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#EndSARS and Digital Persuasion: Moving People to Action through Visuals

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Abstract

This study examines visual narratives of police brutality in Nigeria, with a view to revealing their ideological potentials and strategic functions. Seven purposively selected cartoons drawn from the social media were investigated using critical multimodality with insights from the speech act theory. The descriptive analysis revealed that two broad ideological strategies – demonisation of SARS and intensification of victims’ innocence – were used to foreground SARS officers’ power abuse in order to instigate the #EndSARS protests. To legitimate the protests, the officers were denigrated through emphasis on their negative acts and generic depiction in connection with gaze and pose that suggested insincerity, fear and unprofessionalism. Also, victims’ innocence was accentuated through the foregrounding of their professions, metaphor, symbols, colour and gaze and pose that suggested sincerity and confidence. The texts realised directive speech acts. The study concludes that visuals are ideological constructs that can instigate resistance against social injustice and oppression.

Keywords: multimodality, police brutality, nonviolent resistance, #EndSARS, Nigeria

1. Introduction

With the increasing access to new media and digital technologies, various semiotic modes, such as images, colours, language and layout, are manipulated not only to create meanings, but also to construct ideological events such as social inequality, dominance and oppression. This study intends to investigate visual representations of police brutality in Nigeria, with a view to understanding how multimodal texts were used to instigate the October 2020 #EndSARS protest. The protest was staged against various unethical practices of the now disbanded Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) unit of the Nigeria Police. Although many successive governments and police authorities had warned against bribery, corruption and brutality in the service and they have made moves to rebrand the force, these interventions were not followed by effective implementation. Thus, brutal officers in the police appear state sanctioned and as “tools of oppression”, which the youths tried to resist (Heywood, 2013, p. 402).

As a result, the #EndSARS protest was partly viewed as a challenge to the political elite’s power abuse, bad governance and particularly the persistent socio-economic instability in the country (Orabueze, Ukaogo, David-Ojukwu, Eze & Orabueze, 2021). Since its inception, Nigeria has been built around complexities, such as ethnicity, regionalism and lately elitism, which have overridden patriotism and social developments. All good governance and development indices, such as educational and healthcare systems, economic growth and employment opportunities, have nearly been crippled in the country. Meanwhile, frantic efforts by the neglected citizens, many of whom youths, to ameliorate their socio-economic situation through legal and illegal means have birthed a surge in different forms of crimes. Thus, many police officers tend to have resulted to youths’ profiling, blanket criminalisation of their activities and deployment of brute force against them (Adeniran & Ibrahim, 2021). These are forms of inequality and oppression, which the visuals under study represent.

Many studies on police brutality and the #EndSARS protest have focused on the causes and effects of the protest (see Ojedokun, Ogunleye & Aderinto, 2021; Iwuoha & Aniche, 2021; Orabueze et al, 2021; Aluko, 2021). Others (such as Maradun, Yar’Adua & Msughter, 2021; Dambo et al, 2020; Wada, 2021) have examined the significance and limitations of social media in the protest and its potential relationships with global social movements, such as the Arab Spring and Black Lives Matter. However, there exist limited studies on the different modes of communication

adopted by the protesters. Although some studies (Awopetu & Aseniserare, 2021; Ukor, 2022) have analysed visual communication used in the offline protest activities, the present study's focus on online visual representations of police brutality reveals ideological potentials of visuals in resistance instigation.

2. Discourse, Visual Representation and Resistance

The advent of multimodality in discourse analysis changed the definition of discourse to include not only a stretch of language use but also other meaning-making resources, such as images, colours, typography, light in painting, drawing, music and videos (Fairclough, 2012; Machin & Mayr, 2012). Thus, discourse refers to the comprehensive set of semiotic modes that jointly produce meaning as a whole text. This suggests that discourse is multimodal and that apart from language, other semiotic devices (such as visuals) can represent realities. However, discourse is an important carrier of ideology, which (re)produces contextual meanings to perform a particular function. In other words, it constitutes resources used to represent social practices in order to further an ideology (van Leeuwen, 2008). For example, the various visual texts can be used to explain a situation, warn some people or to reject a position.

