlled.

4. Calls for Integration and Development

Despite the frequent marginalisation of the Mbororo, there are occasional calls in political speeches for greater integration and support for their development. In 2019, during a speech on rural development, a Cameroonian minister remarked, "The government must ensure that the Mbororo and other pastoralists have access to education, healthcare, and the modern infrastructure necessary for their development" (Ngute, 2019). Such statements signal an acknowledgment of the Mbororo's socioeconomic challenges and the need for targeted development programs.

However, while these calls for integration and development are laudable, they are often disconnected from concrete actions. The political discourse surrounding the Mbororo remains largely abstract, and the policies designed to address their needs are often vague and underfunded. As Wodak *et al.*, (2009) argue, political discourse often functions as a tool for mobilizing support rather than effecting genuine change, with leaders using inclusive rhetoric to garner political legitimacy without committing to substantial reforms.

Implications for the Mbororo's Social and Political Status

The discursive representation of the Mbororo in political speeches has far-reaching implications for their social and political status. The perpetuation of negative stereotypes and the failure to address their material needs contribute to their continued marginalisation. While some political leaders make symbolic gestures towards inclusion like Minister Pauline Irene Nguene, these are often superficial and fail to address the systemic issues that hinder the Mbororo's participation in national life.

Moreover, the frequent framing of the Mbororo in terms of conflict and security serves to delegitimize their claims for equal treatment and resources. This discourse positions them as a problem to be solved rather than as citizens with rights and entitlements. The lack of substantive policy responses to their calls for better living conditions and greater political representation reinforces their sense of exclusion from the national project.

On the other hand, the occasional calls for integration and development suggest a potential for change, though this potential is rarely realized in practice. For the Mbororo to achieve genuine inclusion, political discourse must move beyond symbolic gestures and engage with the structural inequalities that limit their opportunities. This would require a concerted effort to deconstruct the stereotypes that permeate political discourse and to ensure that policies address the specific needs of the Mbororo in meaningful ways.

6. CONCLUSION

The representation of the Mbororo in political speeches in Cameroon is characterised by a complex interplay of marginalisation, symbolic inclusion, and calls for development. While the Mbororo are occasionally framed as victims of conflict and marginalisation, their representation in political discourse remains largely negative, reinforcing their outsider status in the national imagination. To achieve greater social and political inclusion, it is crucial that political discourse moves beyond stereotypes and embraces a more nuanced understanding of the Mbororos' contributions and needs. Only through such a shift in discourse can the Mbororo hope to overcome the challenges they face and attain equal recognition and rights within the Cameroonian State.

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