

MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF REPRESENTATION OF INSECURITY IN NIGERIAN ONLINE NEWSPAPER CARTOON

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Abstract

Nigeria has had a running battle with all kinds of insecurity in the last 17 years, as the nation is confronted with terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, ritual killings and ethnic tensions. This has continued unabated and, from all indications, may not subside unless multifaceted efforts are mounted against the unpleasant manifestations. Intensifying actions against the hazard include leaving no stone unturned, but extant studies on cartoons, a critical aspect of visual representation and semantic negotiation lean towards political activities with little attention given to insecurity. Consequently, this study investigates the representation of Nigeria's insecurity situation in selected newspaper cartoons. An eclectic consideration of aspects of Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotics, Barthes' concept of anchorage and relay, and the ideological notions of hegemon and subaltern presents theoretical and analytical insights into a multimodal critical analysis of the sampled artworks drawn from the Facebook pages of The Punch, Daily Trust and Business Day newspapers. Analysis reveals ironical twist, satire and sarcasm as visual encrypted discursive strategies that project negative valence and representation of the masses as victimised, defenseless, and "endangered species"; Nigeria's President as unfeeling, nepotistic, and maladroit; security agents as disoriented and inept; and insurgents as ferocious and untamable. The study concludes that the media employed cartoons for civic goals in the humorous depiction of the security situation in Nigeria and in calling for attitudinal change and concerted action against the alarming situation, which impedes both citizens and the nation on social, ecological, and economic fronts.

Keywords: Social semiotics, insecurity, multimodal representation, hegemony and subaltern, Nigerian newspaper cartoons

Introduction

With the advancement of technology and convergence possibilities, virtual representations such as cartoons are now acknowledged as a veritable tool for informing the public, crusading for reform, and holding government accountable and as not only media nuggets but also an alternative press and emancipatory bursts

of self-expression. A cartoon is a digital depiction of an audience's ideas and emotions; it is a growingly significant part of social interaction. While cartoons are often funny, they convey a variety of messages: insecurity, corruption, and political, social, and economic undertones. It is a valuable source of information and a useful specialised tool used as a critical method of disclosure (ALjrah, Legino & Anwar, 2021). Significantly, cartoons can express a complicated topic in a much more direct and succinct manner than language. Cartoons, otherwise conceived as "talking images", are accessible to the educated and illiterate. They are an influential mode of expression (Issa, 2016) and play a significant part in national discourse (Lee, 2011).

Previous studies into global peace and security concerns have amply shown the media's ability to support new social and political paradigms for political and economic transformation. Smith and Brecher's (2010) argument that the process of building social movements and furthering national development would be impossible without the media and its all-important messages properly emphasise the media's important position in the grand scheme of things. In effect, social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Skype, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Instagram have evolved into a vehicle for information dissemination and for expressing interest in or disinterest in individuals and institutions, among other functions.

Succinctly put, cartoons are contextual and are motivated by modern circumstances and national concerns. It is, therefore, unsurprising that Nigerians are ready to criticise and express their views on individuals and institutions in the present political scene through creative and satirical artwork. Nigerian cartoonists have regularly utilised it as a springboard, both online and offline, to convey various inconsistencies in the country's sociopolitical and security conditions. These modes of communication are defined by a concept known as "social semiotics," which is "a theory concerned with meaning in all its manifestations" (Kress, 2009, p. 54), or by terms such as "multimodal semiotics" or "multimodal discourse" (O'Holloran & Smith, 2011), which is viewed as an emerging paradigm in discourse studies. It extends from the study of language in isolation to the study of language in combination with other resources such as images and scientific symbolism. For obvious reasons, cartoonists use incongruity and multimodal resources in their semantic engagements with their target audience not just as tactics for humour production but also for strategic communication (Muhammad & Terver, 2020). In light of the above background, this study seeks to investigate the representation of Nigeria's insecurity situation in selected online cartoons using a multimodal approach.

