Countering Political Narratives through Nairaland Meme Pictures

Contre les discours politiques à travers des images "mèmes" sur Nairaland

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Countering Political Narratives through Nairaland Meme Pictures

According to Wodak (2002: 8), the effects of power and ideology in the production of meaning, though often hidden, gradually come to form an integral part of social systems and structures. Within Nigeria's sociopolitical space, from a position of control and power, politicians often seek to project their selfish ideologies as the norm into popular discourses that influence social systems and structures. They, for instance, propagate narratives of themselves as laced with integrity and in favour of the masses and national interest, yet underneath exist apathy, animosity, personal interests and ambitions for control and power (Ekanem 2012: 51). During political elections these narratives are subtly pushed into campaign promises and electioneering strategies. The subtlety of these politicians can also be considered as a step in Kim's (2001: 6645) concept of hegemony in which a dominant group seeks to procure the consent of a subservient group to its existing social order, position and expectations. Counter narratives in resistance to such unfavourable political negotiation by politicians have however also arisen in Nigeria's sociopolitical discourses. During Nigeria's 2015 electioneering, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) alongside their presidential candidates, Goodluck Jonathan (GEJ) and Muhammadu Buhari (GMB), were wielded as the suitable and competent parties and candidates to proffer new/positive change during governance, and consequently, in the nation's sociopolitical space. Discourses in favour of this narrative were also reproduced and popularized across the Internet. GEJ was the incumbent Nigerian president at the time and the PDP was the ruling political party, and GMB was a retired general and military head of state at the time and the candidate of the APC. Both candidates had therefore at different times served as presidents of the nation, and thus, not in any way new to the presidential race. Contestations therefore naturally arose to refute any offer of newness by these politicians and to resist their suitability in truly effecting positive changes, since having

already had fair chances to effect new/positive changes and not utilizing them.¹ This also cost them the trust of the masses and led them to being equally considered as selfish and corrupt Nigerian politicians. To further emphasize the non-newness of these politicians, and the fact that Nigerians had already witnessed their style and strategy of governance, Campbell (2015: 1) describes the 2015 elections as a “rematch” of the 2011 elections between GEJ and GMB because both candidates had also run during the 2011 elections in which GEJ won, and their electioneering strategies were largely familiar to Nigerians. These counter narratives also were the subject of several online discussions that abounded at the time of the 2015 electioneering.

FIG. 1. — FRONT PAGE OF THE NAIRALAND “POLITICS” THREAD

Nairaland Says No To Secessionists (1) (2) (3) ... (89) (90) (91) * by Seun . 2938 posts & 273182 views. 10:20am On Apr 20 (Greatsuccess1)
Senator Dino Melaye's Arrest: Nigerians React (1) * by 36govs . 43 posts & 20031 views. 4:32pm (DSDLIVEREPORT)
Armed Men Storm Senator Melaye's House In Abuja (1) (2) * by Houseofmaliq . 79 posts & 17400 views. 4:30pm (kense88)
Biafran Activists Protest Against Buhari To His Hearing(video) by gldglddy . 1 post & 5 views. 4:30pm (gldglddy)
SarakI Seized My \$200,000 - Omoeyele Sowore Opens Up (VIDEO) (1) (2) * by ltsdumebi . 95 posts & 18246 views. 4:30pm (rainylad)
President Buhari Vs Nigerian Youth (a Must-read By Every Intelligent Youth) by zolaman . 1 post & 3 views. 4:30pm (zolaman)
Troops Storm Boko Haram Training Camp, Engage Terrorists In Shootout. Photos (1) * by dainformant . 50 posts & 26679 views. 4:30pm (KendChrist)
Breaking: Police Surround Melaye's Abuja Home by DAILYNIGERIAN1 . 1 post & 8 views. 4:30pm (DAILYNIGERIAN1)
Nigerians Smile As 24-hours Non-stop Electricity Spreads Like Wild Fire by lgbedefender . 13 posts & 118 views. 4:29pm (Rochas2023)
"Nigeria Needs Igbo President" - Apostle Johnson Suleman (1) (2) (3) * by diasporaman . 98 posts & 7364 views. 4:29pm (SoNature)
Biafra: My Worry Is How To Achieve Biafra- Ikedife

Retrieved from <<http://www.nairaland.com/politics>>, April 23, 2018.