Representation or narrative is “the (re)constitution and interpretation of personal, social and cultural reality” (Georgakopoulou, 2011, p. 190). It can be spoken, written or multimodal. Visual representation is the use of images, colours, layout, other graphics or a combination of these to tell a story. It can be referred to as a “graphical story”, a shift from “text-heavy content” (Walter & Gioglio, 2014, p. 8). However, based on differences in ideology, there may not be absolute true representation of events because a narrative (whether linguistic or visual) can be subjective, inaccurate or a selective reconstruction of reality. van Leeuwen (2015) asserts that, apart from denotation and connotation, meanings in a semiotic ensemble depend on textual organisation. General visual structuring strategies include gaze (presumed social interaction between images and viewers), angle (perspective) and distance (social power relation) (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006; van Leeuwen, 2008; Machin and Mayr, 2012). However, van Leeuwen (2008) and Machin and Mayr (2012) discuss more critical visual representational strategies, such as roles distribution, individualisation, collectivisation and exclusion, which can foreground or background social actors' identity. Visual representation can be used as subtle resistance to power. The persuasive power of visuals, such as symbols, images, placards and colours, in mobilising protesters for social movements is immediate. In their study of Twitter activity in the Black Lives Matter Protest, Casas

#EndSARS and Digital Persuasion: Moving People to Action through Visuals by Qasim Adeyemi ALIU and Williams (2018, p. 2) argue that, more than text, images promote political participation and evoke “stronger emotional reactions” such as anger, anxiety and enthusiasm.

3. Studies on Police Brutality and #EndSARS Protest

SARS was established to curb armed robbery and other violent crimes. However, in sheer abuse of power, many SARS officers have allegedly arrested, detained, brutalised and extra-judicially killed countless innocent citizens. Ojedokun, Ogunleye and Aderinto (2021) argue that if previous complaints about erring officers had been carefully attended to and stringent disciplinary actions handed to them, the #EndSARS protest might have been averted. Thus, Rotimi (2022, p. 3) submits that effective police performance monitoring, proper investigation of complaints and disciplinary actions against erring officers and dissemination of “feedback to the complainants” will promote “fairness and accountability” and guarantee “better police service delivery”.

Moreover, Iwuoha and Aniche (2021) contend that civil protests seem to increase police brutality, rather than stop it because of the mutual distrust between the state and the citizens. They also claim that clampdown on civilians is one of the legacies of colonial police, which ruthlessly enforced laws and orders on the defiant African natives. Rotimi (2022, p. 18) corroborates this when he avers that the deployment of Nigeria Police personnel is still informed by the colonial establishment’s philosophy, which privileged containment of opposition and “the enforcement of prescribed laws” over crime prevention and detection. However, Orabueze et al (2021) suggest that the #EndSARS protest is beyond police brutality and that it is a protest against Nigeria’s present socioeconomic woes. Aluko (2021) shares this view as she asserts that the #EndSARS protest was provoked by leadership failure and bad governance.

In addition, Maradun, Yar’Adua and Msughter (2021) examine the significance of social media in the #EndSARS protest. They report that social media engender dynamic interactive discussions of protesters’ genuine grievances and issues affecting them, such as police brutality and bad governance. However, Dambo et al (2020) argue that online activism usually has low effects in challenging human rights abuse and corruption, because of the elite’s repressive tendency and high illiteracy rate. In her comparative analysis of Black Lives Matter and #EndSARS protests, Wada (2021) avers that while both protests were against police brutality, the former was borne out of racism while the latter was provoked by youth profiling. She also reports that although Black Lives Matter protest indeed influenced the #EndSARS protest and that some police officers were injured during the protest, Nigeria’s #EndSARS protest was deadlier (p. 21).

In their analysis of satirical songs used by the #EndSARS protesters, Owoaje and Sofola (2021) reveal that the songs were used to encourage protesters and to ridicule security agents' inefficiency in the war against terrorism. The songs were also used to express disappointment in the political class and to rationalise the youths' resistance by citing the country's socio-economic instability. Also, Awopetu and Aseniserare (2021) and Ukor (2022) examine the use of visuals, such as images, placards, symbols and colours, which do not only express the protesters' grievances and ideology, but also perform certain pragmatic functions, like informing, condemning, encouraging and appealing.