Perspectives on Insecurity in Nigeria

The African continent is beset by a variety of security and leadership concerns. This upheavals include electoral disputes, natural disasters, abduction, insurgency,

armed robbery, religious intolerance, ethnic conflict, community confrontations and ritual murders. Since 1960, when Nigeria gained independence from Britain, the country has faced instability and violence. Apart from the fact that the country experienced several military coups between the 1970s and early 1990s, which almost destabilised and forced the country to its knees, the demands of various pressure groups from different parts of Nigeria also pose threats to the nation and contribute significantly to the country's present heinous security situation. Regrettably, some of the security difficulties have resulted in widespread loss of life and property (Awodola & Oboshi, 2015) and environmental degradation with catastrophic implications for Nigerians and neighbouring states. As Kah (2017) noted, the continent's acute food problem or insecurity is partially the result of these costly conflicts and bad governance. Additionally, he stated:

The escalation of the Boko Haram insurgency has caused many farmers to abandon their farms for fear of attacks by marauding Boko Haram insurgents." The worst-hit states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa have often produced staple foods such as cowpeas, rice, millet, sorghum, corn, yams, tomatoes, onions, fish, and livestock. The farmers are no longer able to produce in sufficient quantities to meet the demand from other parts of Nigeria... Vast areas of southern Yobe, Borno and northern Adamawa states have been under-cultivated or not harvested at all (p.183–184).

Afolabi (2016) examines the relationship between religious violence and national security in Nigeria and asserts that religion, which is supposed to unite several ethnic groups in the country, has become one of the catalysts for the destruction of lives and property, and that violence motivated by religious affiliation and religious policies has resulted in physical and psychological harm to several people. This instability is, without a doubt, capable of jeopardising the country's national security. The link between corruption and weak governance is also recognised as a significant source of insecurity. In this sense, the rise in armed robbery, cultism, terrorism, unemployment, and other elements contributing to insecurity in Nigeria are all related to corruption, either directly or indirectly. Abada and Ngwu (2019) detail how corruption fuels insecurity in the Niger Delta region and remark that militancy in the region is fuelled by political thugs hired by corrupt politicians ahead of regional elections. These criminals, who were unemployed after the elections, sought employment via militancy, which ultimately evolved into the bombing of oil sites and abduction of foreign oil employees for ransom, therefore increasing the incidences of oil theft.

Meanwhile, recent market assaults have scared and pushed many individuals to retreat inside their shells. Numerous business people and craftspeople whose livelihoods depend on cross-border and inter-state interactions have paid a high price or remained invisible out of dread of assaults by insurgents in the north,

kidnappers and separatists in the east, and ritual murders and roving herds in the south. According to the International Crisis Group (2018), the 2014 abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok in Borno state and a slew of other security incidents over the last few years demonstrate that securing towns and communities across the vast northeastern region affected by the Boko Haram insurgency or within militants' striking range, as well as states where kidnapping and other vices are rapidly becoming the norm, is a massive challenge for the Nigerian government and security forces. This may explain why insecurity is seen as a hydra-headed monster in the nation and why all-inclusive action is advocated daily.

National security and sustainable development

National security refers to everything a country undertakes to protect itself as a sovereign entity, which covers every facet of its life and existence. In this perspective, national security is concerned with a country's posture, well-being, stability, and progress, and it symbolises the whole of a country's efforts in its sociopolitical, cultural, economic and international affairs. Together with overall stability, peaceful cohabitation of the nation's people and the nation's citizens at a global level, sustainable development, citizen protection, freedom, well-being, national and integrity constitute the foundation of national security.

A country is deemed to be insecure if these requirements are not present or assured. When a country is unable to protect itself as a sovereign entity, every part of the nation's life and existence is jeopardised, when lives and properties are vulnerable to assault, and not everyone has access to protection and can live a healthy and productive life, insecurity occurs. The focus is on living a healthy and productive life, or the lack thereof. Citing a slew of security issues plaguing the country, including suicide bombings, ethnoreligious crises, armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, and the like, which are all contributing to the country's slow progress toward sustainable development, Olanibi (2015) believes that there is no denying that Nigeria is in desperate need of peace and security.

Review of Related Literature

Various studies have looked at how cartoons have been utilised to transmit messages. Scholarly interest in cartooning as a tool for semantic negotiation and civic involvement has come from various directions. Some of them are examined to demonstrate the gap in the literature and correctly situate the current research. In selected Nigerian political cartoons, Oluremi (2020) analyses the use of humour as a powerful instrument for reflecting on and conveying paradigms of common Nigerian political events. He notes that some 2016 political events, such as Nigeria's 56th Independence anniversary, the anti-corruption fight, and the suspected 2016 budget padding, were re-mediated in political cartoons. He points out that audiences that are well-informed about these political activities can decode cartoons since they share the same key (political knowledge) as the cartoonist. In addition, he states that apart from genuine amusement generated by the sampled

imagery, they also lampooned Nigerian politicians' impracticable campaign pledges and the nation's despondent event at 56; self-centered leadership, lawbreaker legislators, and selective justice in the Nigerian political sphere.