On Nairaland.com, one of the most popular and well-recognized Nigerian online community forums and Internet sites for Nigerian and Nigerian-related discussions and engagements (Africa Practice 2014: 2; FactBound 2011: 5; Terragon Limited 2013: 24), several of such discussions were also found on

1. Press articles revealing Nigerians resistance to GEJ’s and GMB’s governance styles, retrieved February19, 2018, from: <<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/184088-10-ways-jonathan-failed-nigerians.html>>; <http://www.nigeriannews.com/backissues/guest/Abubakar%20Alkali_Sokoto_08_30_2013.php>; <<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/01/buhari-will-never-president-nigeria/>>; <<http://saharareporters.com/2007/01/14/crimes-buhari-wole-soyinka>>.

the politics thread.² These discussions were inclusive of Internet meme pictures reproduced to the same effect of engineering and countering sociopolitical narratives surrounding Nigeria's 2015 elections. Nairaland was founded by a Nigerian Internet entrepreneur, Seun Osewa, in 2005 as a platform for Nigerian content to be easily projected and engaged by Nigerians themselves.³

Internet Meme Pictures

The term “meme” was invented by Richard Dawkins in 1976 and reiterated in subsequent editions of *The Selfish Gene* (1989: 368) to describe the:

new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation. “Mimeme” comes from a suitable Greek root but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like “gene” [...]. I abbreviate mimeme to meme. If it is any consolation, it could alternatively be thought of as being related to “memory,” or to the French word “même”. It should be pronounced to rhyme with “cream”.

Internet meme pictures, as used in this discussion, are the image macros and photo insertions/edits reproduced on the Internet for mimicry, humour, satire, caricature, social commentaries or entertainment. An “image macro” is a term that describes “captioned images that typically consists of a picture and a witty message or catchphrase, used on discussion forums and image boards to convey feelings and reactions,”⁴ and “photo insertions/edits” describe the insertions/edits that involve the manipulations and alterations of photo images for additional effects.⁵ In accordance with Wang and Wen (2015: 355), the success of these kinds of memes lies in the combination of an image and a witty, catchy, or sarcastic sentence, and then “goes viral” on the Internet, circulating from friends to friends, colleagues to colleagues, and families to families. In this sense therefore, the success of mutation and replication includes the visual

2. Nairaland.com has been credited as being the Nigerian website most visited by Nigerians. It ranks 9th for websites most viewed in Nigeria—the home country of 78.9% of its subscribers—where the majority of its estimated 55 million Internet users live. Approximately 30% of the total population of Nigerians have visited Nairaland. <<https://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/nairaland.com>>.

3. Regarding Seun Osewa (Oluwaseun Temitope Osewa, b. 1982, Ota, Nigeria) and his journey with Nairaland, his history, successes, achievements, and challenges, see: <<http://howng.com/nairaland-owner-seun-osewa-full-biographylife-and-net-worth/>>, <<http://www.nairaland.com/3153103/what-dont-know-seun-osewa>>, <<http://www.nairaland.com/3151139/history-nairaland-seun>>.

4. Retrieved Dec. 20, 2017, from <<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/image-macros>>.

5. Retrieved Dec. 20, 2017, from <<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/sites/photoshop>>.

attractiveness of the combination of the images and inscriptions that make up these meme pictures. Internet memes are, however, generally described as creative media constructs and units of information that replicate on the Internet as hyper-links, videos, images or catchphrases (Castaño 2013: 96; Juza 2013: 1). Embedded within these meme pictures are usually ideologies that are representative of real societal events and experiences. Kuipers (2005: 75-76) refers to them as comments on societal events and Huntington (2013: 3) describes them as symbolic, persuasive texts that often rely on larger sociocultural contexts for the derivation(s) of their meaning. According to Kozinets (2010: 1), such meme usage has been made possible by a blend of the social worlds of the Internet and the physical space that cause computer technologies and its practices to become natural alternatives for engaging and depicting human and societal systems. This has consequently enabled the use of memes in sociopolitical negotiations within online discussions such as the engagements on Nairaland during Nigeria's 2015 electioneering.

FIG. 2. — A SCREEN-GRAB OF A NAIRALAND DISCUSSION
WITH INSERTED MEME PICTURE

<<http://www.nairaland.com/2003909/imagine-what-picture-cause-nigeria/1>>, retrieved on August 10, 2017.

According to Hristova (2014: 265), in the contemporary moment, issues of political representation are constantly formed and transformed by visual-cultural representations, which are exemplified by the participatory structure of meme imitation and mutation. Nigeria's 2015 presidential electioneering became a

popular topic of discussion on the politics thread of Nairaland, and an opportunity for Nairalanders (as Nairaland users/members are called) to engage in debate about the social, cultural and political issues that arose during the presidential electioneering. In addition to the regular textual/writing styles of discussion, media files were engaged prominently in these discussions. Some of these media files were meme pictures that particularly addressed the sociopolitical issues this paper explores. Such usage of meme pictures (for engaging sociopolitical issues) can be considered as an alternative means of sociopolitical engagement and communication (as opposed to physical protests or long textual write-ups), which aligns with Ligaga's (2012: 2) and Marek's (2014: 215) argument that the new world of the Internet offers the opportunity for its users to articulate, express and negotiate new structures for engaging social, cultural and political issues. During such engagements, contestations usually arise, just as with traditional protests or critical texts, in response to unsuitable sociopolitical narratives.