4. Methodology

This study employs primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data comprise seven purposefully sampled cartoons that perfectly represent the allegations of police brutality in Nigeria. The data were drawn from the social media between 4th and 15th October, 2020, a period of vigorous nationwide #EndSARS protests. The data tagged TEXTs 1-7 were classified into two broad ideological strategies – demonisation of SARS officers and intensification of victims' innocence. They were descriptively analysed using critical multimodality with insights from the speech act theory. The theories were chosen in order to adequately reveal ideological meanings embedded in the texts and to explain the strategic functions that they perform. Other sources of data included textbooks, journal articles and the Internet.

5. Multimodal Critical Analysis

This study relies on Machin and Mayr's (2012) multimodal critical analysis, with insights from the speech act theory. Multimodal critical analysis explores explicit and implicit meanings buried in linguistic and visual texts. Just like language, Machin and Mayr claim, many visuals connote other concepts and ideas that serve text producers' intentions (apart from their denotational meanings). Thus, critical multimodality explores hidden meanings in pictures and other semiotic devices. In other words, it examines ideological and power relation features embedded in different semiotic devices, such as language, image, colour and so on. An image, combined with its features and spatial setting (such as lighting), can represent a set of values and "certain kinds of identities and practices" (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 50). Also, several kinds of salience (such as potential cultural symbol, size, colour, focus and foregrounding) symbolise different levels of importance (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 54-56).

Furthermore, like quoting verbs in linguistic texts, text producers' attitudes can be decoded through gaze and poses. Gaze reveals imagined interaction between the viewer and the participant. In other words, it realises image acts (that is, demand or offer) just as speech acts in linguistic communication. A direct look by the participant suggests acknowledgment of the viewer and demand of a culturally appropriate reaction from them. In contrast, when there is no direct look, the participant is offered for viewers' observation. Also, Machin and Mayr assert that pose (image composure, which could be a firm, relaxed or leaning posture) represents participant's mood.

For ideological reasons, and to legitimise or delegitimise certain social actions, participants can be represented through various linguistic and visual strategies. These strategies include individualisation and collectivisation (depiction of participant as an individual or a group), specific and generic projection (personal or group identity), exclusion (arbitrary deletion of some significant participant or information), distance (closeness or otherwise of the viewer to the visual participant), angle (participant's perspective) (Machin and Mayr, 2012, pp. 79-102). Just as the linguistic representation of transitivity, visuals can make some agents active and some passive; while in others, agents may be deleted in a way that the understanding of the social action performed will be preserved. This tends to foreground or background certain aspects of meaning. Finally, just as different modality markers determine the level of our commitment to truth in language, divergences of naturalistic visual representation can be determined through degrees of articulation of details, background, depth, colour modulation and saturation.

6. Analysis

In this section, we critically analysed various semiotic devices in the police brutality visual narratives. Tagged TEXTs 1-7, they were categorised into two different subsections of broad ideological strategies, namely demonisation of SARS officers and intensification of victims' innocence.

6.1 Demonisation of SARS Officers

Demonisation is the portrayal of a person or group as completely evil or as an evil agent. It is a form of negative other-representation (van Dijk, 1993). SARS officers, with their uniform and gun, are a dominant group with full power (which could be abused) over the dominated, less powerful Nigerian citizens. Thus, texts under this section present the officers' power abuse and

different oppressive practices in visual atrocity stories in order to expose them to condemnation and justify the #EndSARS protests.



TEXT 1

Pic 1 presents image of an abandoned blood-soaked, lifeless body of a youth in the extreme background; while in the foreground, appear two masked, fierce and gun-bearing SARS officers in a conversation. Red symbolises blood and the victim's still body being covered by blood means death by shooting. Red spots are traced to the gun of one of the officers, while a line of flame connected to both officers' guns depicts their capacity. These altogether suggest that the officers killed the young man. The conversation between the officers and the inscription 'SARS' on their uniforms suggest collaboration and construct a group negative identity for SARS (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The question by one of the officers "DID YOU SEE HIS PHONE?" presupposes that the victim has a phone; while the second officer's reply "YES, I THINK HE'S A YAHOO BOY." suggests that the boy is killed for being a yahoo boy. But the officer's claim that the victim is a yahoo boy is contestable because of the non-factual reporting verb "think". It is an assumption. This suggests unprofessionalism. A yahoo boy is an Internet fraudster, who usually operate through expensive multifunctional phones or computers. But not every expensive phone user is a yahoo boy. The depiction above indirectly establishes that SARS officers kill citizens indiscriminately, without proper and comprehensive investigation. It is noteworthy, however, to say that the penalty for the supposed crime after a thorough investigation may not be death.