Similarly, Oyemade and Adeagbo (2020) explain the linguistic and non-linguistic dimensions of ideological representation in a selection of Nigerian political campaign memes. On Instagram, four memes related to Muhammadu Buhari's and Atiku Abubakar's presidential campaigns were chosen and analysed using a mix of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Social Semiotics and van Dijk's (1998) Critical Discourse Analysis. The study indicates that visual representations and textual resources, in combination with political beliefs, serve social semiotic roles as media for transmitting political intentions and ideological orientations during campaigns. Ariyo (2017) examines multimodal discourse characteristics in chosen cartoons and discovers multimodal discourse features in TELL newsmagazine cartoons. He ties the traits to the circumstances in which they were used by focusing on how they were used in the cartoons. The report indicates that cartoons are used to construct messages on delicate political matters, and are easier to read and comprehend. These signs and symbols had an essential role in creating many different types of art and critiquing the social order. Also, Ademilokun and Olateju (2016) conduct a multimodal discourse study of specific visual images in the political rally rhetoric in Southwestern Nigeria during the 2011 electioneering campaigns. Halliday's (1985) systemic metafunctional principles and Barthes' (1977) anchorage and relay notions were used to examine the data. Because of the intrinsic political, cultural, and social communication that semiotic resources and visual pictures convey, the research determined that they constitute an essential part of the discourse. According to them, communication in the contemporary world has taken on a new dimension, with the past's over-reliance on verbal expression being replaced by multimodal communication, which draws on a broad variety of semiotic resources for meaning projection.

Amore and Atoloye (2016) examine certain cartoons related to Nigeria's 2015 general elections to determine how they express verbal and non-verbal meanings. The study's data consists of fifteen carefully chosen web cartoons. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) social semiotic theory was used to examine the data obtained. The study demonstrates that social semiotic reference is critical in the link between political speech and ideology and that cartoons use language and non-linguistic methods to represent social behaviour. They are one of the most common ways for the general public to access and engage in a society-wide discussion about a specific event or social issue.

Dominguez (2015) explores the development of a metaphor set through time using a corpus of 266 cartoons gathered from a sample of three newspapers. He observes a progressive metaphor diversification and evolution with the oil slick as an old common trait in cartoons about the oil slick caused by the Prestige oil tanker in

2002 on Spanish shores and the subsequent court decision in 2013. He argues that cartoon is particularly helpful for the analysis of social and political realities and to observe how society assimilates new and unexpected concepts. Hakam's (2009) critical discourse analysis of Arab Newspaper is informative and emphasises the importance of cartoons in today's conversation. According to him, a Danish daily, *Jyllands-Posten*, published 12 caricatures of the Prophet Muhammed on September 30, 2005, and linked Islam to terrorism. The debate over the "Prophet cartoons," which not only heightened tensions between them but also resulted in the deaths of 17 people in Maiduguri in 2006, exacerbated tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims in some parts of the world. Even more recently, last year to be precise, the cartoon controversy resurfaced, igniting demonstrations at Batley Grammar School in the United Kingdom when a teacher showed students an "inappropriate" caricature of the prophet. This is primarily because media discourse is seen as a result of social and institutional behaviour. The examined studies have one thing in common: they all look at political cartoons, clarifying political phenomena only from a language and non-linguistic standpoint, to the exclusion of security and insecurity concerns in Nigeria. The current research aims to address this gap in the literature.