In the case of the 2015 presidential electioneering, the prevailing discourse was the presentation of GEJ/PDP and GMB/APC as the suitable candidates for the effecting of new/positive change within Nigeria's sociopolitical space. Tensions in the form of ethnic rivalry, economic instability, insecurity and human devaluation/dehumanization surrounded Nigeria's 2015 presidential electioneering. The masses and the nation at large were in need of salvation from this societal turbulence. It was therefore with a claim to restore serenity in the nation that politicians and political parties campaigned. GEJ/PDP and GMB/APC were, however, considered as the most powerful, serious and suitable to effect positive and new changes, and in support of this, electioneering discourses were propagated (Blanchard 2015: 2; Thurston 2015: 7). Such discourse further triggered counter discourses, which replicated, mimicked and criticized the campaign discourse and were, in turn, reproduced into meme pictures that were fused into Nairaland discussions.

This meme reproduction is the focus herein. The meme pictures are discussed in view of their processes of (re)production on Nairaland, the situations surrounding Nigeria's 2015 presidential electioneering, and the meanings intended by their reproduction. According to Wodak (2002: 12), such examination forms a critical account of discourse as it represents a description of both the processes and structures that give rise to the production of a text and of the ways in which individuals or groups create meanings in their interaction with texts.

Two sets of meme pictures are selected below as representations of the narratives in support of the suitability of GEJ/PDP and GMB/APC for the 2015 elections: Barack Obama-influenced meme pictures, presenting both candidates as competent contenders for the Nigerian presidential position.

Barack Obama was the 44th president, and the first African American president of the United States. The relevance of Barack Obama's endorsement of the GEJ/PDP and the GMB/APC is connected to Obama's influence and position as a seasoned orator and, clearly, given his powerful position and influence as the President of the United States, in terms of leadership in democratic governance (Tharoor 2016).

FIG. 3. — BARACK OBAMA-INFLUENCED MEMES

<<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/people/barack-obama>>, retrieved on December 20, 2017.

In these meme pictures (fig. 3.1⁶, 3.2⁷), President Obama endorses GEJ as the solution to Nigeria's problems for the 2015 presidential race, and in figures 3.3⁸ and 3.4⁹, GMB is endorsed as well. In these pictures, both contestants lay claim to the power of Obama, so as to prove that they respectively share equal access to the political power and influence that Obama exudes. Within the discussion in which these pictures were used, respective supporters of the APC/GMB team and the PDP/GEJ team contributed to their show of support of

6. Retrieved Sep. 26, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2003909/imagine-what-picture-cause-nigeria/1>>.
7. Retrieved Nov. 30, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2068866/no-certificates-buhari-must-arrested>>.
8. Retrieved Sep. 25, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2001782/reasons-why-gej-might-lose>>.
9. Retrieved Dec. 18, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2119726/broom-vacuum-cleaner/1>>.

their preferred candidates. Figures 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 are a combination of image macros and photo insertion/edits while the fourth picture (fig. 3.4) is a pure photo insertion/edit. In the first three meme pictures, different catchphrases have been manipulated unto the placard held by Obama in the same photograph, but in respective support of GEJ and GMB. In the fourth picture (fig. 3.4), the image of GMB is inserted as a show of solidarity and partnership with Obama's office. The importance of each alteration and catchphrase also lies in the importance and position of power controlled by Obama as the President of the United States and in any potential suitability/capability of both teams to enjoy (and to be indulged with) such Obama-power. It is equally, in a similar light, that the picture plate below of GEJ and GMB finds significance as another visual representation of a potential suitability/capability of both teams, as fighting heroes.

FIG. 4. — NIGERIA'S HEROES ARE FIGHTERS

Picture plate assembled by D.N. Dike, Dec. 24, 2017.

Figures 4.1¹⁰ and 4.2¹¹ show GMB and GEJ as powerful, armed-to-the-teeth, fighters. In figure 4.1, GEJ's face has been manipulated into the image of a gun-totting action anti-hero, a movie star, the composition much like a billboard poster with inscriptions in his favour affixed into the picture like advertising using critic's reviews to market the film. In figure 4.2, GMB's face has similarly been manipulated, but here into an image of a superhero warrior dressed in Nigerian colours and symbols, boasting a great protective shield. This plate thus attributes strength, bravery and the power to protect to the

10. Retrieved Dec, 17, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2033329/defeat-jonathan-in-conducts-credible>>.