In terms of salience, capitalisation used for the linguistic text foregrounds the wrong reason for the victim's killing in order to enrage the public against the officers. Also, the texts are enclosed in two frames placed up in the vertical position where the viewer looks up at them. However, for being more important than the question, the second frame enclosing the reply is bigger. The officers, pictured in close shot and looking away from the viewers, do not communicate with them but are offered for viewers' observation and evaluation. In contrast, the long shot used for the victim

suggests that information about the victim is less important than the officers' as such cases of killing are already known to the viewers. Also, the victim's image is made to directly face the audience in order to signify his futile cry for help until his death. This demands audience's sympathy and condemnation of the brutal act. In addition, the officers' poses show forward movement, possibly to run away for fear of being caught. The colour blue in the background, which suggests a blue sky, and the empty open ground with little grass (which may be a roadside) emphasise the lonely stretches of Nigerian highways, where SARS officers usually operate. The colour saturation suggests truth about the story. Another atrocity story is presented in TEXT 2 below.

TEXT 2



This text presents a young man (lying on the floor) being attacked with weapons by SARS officers on a highway. In the background is a weeping lady, who supposedly has already been brutalised by the officers and is being consoled by a man. At the right side are two red and white, parked expensive cars. Although not clearly stated, it is presumed that their only offence is driving exotic cars. Red and white used for the two cars symbolise affluence and power. Considering Nigeria's strained socio-economic situation, few youths are expected to own exotic cars. Thus, SARS officers profile youths who drive expensive cars as internet fraudsters. However, this is prejudicial because some youths are children of the rich; while others become wealthy through legitimate businesses. Also, with three officers having SARS inscription on their uniforms, holding different weapons (guns and baton) and partaking in the same brutal act, this text (like TEXT 1) propagates SARS officers' collective negative identity. In other words, it suggests that all SARS officers are brutes and oppressors. The depiction indicates the officers' unprofessionalism and indirectly exposes them to public condemnation. This is complemented by the irregular dress of the officer in the middle, with jeans trousers and shoes of different colours from the SARS uniform and his cap facing backward. Also, his right foot is placed on the cheek of the major victim, while blood gushes from the victim's mouth. These intensify the wickedness of the officers and indirectly provoke public protest against SARS.

The officers' images represent an offer; they focus on the act and do not communicate with the audience. That is, the officers are presented to the viewer "for scrutiny and consideration" (Machin and Mayr, 2012, p. 71). However, both victims' images create a contact with the audience as they look directly to the viewer for help. This represents a demand for sympathy; and, indeed, condemnation of the brutal act. In terms of salience, the image size of the officers (as the major participants) is larger than that of the trampled man, the emotionally attacked lady and the sympathiser. Also, the parked cars are placed at the right side as new information in order to foreground the supposed offence of the motorists. The colours of the cars (red and white) stand out in the background to form textual cohesion. Blue in the background suggests a blue sky and a lonely part of the highway. This emphasises the victims' helplessness. In addition, colour saturation in the whole text suggests truth.



TEXT 3

At a drug den, this text presents two young men, facing each other across an uncompleted fence. Two different clouds of smoke from their mouths signify smoking, although the substance they take is hidden; while an empty bottle of alcohol within their reach on the floor suggests that they have finished a bottle. At the right side is a fully kitted police officer sitting on a stool, holding a big bottle of alcohol and smoking a big wrap of marijuana with his gun (beside him) leaning on the wall. On the floor are two pieces of paper and an empty can of alcohol (indicating that he had earlier finished two wraps and a can). The conversation between the two young men comprises an exclamation and a reaction. Speaker A exclaims: "DIS ONE DEY SHACK ANYTHING"; while B reacts: "...NA ONE OF THE BAD EGGS BE DIS. NA DEM DEY CAUSE ACCIDENTAL DISCHARGE". The conversation is rendered in Nigerian Pidgin English (the popular protest language in Nigeria). Speaker A, out of surprise, exaggerates the police officer's drug consumption

proWess. Whereas, using the metaphor of ‘bad eggs’, speaker B declares that the police officer is one of the unreliable officers who kill citizens by accidental fire. Bad eggs are rotten, worthless and the badness can affect others, if not separated from them. In other words, speaker B suggests that drugs make police officers to misbehave on duty. Also, the ellipsis preceding speaker B’s utterance seems to conceal long silence and/or derisive laughter. In addition, the phrase “ONE OF THE BAD EGGS” indicates generic depiction of the officer. That is, the officer symbolises a group (one out of many) in the police service.