Theoretical orientations

Social semiotics is premised on the notion that images and other visual modes can represent a particular social relation between the producer, the viewer and the object represented (Liu, 2013). Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) social semiotics is an approach to multimodal analysis of visual communication which draws heavily on the Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics. It is anchored on the notion that the use of numerous semiotic resources in discourses ranging from written, printed, and electronic texts to material lived-in-reality, is capable of encoding and decoding multi-layered meaning. Halliday conceives language as a semiotic system that uses semiotic resources to create meaning. In congruence with this position, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) contend that images, like language, have grammar structures that can be analysed for meaning. They argue that visual design, like all semiotic modes, fulfills Halliday's three meta-functions, and therefore design the theoretical framework of semiotic analysis in consonance with the Halliday's metafunctions: Ideational is replaced by representational, interpersonal by interactive, and textual by compositional metafunctions. Additionally, all semiotic systems are social semiotic systems that allow us to negotiate social power (Liu, 2013). In essence, images articulate ideological stances. Social semiotics encompasses the various rules and concepts that help readers/viewers to comprehend the meaning potential of components' relative positioning, framing, salience, proximity, colour saturations, font styles, and so on (Amore & Atoloye, 2016). As a result, multimodal discourse analysis examines how multiple semiotic modes interact to form a coherent text or communication experience.

Roland Barthes' (1977) "Rhetoric of the Image" is a masterpiece on multimodality that critically explains the implicit and explicit meaning and messages present in photographic images. The study particularly derives from the field of social and cultural semiotics and unveils variegated messages embedded in a Panzani advertisement. Barthes considers three dimensions of image analysis: linguistic message, denoted image, and connoted image. Almost all images are accompanied by some kind of linguistic text or caption. The linguistic message situates meaning within a context, especially when an image is polysemous. Linguistic message can be in form of anchorage or relay, and both can co-exist in one iconic whole. While anchorage reinforces the message already displayed in the image, relay introduces something new especially when the meaning of an image is not fixed. The denoted image relates to deciphering literal and coded meaning in an image. The connoted meaning, also termed "rhetoric of the image" of an image is described symbolically in the light of the social, cultural, historical, ideological, and mythological codes (Olaifa, 2020).

Gramsci's ideological notions of hegemony and subalternity are considered relevant to this study. These notions explain power relations across different societal structures. The understanding of hegemony and subalternity lies in the exertion of power and its effects on the one (or group) who exerts or controls, and the one (or group) who is oppressed and controlled. Hegemony also refers to the idea of the domination of one group over another. The associated term "hegemon" is used to identify the actor, group, class, or state that exercises hegemonic power or is responsible for disseminating hegemonic ideas. Subalternity is simply explained within the nomination and repression of a member or group. Gramsci's concept of subalternity is most often used for an analysis of a group's position, and in these analyses, subalternity is usually assumed to be a negative condition, based on a lack, that needs to be overcome by a confrontation with the structures of power (Smith, 2010). The adoption of the notions of hegemony and subalternity in this study, with reference to represented participants in insecurity discourse, rests on this position: "while it is true that there is no one place in which Gramsci defined and developed the term, nor is there one articulation of a 'theory of hegemony' as a coherent whole, it is the case that the concept informs most of Gramsci's wide-ranging philosophical, political and cultural prison" (Smith, 2010, p.40). In essence, hegemony can be explored in different contexts in as much as power relations exist between individuals or social groups. In this study, the hegemon-subaltern power relation manifests in diverse dimensions, which are explicated in the analysis below.

Material and Methods

Sixteen cartoons were obtained from Facebook and utilised as illustrations for this study. They were purposively selected from the pages of randomly chosen Nigerian newspapers including *The Punch*, *Daily Trust* and *Business Day* newspapers. The three dailies have a wide readership and are often at the forefront of national

debates and discussions. Their cryptic messages in the form of cartoons on national concerns are usually seen by critics and academics (Amore & Atoloye, 2016; Issa, 2016; Ariyo, 2017; Oluremi, 2020) as expressing the unspoken opinions of the population and are therefore regarded vital to this work. The selected online cartoons depict several facets of Nigeria's security situation and its leadership crisis. By their very nature, the sampled cartoons rely heavily on a variety of visual representations to deliver their message. While some have obvious meanings, others convey messages that are harder to discern. Together, they underwent a thorough quality evaluation and their verbal orientations and aesthetically packaged embedded signals were examined in the next phase of the research using the framework of social semiotics put forward by Kress and van Leeuwen, as well as Barthes' notions of anchorage and relay.