11. Retrieved Dec. 10, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2091823/2015-why-buhari-may-defeat>>.

PDP/GEJ, APC/GMB teams. Within the discussions where these memes appear, GEJ is wielded as the “ultimate warrior” and GMB as “the agent for change.”

Contestations that arose to oppose the suitability of these politicians and parties were likewise reproduced into meme pictures engaged in Nairaland discussions. These meme pictures addressed several variations of the unsuitability of the PDP/GEJ and APC/GMB teams. In accordance with Hristova (2014: 265), these memes can be considered as moments of contestation where dominant narratives prevail over points of ideological conflict.

These meme pictures can also be considered as referring to four categories according to which levels of unsuitability for Nigerian politicking can be evaluated: terrorism, animosity, corruption and incompetence.

Terrorism

FIG. 5. — GEJ AND GMB AS PARTNERS OF BOKO HARAM

Picture plate assembled by D.N. Dike, Dec. 24, 2017.

Under this category of unsuitability, GEJ and GMB and their parties are condemned as benefactors of Boko Haram terrorism. The Boko Haram sect is a notorious terrorist group that has largely disturbed the peace of the nation through bombings and mass destruction, causing more than a millions to displace and/or flee Nigeria.¹² According to Falode (2016) and Olarenwaju

12. Founded in 2002, the jihadist organization allied with ISIL, based in northeastern Nigeria, has been responsible, since 2009, under Abukar Shekau’s lead, for the murder of tens of thousands, including the assassinations in Kano, suicide bombings in Abuja, the

(2015: 3-4), the effects of the activities of this group in Nigeria equally negatively affected Nigeria's external relations.

According to Okolo (2014: 3), the Boko Haram, which loosely translates to "Western education is sinful," is an insurgent group officially named Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-da'wa wal-Jihād (جماعة أهل السنة للدعوة والجهاد), translated as "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad," which has spread over the years in its attacks through the northern states down to Abuja, the nation's capital. Boko Haram's recognition and influence as a major security challenge/threat for Nigeria reached its height during Goodluck Jonathan's presidency (2011-2015). The 2011 elections bore the emergence of GEJ as President of Nigeria. This full emergence to assuming the presidency followed his role as interim or "Acting President" in the place of the late Musa Yar'adua (who had hailed from the northern part of Nigeria) and under whom GEJ was Vice President. The northern part of Nigeria expressed displeasure during this time that "their" tenure, led by the late Musa Yar'adua, was shortened, and taken over by a southerner. As mentioned by Okolo (*ibid.*: 4), as a result of this, and linked to a claim of the northern oligarchy's posturing that it will make Nigeria ungovernable for Jonathan, a narrative existed of Boko Haram as a tool utilized by the northern oligarchy against the presidency of Goodluck Jonathan for daring, as a southerner, to occupy the presidency when it was the turn of the north to do so. In this light, it became easy to accuse GMB (a northerner) of an affiliation with the terrorist group. Boko Haram's terrorism and impact however grew during the 2015 general elections, and GEJ and the PDP became equally accused of engineering insecurity in their favour, to delay the polls, and to keep the office for themselves (Blanchard 2015: 6-7). During the electioneering, therefore, to disprove and contest the suitability of GEJ and GMB, discourses on Nairaland arose affiliating both teams with the Boko Haram group.

In figure 5, in pictures 5.1 to 5.3¹³ the GMB/APC team's affiliation is highlighted, and in pictures 5.4 and 5.5,¹⁴ the GEJ/PDP team's affiliation is

kidnapping, of 276 schoolgirls in Chidock, see for example: <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17169935>>, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/nigeria/9030066/Terror-attacks-in-Kano-Nigeria-kill-at-least-162.html>>, <<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/190962-boko-haram-returns-to-abuja-bombs-15-to-death-in-kuje-nyanya-attacks.html>> (consulted on February 18, 2018).

