THEMATIC CONSTRUCTION IN THE NIGERIAN POLITICAL CARTOONS: NEWSPAPER EXAMPLES

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ABSTRACT: *This article explores the way insurgency and banditry are represented in Nigerian political cartoons. Using content analysis, the article examines how these security threats are constructed as themes in the cartoons. It analyses the key visual metaphors and symbols used to convey these themes, as well as the political messages they convey. A purposive sampling was employed, whereby ten cartoons depictions were selected and analysed using semiotic analysis as the theoretical framework to explore the emergent themes of the depictions. The findings identified five emergent themes, such as, banditry, insecurity and poor policies among others. The findings suggest that political cartoons play a significant role in raising awareness and shaping public discourse on insurgency and banditry in Nigeria.*

KEYWORDS: Semiotic analysis, Insurgency, Thematic constructions, Banditry, Political cartoons, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Basically, the prime function of language is communication through which social interaction is channelled. Communication is a medium through which social integration is fostered in the society. One of the powerful modes of visual communication which has become famous in Nigerian newspapers is the cartoon. Cartoons are simplified drawings, representation or symbolic, which make satirical witty and humorous points. Cartoons play a prominent role in correcting societal ills, entertainment and mirror social realities (Oyedi, 2013). Among the genre of visual arts that prove potent in putting checks on the political class in contemporary society is the art of using cartoons to lampoon politicians in such a way that words cannot convey without much censorship. The depiction of insurgency in Nigerian political cartoons could portray the use of language resources used in constructing satire. Political cartoons are illustrations containing a commentary that usually relates to current events or personalities (Omolabi & Zakariyah, 2018). It constitutes a specific category of political reporting in that they are pictorial representations which depict political and social issues and events in a simple, short and condensed manner (Test, 1991). From these definitions, we can say that political cartoons are usually simple and compact but they carry large amounts of information which have to be decoded by first understanding the context, that is, the situation surrounding them.

In every social and cultural context, communication takes place through the activation and interpretation of signs embedded with messages. Thus, the science that studies the life of signs within the society is termed semiotics. Semiotics has a lot to do with the value of communication since it is a formal linguistic exercise that forms an idea of art as a form of communication through the social network of signs-systems and their significance in real life social realities in the current security challenges in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section contextualises the study by reviewing related empirical studies and theoretical underpinning of the study that guides the analysis of the cartoons.

In recent years, there have been considerable studies in literature which investigate the nature and functions of political cartoons. Several studies of political cartoons look at their capabilities to effectively communicate social and political messages to mass audience. These studies have been synthesised and grouped into related variables based on their overall findings:

Zinah, Muslim and Al-Ghabra (2022) conducted a semiotic analysis on cartoons using qualitative and descriptive methods identifying the positivity and negativity of the verbal and visual-verbal signs, and deciphering the non-verbal signs in two of the selected episodes of Tom and Jerry. The researchers adopted Peirce's theory in analysing and categorising signs into icons, indexes, and symbols. They depended on the universal six pillars of Character Counts as the criteria of positivity and negativity to tabulate the product of categorization. They found that the negativity is the dominant aspect in the two episodes.

Felicia (2021) examined the ideological underpinning of cartoons in Nigeria's socio-political context. She unveiled cartoonists strategic moves to (MIS) represent Nigerian women by using data that comprise 10 political cartoons which she selected using a purposive-sampling method in line with the thematic concern of the study using Kress and Van Leewens social semiotic

approach to the analysis of multimodal text along with insight from discourse analysis (CDA). Her findings revealed that semiotic resources, such as pronominal choices, speech acts, labelling, visual metaphorization, salience/emphasis and framing play significant roles in cartoonist's commentaries on gender related issues in Nigeria's socio political domain. Through view against the United Nations global goal of gender equality by 2030, she concluded that Nigerian newspaper political cartoonists represent (UN) equal gender relations among Nigeria.