Analysis and Discussion

Cartoons are not only artistic pieces and caricature representations of people, events and situations, they are also visual communicative resources, carved with aesthetics, to convey explicit and implicit meaning to putative text consumers. Nigeria's index of insecurity is ominously rising such that cartoonists are spurred, as always, to channel their artistry into the practice of civic engagement. In lieu of this, this study beams light on the visual representations of Nigeria's insecurity situation, while unveiling how semiotic resources are deployed in accurate combinatorial possibilities to cartoon turns of events and roles of social actors in the discourse of insecurity in Nigeria. The analysis is, therefore, conducted in the light of multimodality, an approach to language analysis that affords the exploration of multiple modes for encrypting meaning within variegated wider contexts. The study draws on theoretical orientations from the eclectic combination of Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotics and Roland Barthes' concept of relay and anchorage, to explain how semantic indicators, interspersed with semiotic modes of size, colour, focus, gaze, gestures, arrangement, among others, construct representational, interactive and compositional meanings of selected cartoons. Also, negative valence and ill representations of Nigeria's insecurity in the sampled cartoons are projected through visual encrypted discursive strategies such as ironic twists, sarcasm and satire. Representations are mimetically projected along two ideological notions of hegemon and subaltern due to the flagrant unequal power relations between and among represented discourse participants/social actors.

Cartoonists construct and represent Nigeria's insecurity experiences and some concerned social actors in a different light. Social actors are animate agents, particularly humans, whose roles, positions or responsibilities directly or indirectly influence other social actors and social issues. The study identifies Nigeria's president, Muhammadu Buhari; the Minister for Information, Lai Mohammed; the Nigerian Police; the Nigerian military; the service chiefs; Boko Haram insurgents, bandits, and civilians (farmers, school children, the abducted, the raped) as social actors who are directly affected, negatively or positively, by the severe consequences of insecurity.

The masses as victimised, defenseless and ‘endangered species

Insecurity incurs grave consequences of constant dread, defenselessness, victimisation, destruction of properties and monumental figures, and ultimately rising mortality. The plates in this section are visual construction of the plight of the masses who are mainly at the receiving end of the politicisation of insecurity and its lethal consequences. Plate 1 relates to the vicious cases of kidnapping of innocent school children, prominent in Northeastern Nigeria, and a depiction that hangs on text consumers’ shared social knowledge of the abduction of Chibok and Dapchi school girls by supposed kidnappers. As it relates to the real-world experience, three children in school uniforms with hands raised as a sign of surrender are helplessly led away by an armed abductor. The gun is symbolic of the identity of the carrier. They pass by two political figures, Nigeria’s Minister of Information, and Nigeria’s president, whose political power to rescue innocent children remains unexpended. Instead, sarcasm reflected in their cynical, smiley facial expression shows the state’s incompetence in saving the abducted children. Going separate ways hinges on the narrative process of non-alignment and disconnect between the government functionaries and the unsecured citizens. The central positioning of the armed kidnapper shows *information value* and the power relation of “being in charge.” The linguistic caption at the top of the meme, “...using kidnappers, bandits not FG’s job – Minister,” provides anchorage to the compositional meaning expressed by the semiotic modes of gesture and the background colour. The caption is ironic, as it reinforces the irony of the alarming security situation in Nigeria. Similarly, Plate 2 explains negligence and endangerment of the lives of innocent Nigerians in transit. Their helpless state is satirically expressed by dual tragedy: the “mighty boot” of insecurity pushing the directionless bus into a ditch, and the drivers, symbolic of the Nigerian politicians who left the wheel and wrestled at the roof of the bus hoisting the Nigerian flag (signifying their position of power and authority). The two combatants wrestle for a portfolio of power filled with money. In essence, Nigerian politicians prioritise power, inordinate wealth and embezzlement over the people’s security. While the anchorage “politicians at work...” further projects the explicit and implicit meaning of the representation, the verbal expression by the passengers “Driver, stop fighting, please...” is the weak voice of the subalternate Nigerian masses who lack agency to salvage their destiny in the face of national catastrophe (a bottomless ditch). It is a metaphoric explanation of Nigeria at the edge of the precipice, and also a dismal expression of how insecurity and negligence of political leaders on matters of national security can lead the nation to a cataclysmic end.