Furthermore, the use of ‘DIS’ (a proximal deictic element) in both speakers’ utterances signifies familiarity with the officer. Also, the use of the third person plural pronoun by speaker B suggests ideological polarisation between ‘US’ and ‘THEM’ and negative other-representation (van Dijk, 1993). It is paradoxical that an officer, who is expected to maintain law and order, is found relaxed taking illegal drugs. With the armless top, unkempt hair and beard, sagged jeans trousers and a cap facing backwards, the two young men (at the left side) are represented as denizens of the hideout. Also, being in a standing position and leaning on the fence suggests preparedness to run away to the nearby bush in order to evade possible arrest by government agents. However, the police officer stands out as he is pictured relaxed on a stool, bigger in size and placed at the right side (representing new information). This is intensified by colour saturation and capitalisation of the linguistic text. Also, the cloud of smoke emitted by him is bigger than others’. In addition, leaving his weapon unguarded emphasises his negligence and unprofessionalism, as it could be carted away by hardened criminals.

Although speaker A faces the viewers, he closes his eyes and looks unconscious as he passionately smokes, while speaker B backs the audience either to conceal derisive laughter or for fear of arrest. However, words spoken by them represent a communication with the viewer. They emphasise the officer’s unprofessional conduct and indirectly demand public protest against SARS. In contrast, by facing the left side and with no textual communication, the officer does not create contact with the audience. Therefore, he is offered for observation. In terms of cohesion, green is used for the bottles, speaker B’s shoes and leaves behind speaker A (suggesting a nearby bush), yellow appears on the officer’s uniform, his gun and on the empty bottle. Also, white of the paper collocates with the background of the linguistic text; likewise, the officer’s complete black uniform, larger part of his gun and the clouds of smoke.



TEXT 4

This text indirectly ridicules the Inspector General of Police, IGP's, swift change of SARS to SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics unit) amidst nationwide protests. The IGP, indicated through the inscription on his arm, is pictured seated with a crossword puzzle and a bag of tiles (labeled 'RANK AND FILE') on the table. A junior officer sits opposite the IGP. SARS' nameplate placed right in front of the IGP suggests his intention to change it to another name. Also, the rank and file bag (which contains tiles to be put on the board) symbolises potential officers of the new unit. Words generated from the crossword puzzle – 'BRUTAL', 'FEAR', 'FIERCE', 'EXTORT', 'KILLERS' – are all negative. This suggests that SARS is irredeemably evil and that disbandment is the only solution as name change may not bring sanity to it. SARS officers are allegedly cruel, extortionists and killers on highways.

However, observing the all-negative words on the board, the IGP asks the junior officer: "...NOW WHAT OTHER WORD CAN I COIN FROM THESE?". The junior officer responds: "PUT THE TILES BACK IN THE BAG, SIR. SHAKE IT A BIT.. SELECT AGAIN". With his hand on the back of his neck and his looking away from the viewer, the police boss seems to be under pressure and confused; he does not interact with the audience. Although the junior officer's pose (facial expression and hands positioning) also smacks of confusion, he faces the camera a bit and his partial communication with the audience further exposes the police's unprofessionalism in responding to important national issues. Ellipsis in both the IGP and the junior officer's utterances symbolises long silence and confusion. Also, capitalisation of the linguistic text creates emphasis. Using a crossword puzzle to overhaul SARS suggests guesswork, unprofessionalism and the organisation's indifference to citizens' complaints. #EndSARS protesters' major demand is disbandment of SARS. Mere name change looks cosmetic and may not be effective in tackling police brutality.