Nindya and Didin (2020) described Anies Baswedan's political cartoons on his first 100 days as a governor. They employed a qualitative research approach, and analysed the data dealing with the relationship between the utterances and Anies cartoons on his first 100 days as Jakarta's governor. Using different steps; by categorising the sign into icon, symbol, index using a typology of signs and interpreting the meaning of the political cartoons, the researchers found that the signs in those political cartoons had powerful meanings to convey the aspiration of Indonesian people freely towards Anies government. Also, the fact that the cartoons were in the forms of images eased the readers in understanding the meanings behind them, and the political cartoons deal with the relationship between visual and verbal signs of cartoons because it also helps the researchers know about events depicted in those cartoons. Their study also offered some potential use of cartoons for language teaching, even though the challenges of employing them are evident.

Darryl (2020) in his work Constructing Myths via Art of Controversy: A Semiotic Analysis on Political Cartoons, analysed the different ways of expressing opinions by utilising Philippine editorial cartoons and argued how humour in the political cartoons served to present crucial issues and criticise political leaders and their contemptible practices.

Victor (2019) analysed media representations of Joyce Banda, Malawi's first female president, by newspaper editorial cartoons. In her study, a total of 50 cartoons were analysed, comprising Point of Order and Puludzu, from The Nation and The Daily Times newspapers, spanning the period 2012 to 2014. Using theories of feminism and representation, the editorials, using unique visual forms of communication, offered an opportunity for deep reflection on attitudes concerning female and presidential leadership. His findings suggested that both cartoon series depict President Banda as an indecisive, inefficient, clueless and weak politician based on ingrained gender stereotypes of women, rather than on her actions as a president governing the country.

Syaza and Mokhtar (2019) analysed the semiotic meanings behind the illustrations made by Zunar and the most prominent political cartoon elements used in the illustration to portray the controversial political issue of 1MDB. The researchers employed a qualitative content analysis as the mode of the research. Using two instruments, namely coding sheets, an adopted standardised coding sheet designed by the U.S. National Archives and Record Administration to analyse the cartoons visual, words, colour, and another coding sheet which he constructed based on standardised elements of political cartoons by the Library of Congress and Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Foundation, the study revealed the semiotic meanings of Zunars drawings on 1MDB issue showing that the depiction of the real-life events,

Ayesha and Joseph (2018) identified the ethical dilemmas in disparaging political cartoons by analysing theoretical perspectives in both humour and ethics. The researchers proposed a multi-point set of ethical guidelines, while also acknowledging the tension between free speech/press

and the recommendation that cartoonists, editors and media organisations self-impose standards that, in effect, can limit their freedom.

Theoretical framework

The paper uses Semiotic Analysis as its framework of analysis. Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure was an influential figure who made significant contributions to the field of semiotics in the form of his general theory of sign. His legacy shaped modern structural linguistics as well as structural semiotics. He proposed a program of semiology which was a new paradigm for linguistics (Saussure, 1959). The term semiology was used by Saussure to suggest a science that was not yet in existence. Semiology was intended to include not only human language, but also all forms of communication used within society, linguistic and nonlinguistic. Saussure believed that while each spoken language uses different words, they are all used to denote much of the same things. Saussure's underlying theory of sign begins with the bilateral model (Noth, 1995). This dichotomous model consists of three concepts: the sign, the signifier, and the signified. A sign for Saussure is the combination of a signified (a concept) and a signifier (through which the concept is manifested). According to Saussure, the sound image is the signifier and the concept the signified. For instance, a bunch of roses is a sign while the flowers stand as signifiers of the signified passion. The sign represents the whole according to Saussure, the linguistic sign is arbitrary. Thus, there is no absolute link that connects a signifier and a signified.

Saussure also focuses on discussion about the language system as a whole. He categorised the structure of language into two forms: la langue and la parole. The structures that exist outside of the individual he referred to as la langue, the abstract system of rules underlying speech. Saussure conceived of la parole (human speech: literally, words) as an intrinsically unordered quagmire, an infinite and arbitrary combination of the elements of language by individual speakers (cited in Hawkes, 1977). But he discarded parole as an impossible object for systematic study. Saussure further distinguished between two or more types of structural relations in language, namely syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations (Noth, 1995). Syntagmatic relations, he defines, are the relations between elements in the sequence of combination. This suggests a linear relation, while paradigmatic relations exist between linguistic elements that may structurally occupy the same resources.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach, which is suitable for studying political cartoons because it employs a naturalistic way of understanding phenomena in real-world settings. A qualitative research paradigm offers suitable and appropriate ways for understanding social phenomena and allows the analysis of cartoon texts to understand social realities (Giarelli & Tulman, 2003).