Plate 1



Plate 2



In the same vein, Plate 3 identifies a speeding vehicle conveying some escaping armed participants attired in the military uniform, whose identity is marked as Boko Haram by the linguistic label at the back of the vehicle. The same terrain indexed by the signpost "Nigeria" is littered with dead bodies. The scenery depicts mutilation, murder and massacre of defenseless innocent Nigerians who the Boko Haram insurgents regularly brutally attack. The positioning of the victims at the centre of the plate reinforces the deployment of the semiotic resource - *salience*, which is accorded to the represented casualties. There is a sight of a survivor communicating with an unknown implied participant through a telephone. The verbal cues and his response serve as a relay, a linguistic resource that introduced another strand of meaning other than the ones communicated by semiotic modes. The linguistic caption reflects Nigeria being labelled as a hub of terrorism with an entrenched operational communicative system and structure. Plate 4 further portrays the masses as helpless and persistently endangered even in the very presence of the military and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. Within the representational level of multimodal analysis, vector is instantiated by the dialogue between the participant dragged away by an armed uniformed militia and the federal government's representative. A *reactionary process* occurs such that the 'endangered' citizen's cry for help is met by the reaction of the whisking off of a

Nigerian military officer who could have swung into action and rescued the victim. The insurgent drags the participant through the skulls of dead victims; an indication that the victim would suffer a similar fate. The linguistic caption at the top of the plate serves as both anchorage and relay. As anchorage, the caption reinforces the message conveyed by the semiotic modes of gesture, posture and dialogue. As relay, it explains the scenery both as a news headline and as a re-enactment of what had happened in some Northern states plagued by the Boko Haram murderous attacks, and the consequences of the decision of the Federal Government to withdraw military troops from insurgency and violence-ravaged states. Again, the replacement of the military with the police in a terrorised territory ridicules the Federal Government's approach towards tackling insecurity

Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 8



The text producer of Plate 7 relies on the putative readers' shared knowledge of the ethnic affinity of the President in representing him as nepotistic. In the spirit of the hotly debated Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) settlement policy initiated in 2019, to resolve the recurring dispute between the nomadic Fulani herdsmen and sedentary farmers, and its replacement with Livestock Intervention Programme planned to be implemented across the nation in 2021, form the relative perception of the general public about the President as that of unequivocal nepotism. Accordingly, the recurring killing of several farmers in their homeland birthed the tagging of the Fulani herdsmen as murderers, especially with the kind of firearms they parade their cattle with. The caption "insecurity: don't withdraw licensed gun – Reps tell Buhari" operates as *anchorage*, foregrounding the context of the dialogue between the participants. Sarcasm and irony play out aesthetically and ideologically in the President's response to a hunter who flashes his licence to use the gun. This *narrative action process* in the light of representational meaning construction creates vector links through eye contact and gesture between the President and the hunter. The President's admittance of provocation towards the licence spurs hysterical laughter from the more sophisticated arm-wielding nomadic herdsman – his identity indexed by the image of cattle in the background - who in the first place should have been the participant confronted by the President. However, this ironic twist is intentional to advance the unveiled nepotistic tendencies and ethnic sentiment of the President.

Plate 9



More profoundly, the President’s maladroitness and disillusionment are clearly articulated in Plate 9 through relevant and adequate semiotic properties. In the background are violent exchanges, as well as gory, vicious, distressing and chaotic scenery of mutilation and murder of armless and harmless citizens by ammunition-bearing insurgents, to paint a somewhat surreal image of Nigeria’s security situation. Skulls are symbolically littered at the site, just as blood, which serves as a testament to the several innocent lives that bloodthirsty insurgents have wasted. More disturbing but somewhat symbolic in this representation is that while humans suffered gruesome killing, cattle roam the same terrain untouched and unscathed. Again, the *narrative action process* of gestural exchanges in the background triggered a *reaction process* of the President’s bewildered gesture. So devastating is the sight and the situation that the President’s posture and gesture express perplexity and discombobulation. The bigger size, mucked-up posture, and centralised positioning of the President despite kneeling are semiotic resources of *salience* and *focus* to foreground compositional meaning. With the anchorage “rising insecurity in Nigeria” foregrounding the encrypted semiotic importance in the cartoon, the verbal cue “over to you, Oh God Almighty” expresses the acknowledgement of more incredible spiritual and supernatural force in dousing the pernicious situation of Nigeria’s insecurity.

