



Pragmeme of Political Humor in Selected Nigerian Political

Cartoons

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Abstract

Political humor is a recurring element in print media and other genres, touching various areas of Nigerian political discourse. In this study, the political humor deployed in responding to some prominent political events in 2016 is examined through content analysis. It examines the pragmeme of humor in selected 2016 political events that are re-mediated in some political cartoons. The selected political issues are Nigeria's 56th Independence Anniversary, the crusade against corruption, which Muhammadu Buhari commenced when he became the President of Nigeria, and the alleged 2016 budget padding scandal which rocked the House of Representatives. The frameworks for the study comprise Flanson and Barrett's Encryption Theory of Humor and Mey's Pragmeme Theory. Six political cartoons which were subjected to discourse interpretations were culled from Aprozotoons Media; an internet-based Nigeria foremost cartoon journal with a large collection of relevant cartoons resource for print and electronic media. Results reveal that audiences who are well informed on these political activities are able to decrypt the cartoons because they share the same key (political knowledge) with the cartoonist. Thus, honest laughter is produced, and on the other hand, the cartoons' essential features are subordinated to the pragmeme of humor of otiose campaign promises and the Nigerian despairing episode at 56; self-centered leadership, lawmakers who are lawbreakers and that the worst form of corruption is selective justice. Hence, these findings enhance public perception of the country's political actors and underscore the need for rethinking the receptivity in political acts, promises, and decisions.

Keywords: *Encryption theory, Political cartoon, Political humor, Pragmeme.*

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Introduction

Humor, a natural phenomenon in human society, is as old as the use of language for human communications. In its different forms of verbal and non-verbal expressions, humor has the potential to consciously or unconsciously evoke laughter in the audience. Different spheres of human activities have generated specific and general humor to address issues of personal and general concerns. In contemporary society, one of the general concerns of individuals is how their society is governed by administrators, who are either elected or appointed. Often, modern democracy has encouraged a change of power through elections and as a result, politicians are released to engage in the political game of election or re-election. These politicians deploy verbal and non-verbal language resources to attract public attention and disparage their opponents. In their language resources, politicians use humor with specific reference to Nigerian experience.

As against the background of the use of humor by Nigerian politicians, Nigerian populace especially the media practitioners have resorted to the use of humor (in this context, political humor) to satirize the misdemeanor of political leaders in the political landscape of the country. This is common in the print and online media under the name political cartoons. Nearly all Nigerian Newspapers such as *The Punch*, *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian* and *The Nation* have sections for political cartoons on topical issues in the country. Political cartoons contain “both visual and textual message on political events presented through cultural symbols” (Gocek, 1998).

The epicenter of this paper, therefore, is on political humor as one potent tool that reflects on and conveys paradigms of shared Nigerian political events in some selected Nigerian political cartoons. In this context, political humor is taken as an honest signal of shared common knowledge, attitudes, and preferences (Flamson & Barret, 2008). This position is relatively in tandem with a pragmatic theory, especially the theory of pragmeme, which situates speech acts (political humor being one) in the appropriate sociocultural context. Based on this background, this paper examines the pragmeme of political humor – linguistic and non-linguistic interpretive communicative resource being instantiated in Nigerian political cartoons, to targeting audience perception and stimulate political volte-face. With this intent, the paper claims that much of the verbal and non-verbal (pictorial) acts associated with political humor are dependent on the exigencies of rethinking the sensibleness of political acts, promises and decisions.

Literature Review

Political Cartoon and Political humor

Cartoon and humor are media reserves that have immemorially maintained an undeniable presence and influence in the communication of the age-long social institution known as politics. Based on this communicative role played by cartoon and humor, the two have preserved symbiotic relationships with politics; thus they are known as political cartoons and political humor in extant literature. Political cartoons have been avowed to be a powerful communicative weapon to satirize government without incurring the wrath of the affected persons and