13. Fig. 5.1: retrieved Sept. 26, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2008595/cool-picture-nigerias-coming-president/1>>. Fig. 5.2: retrieved Nov. 2, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2021264/dear-apc-abacha-buhari-stole/1>>. Fig. 5.3: retrieved Dec. 7, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2079358/boko-haram-backs-jonathan-president/1>>.
14. Fig. 5.4: retrieved Sept. 26, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2008595/cool-picture-nigerias-coming-president/1>>. Fig. 5.5: retrieved Dec. 4, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2067303/2015-buhari-fails-submit-academic/9>>.

shown. The memes are reproduced as a combination of image macros and photo insertions/edits with the faces/images of GMB and GEJ inserted into Boko Haram images, and by affixing “incriminating” textual inscriptions. The first meme picture (fig. 5.1) is reproduced as a campaign poster infused with the images of GMB and Abubakar Shekau (the acclaimed leader of the Boko Haram sect) as a team, with an ironical call to vote “for national security” and the threat of “your vote or your blood,” all of which are danger signs against any form of suitability of GMB. GMB’s face has been printed into a Boko Haram identity card in figure 5.2, which clearly shows his alleged affiliation with the sect. In the third picture (fig. 5.3), his face has been manipulated into the image of a Boko Haram soldier and his name changed to “Bokohari” (short for Boko Haram + Buhari) to further buttress the point of a GMB affiliation with the terrorist group. GEJ’s face has also been manipulated into another image of a Boko Haram soldier in the fourth picture (fig. 5.4). The images of the soldiers in the third and fourth meme pictures (fig. 5.3, 5.4) are popular images on the Internet of the appearances of the sect’s members. In the fifth picture (fig. 5.5), GEJ, in a recreated conversation with Obama, is shown as accepting responsibility for the control/ownership of the Boko Haram sect. For the APC or PDP to be affiliated with the Boko Haram group implies that both parties should be discredited for engaging in collusion with Boko Haram. Both can be interpreted then as fomenters of insecurity and terrorism and, as such, the memes serve as a strategy of demeaning both political teams. In light of the politicians’ unsuitability, the first and fourth pictures (fig. 5.1, 5.4) serve as Nairalanders exemplary criticism of GMB’s and GEJ’s alleged affiliation with the Boko Haram. Nairalanders also seem to subject both politicians to the criticism in Fela Anikulapo Kuti’s (1938-1997) popular song, “Beasts of No Nation” (1989)¹⁵, referencing the lyrics “animal in human skin”:

Ironically, the same song was used by Fela to criticize and contest GMB’s governance during his time as Nigeria’s military head of state, which reinforces the importance of contesting the possibility of newness from a previous Nigerian leader.¹⁶ Recalling Fela, known for his criticisms of the inadequacies and inhumanity of the Nigerian military government, reinforces the meme composition of words and images contesting any possible newness or suitability of a militarized commando politician.

15. For the complete lyrics, see <<http://www.africappella.com/lyrics/Beast+of+no+Nation>>.

16. “Fela’s Political Views,” retrieved Dec. 21, 2017, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fela_Kuti>. Retrieved Feb. 20, 2018, from <<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2010/oct/31/fela-kuti-musical-neil-spencer>>, <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Fela-Kuti>>, <<http://www.nytimes.com/1986/11/07/arts/fela-anikulapo-kuti-nigeria-s-musical-activist.html>>.

Animosity and Apathy

Closely related to the representations—through meme pictures—of these politicians, as benefactors of terror and insecurity in the nation, are the representations of their hostility and indifference towards the affairs and concerns of the masses. The particular case considered here is the kidnapping of 276 school girls in Chibok, and the unbecoming political responses to the situation. According to Blanchard (2015: 8), Boko Haram attracted increased international attention in 2014 *via* its April abduction of more than two hundred school girls from Chibok, a town in Borno State, which sparked both a domestic and international outcry and the Twitter campaign #BringBackOurGirls. For not offering any effective means of intervention for the girls albeit having influence/power of the presidency to do so, the PDP/GEJ team was particularly accused of profiting from the sect’s attack. The APC/GMB team’s affiliation with the situation is still allegeded in connection to a northern politician (GMB) who is being supported by a terrorist group most active in the North. It is in this context that discourses in Nairaland’s meme pictures arose insinuating that both teams had something to gain from the disappearance of the school girls and largely profiting from the misfortune of Nigerians.

FIG. 6. — THE HOSTILITY OF GMB/APC AND GEG/PDP

Picture plate assembled by D.N. Dike, Dec. 24, 2017.