Security agents as disoriented and inept

The Nigerian security agents are not left out in the discourse of national insecurity, especially with the roles the Nigerian Police and the Nigerian Army played in the #EndSars protest saga. In the representations below, the security agents are lampooned for abetting and amplifying the farmers-herders crisis. They are portrayed in Plate 10 as stooge and puppets of the President’s ethnic sentiment and nepotistic values. Ideological meanings are arranged in two slides. The narrative action process aptly captures the Slide 2 reaction provoked by the Slide 1 action. In these slides, a farmer, an armed Fulani cattle grazer whose cap uniquely indexes his identity, and Nigerian security agents are presented as discourse participants and compositionally categorised through framing. Framing relates to how semiotic modes combine to capture individuality and differentiation. This, however, frames

the armless but defensive farmer as a differing ideological group, an out-group collaboration of the murderous cattle grazer, the Nigerian police and the Nigerian army. This group can also be called “a group of hegemons”. In Slide 1, both security agents stand aloof and watch the assaults perpetuated by the armed Fulani herdsman and the armless farmers. Slide 2 narrates retaliation by the unarmed farmer who was able to overturn the threatening situation. The pointing of guns at the farmer and changing their positions at both ends are symbolic narratives.

Plate 10



Plate 11



Plate 12



The ironic twist in Plate 10 stands to satirise the Nigerian security agents and to re-echo their disorientation, disillusionment and ineptitude in conducting their primary responsibility. Significantly, the trait of disorientation is further portrayed in Plates 11 and 12. This representation stands to assert that the Police are as well victims of the nation’s insecurity challenge. At the police station, a complainer with tattered cloth, most likely a victim of a physical assault, is astounded that the three policemen are weeping profusely for unknown reasons. The anchorage “as insecurity worsens...” attributes the wailing scenario of both the complainer and the policemen to the overarching negative influence of insecurity on the police. This suggests that the “helpers are helpless” and, as such are victims of helplessness. Similarly, Plate 12 narrates how the anchorage – the news item at the top of the plate - reinforces the meaning constructed by other semiotic modes such

as posture, appearance, facial expression and gesture in the police station setting. Another victim of insecurity and ravaging insurgency is a woman with a son, and a baby strapped at her back. The sarcastic statement made by one of the police officer indexes disorientations as he attempts a justification for ineptitude – sleeping at the counter. The mantra “Police is your friend” is in this light captured as mere linguistic rendering and facade. Just as the huge exclamation symbol signifies the complainer’s dazedness at the sight of the weeping Police officers, the little boy in Plate 12 stares at the sleeping officers such that a notion of disorientation is further registered.

Insurgents as ferocious and untamable

Generally, insurgents, usually terrorists, are trained to be violent and have no regard for lives. They are fearsome for their attacks, confrontational and have vicious approach to negotiation. Their presence and activities command fret, jittery and terror. This study identifies the representation of insurgents as ferocious and untamable. Plate 13 explains the narrative of heavy presence of kidnappers, bandits and Boko Haram militias, as the earlier announcement made by Nigeria’s Defense Minister serves as *anchorage* which properly situates the visual message within the right context of interaction. While the defense minister and his cohorts had taken to their heels at the sight of kidnappers, a young boy is left alone to sarcastically confront an insurgent standing before him. He is only empowered with a catapult, and cries at the sight of a sophisticated gun. In the same vein, the posture, size, and position of multimodal semiotic resources are combined to adequately represent the social actors in Plate 14 – the insurgent, the captured and mal-handled citizen, and the President with two of his service chiefs. Obviously, one of them wields power of hegemony at the expense of others. The insurgent manhandles a young man as the latter calls and cries for help from the President and his service chiefs. The response depicts humour while simultaneously labels the President and his chiefs as cowards. The compositional arrangement of semiotic resources is highly strategic in explaining Nigeria’s insecurity. The strength of the insurgent is foregrounded by his ability to lift another human upside down and handle him with a single hand. The fearsomeness and hegemonic power are further entrenched by the positioning of the semiotic elements in certain strategic location in the plate. The placement of the President and his chiefs at the margin accords little importance to them. The anchorage “Only God can police Nigeria, Niger border – Buhari” properly reinforces and situates the semiotic inferential meaning from the visual message to the voice of a newscaster.