institutions. Political humor is capable of engendering distractions and instilling jokes. The significance of political humor also lies in the fact that they are able to give socio-political commentaries on vital areas of reality. In the words of Edwards and Winkler (1987:306), political cartoons are “graphic presentation typically designed in one-panel, non-continuing format to make an independent statement or observation on political events or social policy”. Such a statement or observation may often serve to undermine, unsettle and oppose excesses of power consumption and authority, and as such they may be viewed as ‘weapons of the weak’, providing expressions of resistance and solidarity in opposition to political leaders and elites (Hammett 2012). Little wonder that Brown (2012:1) asserts that “from the printing press to the internet, political cartoons and imagery have proven to be invaluable tools of resistance while also posing serious threats to the governments they target”. However, with these critical assignments rendered by cartoons, its role is not accredited and considered significant because of the poor cognition of some of the audience. Through its channel (print media), political cartoons are seen as elitist weapons because of the selectivity of a literate audience that can understand the message. Thus, they tend to be an overlooked means of political discourse. Nonetheless, they are rhetorical texts that assist not only in interpreting and framing political discourse but offering symbolic constructions of political and national identities (Edwards and McDonald 2010), and consequently offer readers comprehension of politicians/public figures in the political scenes.

Political humor, in its succinct term, is any humorous text that not only makes reference to politics but achieves the goal of politics by dealing with political issues, people, processes, events, or institutions. It is known to be a communicative resource for spotting, highlighting, and attacking incongruities originating in political discourse and action (Tsakona & Popa 2011, Chun 2004, and Warner 2007). These incongruities, as a matter of fact, are those political shortcomings that constitute a deviation from political norms, and consequently, in view of this nonconformity, become undoubtedly fielding items for media. Political humor informs its audience about this political reality and points out that this is in fact an incongruous reality (Tsakona & Popa 2011). It commonly evolves in the form of jokes or satirical verbal and non-verbal genres that accompany political commentary, comic sketches aiming to ridicule the blunders of politicians ruling the country: their decisions, behavior or attitudes (Poprawa, n.d.); which could be in the forms of incompetence, recklessness, corruption, among others.

Political humor is one of the tasks of the political cartoon, and it is prevalent in this media genre (political cartoon) because of its communicative potential without incurring the wrath of the affected persons and institutions. Although it may appear in political cartoons as superficial, there is actually more to its triviality than meets the eyes. For every signifying political discourse, cartoonists are able to extract vital news items, and in turn, replicate with pictorial humorous edges in order to appeal to their readership. Consequently, by distilling political arguments and criticism into clear, easily digestible (and at times

grossly caricatured) statements, they have oiled our political debate and helped shape public opinion (Greste, 2015). In like manner, they are able to engage their audience in politics and in the reasonableness of political acts and decisions (Tsakona & Popa 2011). This audience-involvement has been affirmed in Greste's (2015: 1) when he signals that "we all love a good political cartoon. Whether we agree with the underlying sentiment or not, the biting wit and the sharp insight of a well-crafted caricature and its punch line are always deeply satisfying."

Humor, in politics, could be deployed by a cartoonist in three major ways, namely irony, satire, and sarcasm. In other words, political humor could be characteristically ironic, satirical, or sarcastic in its functions. If it is ironical, it portends that the literal meaning of what is presented is the opposite of what is intended, and should it be satirical, it exposes and denounces vices, follies, abuses, and casts judgment by scorning and ridiculing; through sarcasm, it praises but such acclaims are invectives.

A number of scholarly considerations have been directed to political humor. These research interests could be attributed to the dominance of hybrid forms of political reports over the years. For instance, Harris (2009) and Dynel (2011) investigate humor in the American presidential race of 2008 and Polish pre-election debates of 2007 respectively. Mueller (2011), Archakis and Tsakona (2011), and Saftoiu and Popescu (2014) examine humor in parliamentary proceedings. Mueller probes into humor in the German Bundestag (German House of Representatives); with focus on amusement and laughing parliamentary situations,

Archakis and Tsakona (2011) consider humor in Greek parliamentary debates while Saftoiu and Popescu (2014) attempt the construction and consolidation of the political brand, 'The Tribune-Jester', in relation to the use of ethnic humor in the form of joking in Romania parliamentary discourse made by Corneliu Vadim Tudor. In the study of political humor in the Nigerian political discourse, Taiwo (2007) makes an inquiry into how the Nigerian writers creatively and manipulatively deploy morphological and lexico-semantic nuances in ridiculing politicians and men of the Nigerian Police Force. In the same vein, Abioye (2009) investigates satirical style as a source of literary comment in selected Nigerian newspapers. The work observes a general destitute in the knowledge of satire as a stylistic device, how it could be deployed effectively and, that writers find it safer to use an indirect method of criticizing because of repression fears. On the internet, Adegaju and Oyeboode (2015) engage in the patterns of humor evidenced in the use of internet memes in the online campaign of the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria. The study reveals that memes serve subversive purposes of detraction from the electoral value of the targets. On the other hand, Ogbo and Nuhu (2016) also explore satire as a form of imagery to depict some political issues in some cartoons contained in some Nigerian national dailies.