In figure 6.1,¹⁷ which is an image macro with relevant catchphrases affixed implying that GMB/APC profit from the girls' abduction, a conversation takes place between GMB and Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a highly influential APC politician). APC is accused of benefiting from a breach in national security. In figure 6.2,¹⁸ which is a combination of photo edit—GEJ's face/image is used to replace a random photo of a man being struck by a woman—and textual inscription, "Bring Back Our Girls" (reiterating the #BringBackOurGirls campaign), GEJ is held responsible for the disappearance of the girls. The missing girls, their misfortune and the apathy of politicians towards their disappearance can thus be considered as representative of the wider Nigerian society's misfortune in the hands of selfish/indifferent Nigerian politicians. Nigerian politicians have always been accused of animosity and apathy towards the affairs of the masses (Yakubu 2012: 39, 48; Idike 2014: 5-7). Within the discussion in which this second meme picture (fig. 6.2) was used, a Nairaland¹⁹ puts it this way: "the woes with Nigeria didn't start with Jonathan [GEJ], but [is an] accumulation of wasteful years of the northerners who have presided over the affairs of this country."²⁰ It is also due to such selfishness of previous Nigerian politicians that GEJ and GMB are accused as well as due to their own past histories, as both experienced the seat of presidency at different times. GEJ was a civilian president, from 2010 to 2015, and GMB was a military head of state from 1983 to 1985. As another Nairaland puts it,²¹ these politicians "continue to display nauseating indifference" to the plight of Nigerians. Selfishness leads to corruption, as viewed from within Nigeria's sociopolitical space, and deserves to be considered as the result of this apathy towards the concerns of the masses and a major theme of memes.

Corruption

In many memes, the GMB/APC and GEJ/PDP are shown as tainted and corrupt. They are particularly considered unfit for clean governance and lacking in integrity. The figure of the pig becomes then representative of the unpleasant

17. Retrieved Dec. 10, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2092065/abia-traditional-rulers-disown-monarch/1>>.

18. Retrieved Nov. 25, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2046036/dont-vote-pdp-unless-all>>.

19. BrokenTV's comment, retrieved Nov. 25, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2046036/dont-vote-pdp-unless-all>>.

20. BrokenTV, Nov. 25, 2015, <<http://www.nairaland.com/2046036/dont-vote-pdp-unless-all>>.

21. Edcure's comment, retrieved Dec. 2, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2070139/drivers-refuses-take-president-gejs/2>>.

politicking styles in Nigeria. As Ekanem (2012: 48-49) notes, the culture of impunity and other vices perpetuated at all levels of governance can be ascribed to Nigeria’s political class who pledge, on one hand, to uphold the law and, on the other hand, break the law with impunity. These meme pictures condemn the APC/GMB and PDP/GEJ teams as corrupt are reproduced on Nairaland discussions.

FIG. 7. — DEPICTIONS OF GMB/APC AND GEJ/PDP AS CORRUPT

Picture plate assembled by D. Dike, Dec. 24, 2017.

Within the discussion that figure 7.1²² was used, Nairalanders mention that both GEJ and GMB had, at different occasions, given their word not to run again for president after their previous tenure. This, in itself, made a case of the fact that both were going back on “their word” by their re-run for presidency and consequently represents a lack of consistency, which would be required of a leader with integrity. Within the discussion that figure 7.2²³ was used, both candidates are also accused of entertaining a selfish hidden agenda in running for presidency, of not being trustworthy, which again affirms for the Nairaland public the unsuitableness of both teams as agents of positive change or in terms of newness.

In figure 7.1, GMB’s face is affixed on the pig alongside the image caption, “a pig is a pig with or without a lipstick,” which is a variance on the popular

22. Retrieved Nov. 30, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2064608/north-must-produce-president-2015/1>>.
23. Retrieved Dec. 9, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2087338/pressure-probe-buhari-campaign-funding/2>>.

dictum that a pig will always return to a piggery when left to roam no matter how much it is embellished/decorated (with lipstick). It alleges that a new opportunity for GMB would not necessarily prove effective even if he embellishes himself to look more attractive. GEJ's famous "I had no shoes" quote from his 2011 campaign,²⁴ which once endeared him to the common and poor Nigerian, is also affixed on the "PDPig" in picture 2. It also becomes ironic that a phrase that once endeared Nigerians to a politician has become re-used in a repulsive manner. This shows that whatever trust once granted the politician, thanks to such a phrase, has been lost. A Nairaland²⁵ gives a possible reason for this: one who once had no shoes has now looted the nation's wealth for personal profits. It reeks of hypocrisy. According to another Nairaland,²⁶ his having no shoes before but having them now may symbolize GEJ's induction into the nitty-gritty of an impunity laden Nigerian politicking (just as his predecessors) and, as such, GEJ's "new shoes" represent having definitively abandoned "innocent" political ways. Such corruption consequently serves as a reason for the rejection of politicians as incompetent. The ways in which the GEJ/PDP and GMB/APC are condemned as incompetent is discussed under the next category of selected meme pictures.

Incompetence

Graphic representations of the candidates as blind men, as hustlers and playing like school children, presents the GMB/APC and GEJ/PDP teams as largely incapacitated for potentially new or effective governance. Incapacitated, conniving or juvenile, the politicians are highly devalued through these ridiculing images.