Plate 13



Plate 15



Plate 14

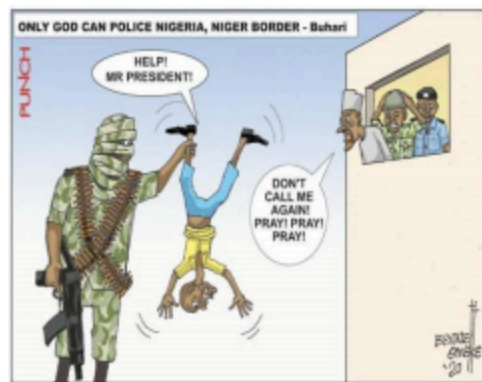


Plate 16



Furthermore, the terrorisation of the Northern Nigeria by bandits is amplified in Plate 15. Despite being a region ravaged by the Boko Haram attacks in the past one decade, leading to death and displacement of indigenes and settlers, the Northern region indeed suffers double tragedy of being war-torn through the ruthless attacks masterminded by banditry. The signpost at the side of the plate is a signifier of the North as the territory heinously attacked by bandits. Many state governors of the region consider negotiation as a last resort to securing peace, while some do not consider it as an option. The plate displays the image of an armed bandit with a monstrous physique, standing directly in front of dead casualties as symbolised by flood of skulls. Beside him in a pleading and appeasing gesture is a seeming elite ready to negotiate monetarily the cessation of killings in the region. A bird perching on a signpost reveals the identity of the negotiator as the State Chief Security Officer, a personality and office expected to motivate settlers in the face of aggression, confront bandits with all gallantry, and mastermind their annihilation and evacuation from the soil of the region. This further foreground the untamed nature of the bandits, and further reinforces the hegemony and dominant power of the bandits as well as the subalternation of both the state security agencies and

parastatals, and the settlers. In similar light, Plate 16 satirises the numerous news release on the Nigerian Army containment and victory over the Boko Haram insurgents at specific villages and cities. The second slide of the play exposes this as a blatant lie. While the represented military officers granted an interview, announcing the neutralisation of the remnant and fleeing Boko Haram terrorists who feign death, the terrorists suddenly rise, provoking a humorous contemplation of the “death and resurrection” of the terrorists. Again, this representation downplays the military might and strategies of the Nigerian military as weak and unmatchable with the terrorists’, while also asserting the hegemonic power of the latter. Whether or not the Nigerian military is winning the war against the Boko Haram terrorists is a deep contemplation that this representation leaves the putative viewers to brood on.

Conclusion

This study has explored the deployment of semiotic and semantic properties in the representation of Nigeria's insecurity situation in selected newspaper cartoons. Adopting eclectic theoretical insights from Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotics, Barthes' concepts of anchorage and relay, and the ideological notions of hegemon and subaltern, analysis reveals the representation of the masses as victimised, defenseless and ‘endangered species’; Nigeria's President as unfeeling, nepotistic and maladroit; security agents as disoriented and inept; and insurgents as ferocious and untamable. Profoundly, these visual representations explain power as a tool of operation, wielded by a repressive and despotic individual or social group against repressed individual or social group. Analysis shows the binary explication of the hegemon-subaltern relation in several dimensions: Nigerian security agencies exerting unchecked power against Nigerian civilians; insurgents suppressing armless Nigerians; and insurgents subduing Nigerian security agents. The study, therefore, takes the position that the media employed cartoons for civic goals in the humorous depiction of the security situation in Nigeria and in calling for attitudinal change and concerted action against the alarming situation, which impedes both citizens and the nation on social, ecological and economic fronts.

Against this backdrop, the study aligns with O'Halloran's (2008) claim that metaphorical constructions of meaning occur across linguistic and visual elements, and concludes that in the digital space, with all forms of technology in use, the concept of literacy has shifted, and the supremacy of verbal language has been eroded as diverse aspects of visuality and a wide range of semiotic resources have been incorporated for meaning projection. The result accords with previous research that semantic negotiation is a discourse activity that is not limited to text-based interactions between social actors; it may also occur in visual representations using multimodal resources. As a result, it is anticipated that cartoonists, as well as other text creators, would use the potential provided by multimodal resources and the dynamic character of language for their varied communication activities. Furthermore, non-alignment and quietness are not appropriate at this point in

Nigeria's history. The moment has come for Nigeria's security concerns to be addressed in a concerted and decisive manner, and the utilisation of the multimodal resources inherent in cartoons might help.

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