It is a kind of research that produces findings from real-world settings where the investigated phenomenon under study unfolds naturally (Patton, 2002). In recent years, there has been a growing interest in using qualitative research paradigms for analysing political cartoons. The cartoons provide a subtle way of communication that competes with news editorials. A purposive sampling was employed, whereby ten cartoons depictions were selected and

analysed using semiotic analysis as the theoretical framework to explore the emergent themes of the depictions.

ANALYSIS

A semiotic discussion of the themes then follows in terms of denotative and connotative perspective of meaning. The predominant themes in the cartoons depictions are banditry, national security, national policy, poor economy and educational setback (due to school students' abduction). The paper analyses five samples of the cartoons out of the ten cartoons sampled.

Banditry

In the context of the cartoons depictions, banditry refers to the occurrence or prevalence of armed robbery or violent crime in a given society. It involves the use of arms, force, or threat to that effect, to intimidate a person with the intention to rub, rape or kill that person under attack. Banditry is a crime against people. It has been a common heinous and horrible kind of crime that creates havoc and insecurity in contemporary societies (Nigeria Watch, 2011). In the cartoon below, an example of banditry is seen as follows:

Figure 1: An aftermath of banditry attacks (Daily Trust, 2021)

This figure shows houses on fire, with captions on yellow cards with the name of four northern states: Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina and Southern Kaduna. There are two (2) people on the motor circle and the third person standing behind the motor circle and blood (red) coming from Sokoto which means blood shed.

-       These are the skulls of people on the ground. This means they have killed a lot of people in Sokoto. They are now relaxing, celebrating and waiting for the next order (attack) that means where to attack next. They have put all those states on fire, as they have destroyed a lot.

- And merely in Sokoto there is too much bloodshed and destruction.

National Security

Security is presently a major challenge in Nigeria, especially in the Northern part of the country, even though the government claims to be on top of the situation, the problem persists. Thus, national security, a concept understood by some as an abstract notion relating to the 'condition of the state' and referred to in security and intelligence legislation. It argues that the concept of national security can serve a more vital role, as a principle for organising government. Ammerdown (2016) asserted that national and international security may be understood as a shared freedom from fear and want, and the freedom to live in dignity. It implies social and ecological health rather than the absence of risk as a common right. Prabhakaran (2008) argues that national security is the measurable state of the capability of a nation to overcome the multi-dimensional threats to the apparent well-being of its people and its survival as a nation-state at any given time, by balancing all instruments of state policy through governance and is extendable to global security by variables external to it. National security is also the defence of a country against internal and external threats to national unity, cohesion, peace, aspirations, and goals, among others. According to Anyadike (2013), national security now encompasses a broad range of activities which impinge on non-military or economic security of the nation and the values supported by the society. In this regard, national security is the requirement to maintain the survival of a country through the use of economic, diplomatic and political power.

Figure 2: Causes of insecurity (Daily Trust, 2021)

This figure depicts a picture of different people facing a cemetery building, kneeling down begging a man sitting down on top of a cemetery wall. The verbal expressions that make up the written caption are scattered all over the wall which include, insecurity, unemployment, poverty, corruption, taxes, and high cost of living.

The connotative meaning of this cartoon shows unemployment and abject poverty as the main cause of insecurity. The figure portrays the living condition of people indicating that people are in trouble, they are suffering from poverty, hunger, high cost of living, taxes,

unemployment, they are in serious trouble. They want the government/president to help them to ease their suffering from insecurity which aggravates the hardship through banditry, which is another form of insecurity ravaging the northeast region of the country. Bandits incessantly hunt them every blessed day, killing them, kidnapping, burning and raiding their houses.