All the images in figure 6 are photo insertions/edits. Meme pictures (fig. 8.1-8.3)²⁷ are dedicated to the GMB/APC teams. In the first picture (fig. 8.1),

24. Press articles revealing GEJ's "I Had No Shoes" quote for his 2011 campaign and some reactions to it, retrieved Feb. 20, 2018, from <<https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2015/jan/18/president-nigeria-goodluck-jonathan-poor-boy-to-king-profile>>, <<http://www.thescoopng.com/2013/03/06/wait-a-minute-isnt-that-a-younger-gej-with-shoes/>>, <<http://newsrescue.com/thank-god-goodluck-jonathan-shoes-2015-eneh-john/#axzz57fY-TA6KZ>> and <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-12192152>>.

25. Subterfuge's comment, retrieved Nov. 25, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2046036/dont-vote-pdp-unless-all>>.

26. Bakila's comment, retrieved Dec. 2, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2070139/drivers-refuses-take-president-gejs/2>>.

27. Fig. 8.1, retrieved Nov. 13, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2048819/young-people-bring-glory-nigeria>>, Fig. 8.2, retrieved Nov. 26, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2056816/apc-live-rally-accepts-decamps/5>>. Fig. 8.3, retrieved Dec. 9, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2087399/even-goats-dont-want-buhari>>.

GMB’s face has been inserted into an image of a blind man teamed up with another blind man (Bola Tinubu, the influential APC politician), with the APC logo affixed on the clothing of the men, all to relegate both politicians to a powerless incapacitated (political) position. In the second picture (fig. 8.2), GMB is once again portrayed as a blind man, and this time, he is shown to lead a man with perfect vision (Yemi Osinbajo: GMB’s running mate). In this situation, APC is further ridiculed as GMB’s running mate who, by this meme, is considered a preferable candidate than GMB is “subjected” to follow GMB instead. This sub-narrative of “a preferred Osinbajo” lies in the fact that unlike GMB who is accused of having no formal university education, Osinbajo is a renowned lawyer and a Pentecostal pastor. Also, there is a third image that further ridicules and weakens the potential for APC effectiveness: Oby Ezekwesili, another renowned APC politician who is alleged to have competently served at different national and international levels and organizations, is equally rendered incapacitated on the floor. In figure 8.3, GMB’s campaign poster is shown as being eaten by goats, an indication of an included rejection of the politicians by animals, and a further insult on, and rejection of the APC team.

FIG. 8. — INCAPACITATING POTENTIAL GMB/APC AND GEJ/PDP LEADERSHIP

Plate assembled by D. Dike, Dec. 24, 2017.

Figures 8.4²⁸, 8.5²⁹ and 8.6³⁰ are meme pictures dedicated to the GEJ /PDP teams. Figures 8.4 and 8.5 ridicule GEJ and his running mate, Namadi Sambo. By depicting both men as hawkers in figure 8.4, a position that is considered to be on the low end of the economic scale, the PDP team is invariably stripped of economic value and power, hence, undignified. The team is again stripped of relevance in figure 8.5—they are depicted as “playing boys.” In many Nigerian cultural contexts, boys are sent out to play when men have important issues to discuss. Consequently, the PDP is counted as unworthy of the presidency. In figure 8.6, GEJ is depicted as stripped of political power, as goats are busy eating his campaign pictures. Just like GMB’s in figure 8.3, the campaign pictures have been converted to goat-meal, thus GEJ and GMB are, in essence, stripped of worth, fodder for farm animals. These pictures can be said to be representative of a retraction of the Nigerian masses’ votes-of-confidence from their politicians. As an emphasis, a Nairaland’s remark³¹: “to hell with all these stories... I don’t care if we get ruled by a squirrel as long as we see change for good,” equally symbolizes the fury of the Nigerian wearied by unfavourable politicking. Also, “an advice”³² is given by the Nairaland who reproduced the meme picture of a hawking GEJ, asking him to quit the chase for presidency and consider another career, “perhaps... street hawking.”

The prevailing political discourse to promote new, positive leadership by the two main parties and their candidates during the 2015 electioneering led to contesting narratives that were reproduced in the meme pictures replicated on the Nigerian Nairaland forum. These pictures also serve as symbolic and persuasive texts that are representative of Nigerian sociopolitical issues. Meme pictures on Nairaland that revealed the patterns through which Nigeria’s 2015 electioneering contestations were engaged, the values and expectations relevant to the electoral process and have been discussed as creative visual representatives of Nigerian societal issues and contestations. They especially speak to the diverse issues and imbalances that surrounded Nigeria’s 2015 presidential electioneering. The extent to which these images have effected possible changes in contemporary unfavorable Nigerian political spaces is

28. Retrieved Nov. 25, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2054962/stick-incumbent-president-re-elect-him/8>>.