These aforementioned scholarly works are brilliant efforts on political humor. However, it should be affirmed here that sufficient scholarly attention has not been given to the political humor deployed in responding to some prominent political events in Nigeria in the year 2016. This current endeavor,

therefore, attempts to examine the pragmeme of political humor in recent political events within the Nigerian political climate in selected political cartoons. These are political happenings such as Nigeria's 56th Independence Anniversary (in 2016), the crusade against corruption which Muhammadu Buhari commenced when he became the President of Nigeria, and the alleged 2016 budget padding scandal which rocked the House of Representatives.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical base of this article is eclectic, amalgamating insights from Flamson and Barrett's Encryption Theory of Humor and Mey's Pragmeme Theory. The two are, therefore, briefly discussed in sequence; together with how they stand to adequately interpret the selected political cartoons for this paper.

The heart of Flamson and Barrett's theory of encryption-decryption stands in the submission that intentionally produced humor honestly signals the fact that speaker and audience share information, enabling the assessment of relative similarity and social assortment for compatibility over time (Flamson and Bryant 2013). The impression given by this humor theory is that, essentially, humorous productions come with layers of inference of a speaker's meaning, a majority of which relies on access to implied information on the part of the conveyer of humor and the audience. The encryption model, thus, emanates from the notion that humor is an encoded form of the communicative act, a message-based mechanism, whose inherent meaning could only be decrypted if its target audience has possession of a "key", that is, the common knowledge, attitudes and preferences required to derive the implied messages contained in the piece. The degree to

which the encrypted messages seem non-random to key-holders strengthens the 'manifestness' of the speaker's possession of the key (Flamson and Bryant 2013). This encrypted aspect of humor, in the words of Flamson and Barret (2008:262), "explains both a pervasive proximate aspect of humor (the non-random fit between the explicit information in-jokes and the implicit background knowledge they refer to) and its ultimate function as a social assortment device", that is, its potency at engendering affiliation with compatible local peers.

Within the encryption theory, humor is taken to have a pragmatic thrust considering the fact that it is capable of indexing a mammoth of background information. Accordingly, Flamson and Barrett (2013) argue that encryption/humor is a special case of inferential communication that can be proximately described through relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). They propose that humor:

...is a special encrypted form of ostensive behavior that relies on principles of relevance to produce certain cognitive effects, but in such a way that some effects will only be made manifest to those who have a sufficiently similar cognitive environment to derive that implicit content. Audience members that do not share the cognitive environment with the speaker will derive more mundane inferences of speaker meaning, unaware of the encrypted information that has been conveyed. (Flamson & Barrett, 2013:57)

The encryption and decryption process of humor is a cognitive effect that is considered a special form of relevance. A cognitive effect is obviously an adjustment in an individual's

representation of the world. When the cognitive effect is positive, then it is worth having. Other things being equal, the more positive cognitive effects a produced humor gives rise to, the more relevant it is. However, the more processing efforts involved in deriving cognitive effects from such given humor, the less relevant it is. A humorous text is especially relevant to any audience by virtue of its modest contextual effects on their environment and also relevant to that subset of an audience whose cognitive environments contain the key (Flamson & Bryant, 2013).

Plainly, the relevance theory has accorded the encryption theory comprehensive and detailing notions about the mechanisms of humor as an encrypted phenomenon whose funniness is not determined by its superficial content, but a relationship of its external content and its implied meaning understood by both its speaker and its audience and thereby typifying humor as an oblique, subjective, and social assorting communicative act. Nevertheless, this paper considers the input of relevance theory as limited taking into consideration that it conceives humor as a sensation bound up to the principle that human cognition is built towards maximization of relevance, and that the motivation of humor (either verbal or non-verbal) is based on a speaker's intention, that is, the understanding by the speaker of what will be effective in a particular cognitively-oriented context, and that the interpretation of humor is predicated on a speaker's utterance meaning as determined by the intention within particular cognitively-oriented context. Consequently, as an enhancement to all these, this paper has characterized humor