In addition, behind the cemetery, there are massive graves with yellow placards with captions written on it which shows that under the yellow card are the graves of many innocent people killed by the bandits. People are pleading to the government to help them, at the same time; the leadership (government/ president) is saying or telling them that "I am on the road to deliver you out of your problems". The person is saying he has planted many fruits for them behind the wall.

The connotative meaning reflects what is happening in Northern Nigeria; death toll rising as a result of the incessant attacks launched by the bandits, while the political leaders are unconcerned about it. Also the man sitting on the cemetery wearing a light blue shirt and light blue cap symbolises the president himself. The non-linguistic device used in this cartoon is the use of yellow cards to indicate many things which cannot be recognized because the caption on the card is not clear. The multidimensional nature of human security is underlined by the recognition given to economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security.

In Nigeria, it was observed that the level of insecurity has increased since the return to democratic governance in May 1999. These insecurities are caused by communal clashes, ethnic/tribal conflicts, religious riots/conflicts, militancy and ritual killings, cultism and ethnic militia attacks and the farmers-herdsmen conflicts (Akinola, 2016). These further increased with the arrival of the *Boko Haram* insurgency in the North-East from 2009 to date. The level of insecurity further increased with the changing of the farmer-herdsmen clashes into banditry and cattle rustling between 2010 – 2015 in some northern states. This form of insecurity further changed to not only banditry, cattle rustling but to also include kidnapping of people for ransom.

Katsina State is one of the States in the North-West that is presently affected by banditry, cattle rustling and kidnapping which started from July 2018 to date. This affects mainly the eight frontline Local Government Areas (LGAs), namely: Jibia, Batsari, Safana, Danmusa, Kankara, Faskari, Dandume and Sabua. This situation has become so bad that in January 2019, the Governor of Katsina State lamented that Katsina State is under serious siege by bandits and kidnappers. The above cartoon

National Policy

National policy as a theme entails a number of issues, most notably among them are: corruption, ethnic unrest, and environmental encroachment. Endemic corruption is not found only at the apex of government, but permeated every level of the state. The culture of kickbacks, bribery, and embezzlement have encouraged mismanagement and wasted huge amounts of limited national resources. It also has fueled political instability by placing a high premium on the control of state offices. Corruption as an undercurrent in the discussion of national policy is a major inhibitor of democratic development, especially when it is prevalent at the highest levels of government. Bribery is used to neutralise leading politicians who have self-selected themselves to represent the people of Nigeria and to act on their behalf.

Intimidation, violence, and murder suppress many of those who want to act in a way to raise their voices against corruption. Such phenomena served to rupture the democratic process in Nigeria. Corruption also hinders political and economic transparency, necessary in a democracy. Key decisions are made secretly by a few top Military officials for their own benefit. The majority of Nigerians are excluded from the political mechanisms that govern their lives. Corruption holds back economic reforms and the development of a true market economy from which the majority can benefit because the status quo is the one convenient to those reaping the profits of corruption. Although some Western companies have undoubtedly taken part in corrupt activities, most have been dismayed by the adverse business environment fostered by corruption.

Another component of the National Policy theme is ethnic tensions. Nigeria, like most countries in Africa, is an amalgamation of over 250 different ethnic groups with varying cultures. Competition for power and resources among the three main ethnic groupings - the Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in the southwest, and the Ibo in the southeast - has contributed to a turbulent political history that has helped to stall national economic development. In recent years, a fourth dimension has been added to Nigeria's tripartite competition. Smaller ethnic groups in the Niger Delta, where most of the country's soil reserves lie, have become increasingly restive, demanding political self-determination and a greater share of Nigeria's oil revenue.