In terms of salience, the crossword puzzle board (placed slightly at the centre) is foregrounded; while the junior officer is placed at the right side as new information and the IGP is presented as already known person, at the left. In order to denigrate the IGP, he is presented below the eye level in the foreground with loss of composure for viewers to look down on him. This signifies his powerlessness and vulnerability (Machin & Maryr, 2012). In contrast, looking up at the junior officer as he advises the IGP accords him “a sense of ... power” (Machin & Maryr, 2012, p. 100). In summary, both participants are offered for public observation and scrutiny. However, the portrayal of police leadership as confused justifies the #EndSARS protest to right the wrongs. As a form of modality, colour saturation and lighting generally instill truth in the text. Also, the colour combination – blue, black, white and yellow – creates textual cohesion.

6.1 Intensification of Victims' Innocence

Intensification means making things larger, better or worse than they appear. This could be done textually through exaggeration, metaphor, capitalisation and other visual strategies, such as valued cultural symbols, gaze, pose and colours. To further increase outrage against SARS officers and to induce sympathy for Nigerian youths, texts under this subsection foreground victims' innocence.

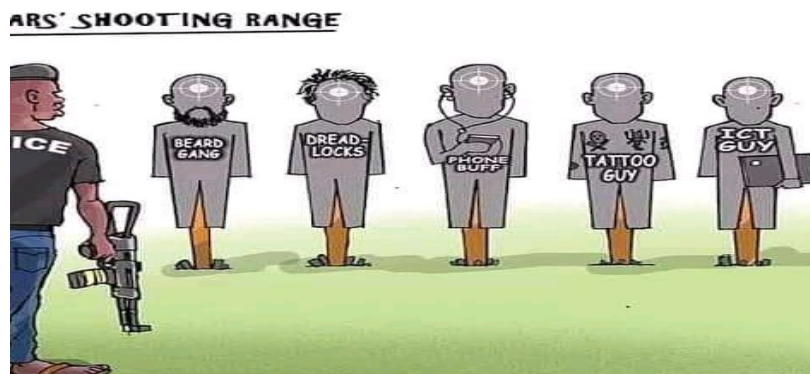


This text presents a helpless young man, supposedly being shot by a SARS officer. It represents a case of agent deletion as the shooter's image is excluded from the text (Machin & Mayr, 2012). However, it “does leave a trace” (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 29). The young man's clenched fist around his neck accompanied with the inscription “SARS” on his fist signifies a serious pain from gunshot injury. The exclusion, however, could be explained in the sense that whenever such officers perpetrate evil, they will probably run away to avoid being caught. Dressed in a blue short-sleeved shirt, with dreadlocks and well-shaved and gelled beard, moustache and

eyelashes, the young man (open mouthed and shedding tears) screams: “I AM A LEGAL PRACTITIONER, NOT A YAHOO BOY”. By asserting his identity as a lawyer and indirectly his fundamental right to dress as he pleases, his innocence is foregrounded. This is intensified by the text’s capitalisation. Also, presupposing that he is mistaken for a yahoo boy (probably because of his hairstyle), the young man indirectly challenges youths’ profiling as yahoo boys. However, even if he is a yahoo boy, it is extrajudicial to shoot him without proper investigation.

In terms of salience, the young man is placed at the centre in order to foreground SARS’ negative act, while the linguistic text is placed against his mouth to emphasise his pain. Also, his image being placed a bit above eye level for viewers to look up at him indicates dignity and high position. He does not create an eye contact with the audience and so he is offered for viewers’ observation and scrutiny. However, the bold and capitalised linguistic text, including the #EndSARS slogan placed at the edge of the background, demands public protest against SARS operation. The unkempt edges of the background collocate with the young man’s dreadlocks and this suggests brutish behaviour and impunity of SARS. Colour saturation adds truth to the story, while the colour combination of blue, black and white produce textual cohesion. Black signifies grief; white symbolises innocence and peace, while blue indicates dignity.

TEXT 6



This text presents a police officer (at the leftmost edge) holding a gun (the cultural symbol of shooting) in preparation for the execution of a row of five supposed criminals labelled “SARS’ SHOOTING RANGE”. The respective labels on each of the five images – “BEARD GANG”, “DREADLOCKS”, “PHONE BUFF”, “TATTOO GUY” and “ICT GUY” – represent the supposed offences committed by the criminals. However, the seeming unreality of their various offences emphasises their innocence. This is intensified by the labels’ capitalisation and their placement on the respective victims’ chests. Whereas, the shooting range metaphor is employed to emphasise the supposed wickedness of SARS officers. A shooting range is an area used for shooting practice.