29. Retrieved Dec. 2, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2070139/drivers-refuses-take-president-gejs/2>>.

30. Retrieved Nov. 27, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2059009/house-to-house-campaign-organization-dumps-jonathan/1>>.

31. Zheros’s comment, retrieved Nov. 25, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2054962/stick-incumbent-president-re-elect-him/8>>.

32. ItsMeAboki’s comment, retrieved Dec. 2, 2015, from <<http://www.nairaland.com/2070139/drivers-refuses-take-president-gejs/2>>.

yet to be known, but the potency of these meme pictures to contest, critique, and denounce unfavourable politicking, through this form of protest, the proliferation of sophisticated visual and verbal quipping with contextual humor and satire, can be said to have been achieved.

FIG. 9. — THE NAIRALAND FORUM IN 2018 WITH CLOSE TO 2 MILLION MEMBERS

April 2018 Homepage of Nairaland Forum, <<http://www.nairaland.com/>>.

Nairaland’s population also keeps growing³³ and its relevance as an ingenious Nigerian social media space for tracking the progress of societal situations also increases.³⁴

Independent Researcher, Lagos.

33. The April 23, 2018 registered member index of Nairaland.com is close to 2 million, <<http://www.nairaland.com/>>.

34. Further Nairaland discussions engaged (with meme usage) the results and winner (GMB/APC) of the 2015 elections, and Nairanders’ reaction to this; example, <<http://www.nairaland.com/2229975/final-result-2015-presidential-election>>, retrieved, Mar. 23, 2018.

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ABSTRACT

As part of opposing Nigerian politicians' impunity, animosity and incompetence, Internet meme pictures were utilized on the politics thread of Nairaland.com, a Nigerian online community forum for engaging Nigerian societal issues. During Nigeria's 2015 electioneering, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) and their respective candidates, Goodluck Jonathan (GEJ) and Muhammadu Buhari (GMB), contested for the office of president, both claiming to be suited to effect new and positive changes within Nigeria's sociopolitical space. This narrative was naturally propagated in Nairaland discussions and meme pictures. Contestatory meme pictures, however, arose amidst Nairaland discussions to oppose this narrative, mimic, and ridicule it, instead condemning the candidates as corrupt and incompetent politicians. Twenty-one meme pictures have been selected through a non-participant observation of twenty discussions on the politics thread of Nairaland, during the electioneering period (the official presidential campaign dates) between October 2014 and January 2015. These are discussed using a critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework to examine the processes through which contesting issues of power are embedded within them. In showing how pictures become visual representatives (pictorial representations) of the different levels of political animosity and ineptitude exuded by Nigerian politicians, this paper thus reveals the protest value of Nairaland meme pictures in resisting the sociopolitical imbalances that characterize Nigeria's electioneering.

Keywords: Nigeria, Nairaland, meme pictures, Nigerian electioneering, presidential race, 2015.

RÉSUMÉ

Contre les discours politiques à travers des images « mèmes » sur Nairaland. — Les images mèmes ont servi à contester l'impunité, l'animosité et l'incompétence des hommes politiques nigériens. Cet article analyse ces images « mèmes » (*memes*) utilisées sur le fil « politique » du forum Nairaland.com, une communauté en ligne engagée sur les questions sociales au Nigéria. Pendant les élections de 2015, le People's Democratic Party (PDP) et le All Progressives Congress (APC) ainsi que leurs candidats respectifs, Goodluck Jonathan (GEJ) et Muhammadu Buhari (GMB), se débattaient pour la présidence, tous deux prétendant être le plus apte à effectuer des changements positifs dans l'espace sociopolitique. Ce discours a été repris dans des discussions sur Nairaland et par le biais d'images mèmes. Ces dernières ont mimé, ridiculisé, et accusé les deux candidats de corruption et d'incompétence. Vingt-et-une images mèmes ont été sélectionnées, par l'observation (non participante) de vingt discussions sur le fil politique de Nairaland, pendant la période de la campagne électorale entre octobre 2014 et janvier 2015. Ces images sont étudiées selon le cadre de l'analyse du discours critique (*Critical Discourse Analysis, CDA*) afin d'examiner les processus de contestation du pouvoir inscrits dans ces images. En démontrant comment ces images mèmes deviennent les représentants visuels (et graphiques) des différents niveaux d'animosité politique et de l'inaptitude des hommes politiques nigériens, cet article révèle la valeur de contestation des images mèmes sur Nairaland qui résiste aux iniquités sociopolitiques ayant caractérisé la campagne présidentielle au Nigéria.

Mots-clés : Nigéria, Nairaland, campagne électorale nigérienne, campagne présidentielle, images mèmes, 2015.