Figure 3: Buhari appoints New COAS – News (Chief of Army Staff) (Daily Trust 2021)

Buhari welcomes the COAS "Welcome General you have got work to do." The new chief of Army Staff has a lot to settle, because Nigeria is on fire, in the North there's an issue of Boko Haram and Kidnappers, while in the south, IPOD and Biafra were always launching an attack. The picture on the wall shows that everywhere is on fire (everywhere is burning) i.e. insecurity, banditry, Boko haram, Ipod, Iswap, Biafra etc. Also on the table, there is a fire extinguisher that he could use to terminate Boko-Haram etc. So, the fire extinguisher represents that the COAS will have to distinguish the fire for B-Haram, Insecurity, and Banditry. Niger delta and Biafara. The posture of the president looks worried, that Nigerian insecurity is getting out of hand.

Poor Economy

As a theme, the "Economy" was referenced in the cartoons. At the time of the cartoons' publication, most African countries were restructuring their economies and many law democracies as a means to reform. Without a democratic base, most countries could not move forward and quite often the support and goodwill needed from the international community to achieve the desired level of economic growth was not forthcoming. Nigeria until then was an undisputed leader. But this leadership role appeared to be contestable in the face of emerging political developments across the continent.

Figure 4: "I am worried about your situation (Daily Trust, 2020)

The picture depicts President Buhari in a green car, a man carrying heavy luggage as fuel price increases, Increased Electricity Tariff, Increased Taxation, the man is about to fall at the same time farting (flatulence) TWAY! TWAY, one luggage is on the ground, with a man (bandit fully armed with AK43) after him, chasing him with "KOBOKO". President Buhari telling Nigeria that he is worried about their situation, what he is worried about, he said he is worried about fuel increase, lack of electricity, lack of kerosene, increase prices of food stuff, increase electricity tariff. Increase taxation we have poverty and banditry at the back. At the same time.

Buhari is distancing himself from people to show that he is not serious, because his car is far away. This is exactly the real situation in the country, everything is turning from bad to worse. There is an increase in fuel and also the electricity tariff is high with no power supply to more than ¾ part of the country. Nigerians have never experienced poor electricity supply like this era. People are suffering, there is hunger in the country and food prices are fluctuating. Out of 50 people, only 5 can afford three square meals. Poverty is another major problem in Nigeria, the politicians and corrupt high ranking officers embezzle the country's funds. Bandits have almost destroyed the northern part of Nigeria, some villages markets were closed, farmers can no longer farm in their farm because of insurgency there is shortage and increase in food prices. However, the president is still turning deaf ear to the situation, busy telling people that he is worried about their situation. The man that is carrying that load is Bola Ahmed Tinubu, so if Tinubu comes to power that is what he will still stand for.

Educational Setback (due to school abduction)

In Nigeria, students have been risking their lives for education. Like most parts of the world, schooling comes with its fair share of challenges but when students risk losing their freedom or lives at school, our tomorrow is under attack where going to school is tantamount to charging into battle amid a swarm of bullets. Although this abduction did not begin recently, it has become more frequent today than it was in 2014 when 276 girls were abducted from Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State. The abduction of Chibok girls sparked global outrage and condemnation for the then Jonathan's administration but outrage is not enough to solve a hydra-headed challenge such as kidnapping. The frequency of these abductions now, in a way, normalises the nightmare.

Figure 5: A lady directing a man to Jangebe in Zamfara State (Daily Trust, 2020)

The lady : " help our girls have been abducted!

The security: "I am going to Abduct Dansu first.

The lady represents the Jangebe girl's mother. Those girls that were kidnapped on February 26, 2021 aged 16-18 from the Government Girls' Secondary School Jangebe, Zamfara State. The woman is telling the security personnel that their daughters have been abducted, and she is showing him the direction the kidnappers follow with the girls, but the (man) government is not looking towards her direction. He is running away from his duty, because he is afraid of the kidnappers.

The ten cartoons analysed have shown that there are depictions ranging from linguistic to nonlinguistic and the themes describing the current situation in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The study provides additional insight on how political cartoons are used to construct social and political issues in a clear perspective without experiencing censorship as the case is in the mainstream media. The depictions are creatively constructed using numerous linguistic and nonlinguistic resources to portray important messages that provide political commentary, ridicule politicians, and expose social vices in our society in a dramatic passion. The findings of the study have indicated how cartoons form a specific genre in political discourse that could be harnessed to set social agenda by depicting issues of great importance to the public.

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