Thus, the officers are indirectly condemned for using innocent people for shooting test. It is worthy of note that the images' "stereotypical representation of dress, hairstyle and grooming or physical features" foreground identities and values of a group of Nigerian young people (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 101). The thick beard, dreadlocks and tattoos constitute latest fashion among young men especially in popular Nigerian cities and the global influence of the internet has turned many youths to phones and computer enthusiasts. But to SARS officers, any persons with any of these features appear to be suspects. This indirectly condemns the prejudicial treatment of the youths.

In terms of salience, the five images are placed at the centre to foreground their supposed offences. Also, the youths are dignified as the audience look up at them by being placed above eye level and with their relaxed pose, especially those with a mobile phone and laptop. The gadgets suggest "mobility and independence" (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 52). In addition, facing the viewer, the helpless victims demonstrate confidence, sincerity and a demand for public sympathy; and by extension, protests against SARS. In contrast, the text producer tends to disempower the officer as his image and the inscriptions 'SARS' and 'POLICE' are halved on the leftmost edge. Also, the officer backing the camera symbolises lack of confidence, fear and exposure to threat (Machin & Mayr, 2012). In addition, his casual dress (especially blue jeans trousers and slippers) suggests unprofessionalism. White and green used for the background form textual cohesion. White (used for the upper part, victims' offences and their brain) symbolise innocence and peace. Green signifies youth and rebirth.

TEXT 7



This text is a manipulation of the actual picture of a weeping lady who sat on a portrait holding the Nigerian flag during the #EndSARS protest. Her cry, indicated by her open mouth and tearful eyes, signifies grief. She represents a secondary victim of SARS brutality. Also, her image's

duplication in different sizes represents several other victims of police brutality. Moreover, appearing barefoot signifies helplessness. However, the Nigerian flag (green, white, green) that she holds emphasises her patriotism. Also, her sitting on the portrait and her colourful and dangling hairstyle signify dignity and high position. All these emphasise her innocence; and by extension, her brother's. At the left side, a bold and capitalised passive sentence "SHE LOST HER BROTHER TO SARS" (supposedly spoken by an imaginary participant) presents the reason for her cry. With the passive construction, the actor is backgrounded. The two hashtags under the sentence #ENDSARS NOW and #BETTER NIGERIA suggest that the disbandment of SARS unit will create a better country. In other words, the participant indirectly demands public sympathy for the lady and protest against SARS. However, like many slogans, they seem to oversimplify Nigeria's various socio-economic and political issues under police brutality. The text producer does not clearly state how SARS disbandment will make Nigeria better.

In terms of salience, the lady is placed at the right side as new information. Although she is pictured in close shot, at eye level and she faces the audience, she could not genuinely interact with the viewer because of her partially closed eyes due to grief. Thus, she is offered for viewer's observation (Machin & Mayr, 2012). In contrast, the linguistic text, including the hashtags, demands public protest from the viewers. In fact, the overall argument of the text is a directive: 'Disband SARS for a better country because SARS kills the lady's brother'. Red, black and white create colour contrast and form textual cohesion. Full red background signifies the ubiquity of SARS victims' blood and danger (if SARS continues to exist). White symbolises innocence and peace. Black suggests grief. In addition, colour saturation instills truth in the text.

7. Conclusion

This study has examined the exploitation of various semiotic devices in the narratives of police brutality in Nigeria. The study revealed that two broad ideological strategies – demonisation of SARS and intensification of victims' innocence – were used to foreground SARS officers' power abuse in order to instigate the #EndSARS protests. Thus, in order to legitimate the #EndSARS protests, the officers were denigrated through emphasis on their negative acts and generic depiction in connection with gaze and pose that suggested insincerity, fear and unprofessionalism. On the other hand, through the foregrounding of their professions, metaphor, emphasis, gaze and pose that suggested sincerity and confidence, patriotism symbol and colour (white), the victims' innocence was accentuated in order to provoke further condemnation of SARS. Although the texts realise

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assertives (which explain various events), they were indirectly employed as directives, to instigate protests. The study concludes that visuals are not only capable of expressing ideological meanings, but also can tell stories to instigate resistance against social injustice, dominance and oppression.

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