as a pragmeme. Here, this idea of pragmeme is contingent on the notion of pragmeme as submitted by Mey (2001), as situationally bound speech. It also transects with Carpone's (2005) view of pragmeme as a situated speech act, which synergizes the rules of language and that of the society in determining meaning. A meaning intended as a socially recognized object, sensitive to social expectations about the situation in which it is to be interpreted. As situated speech act, pragmeme undergoes transformations having been acted upon by the forces of regimented situation, (in the arguments of Mey, 2010:2883, "the place where the linguistic interactants meet, not as disembodied 'talking heads', but as agents on the societal scene, bringing along their entire baggage of world knowledge: tacit and explicit presuppositions, expectations, and prejudices, as well as prior linguistic experiences") that reshapes the original illocutionary value of a speech act by adding contextual layers of meaning, or even may change the illocutionary value of the speech act (Carpone, 2005).

Political humor, either verbal or non-verbal, is encrypted, but they are pragmeme. When they are embedded, not only in a cognitively-oriented context but in the entire situation which comprises the context of use; rules that transform what is being communicated into what it is meant in adherence to social constraints and lastly, the cotext, they fulfill social functions (Carpone, 2010) rather than just implicating speaker meaning. Therefore, this paper hypothesizes that political cartoonists make use of encrypted political humor to pass across socio-political

functions, where they both share social-political affordances with their audience.

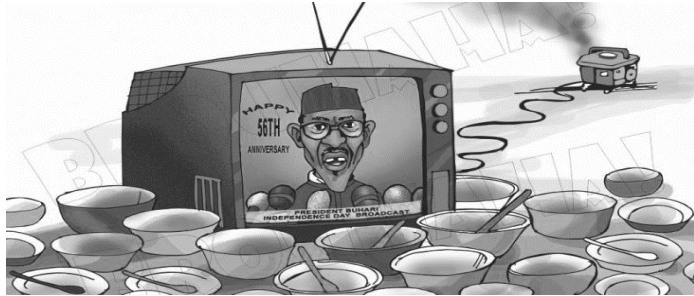
Methodology

The materials used for this paper comprise six (6) political cartoons derived from Apropokotoons Media. This cartoon network was selected because it domiciles in Nigeria. In addition, it is well-informed of political events in the country, and besides, it is Nigeria's foremost cartoon journal with a large collection of relevant cartoons resource for print and electronic media. The political cartoons were non-randomly selected in view of their relevant political humorous pictorial rendition. They were selected for insightful exemplifications of Nigeria's 56th Independence Anniversary, the crusade against the corruption of Muhammadu Buhari at the inception of his administration, and the alleged 2016 budget padding scandal which rocked the Nigerian House of Representatives. Accordingly, political humor (verbal and non-verbal) in these collections were critiqued with the theoretical apparatus of encryption and pragmeme.

Results and Discussion

A picture merits a thousand words, but in Nigeria, it worths more taking into account the wedges of the political situation in the country. This section of the paper examines some of these political circumstances as they are echoed with pragmemic political humorous embellishments in some selected cartoons so as to ascertain how such humor is instantiated to targeting audience perception.

Cartoon 1A: 56th Independence Day Broadcast



October 1, every year, commemorates the freedom from British colonialism which Nigeria attained in 1960. That year, the hovering British Union Jack was lowered, and the green-white-green flag was raised to Nigeria's sovereignty. Thus, the date, October 1, has indelibly remained memorable in the annals of Nigeria, and every year on that date, there are reflections on issues that hinge on the economic, social, religious, and political growth of the country.

This reflection-exercise essentially starts from the President, who gives an inventory of issues from the mandatory October 1 broadcast.

On the occasion of Nigeria's 56th Independence Anniversary celebration, the man at the helms of affairs, President Muhammadu Buhari (PMB), expresses himself in a nationwide broadcast, thus:

"I know that uppermost in your minds today is the economic crisis. The recession for many individuals and families is real. For some, it means not being able to pay school fees, for others it's not being able to afford the high cost of food (rice and millet) or the high cost of local and international travel, and for

many of our young people the recession means joblessness, sometimes after graduation from university or polytechnic. (TELL, October 1, 2016)“

Prior to this broadcast, Buhari had made convincing assurances of a better Nigeria through the Change mantra on which he had campaigned and solicited votes for his presidential bid the previous year. Hence, upon his assumption of office on May 29, 2015, there were high expectations as most Nigerians looked forward to the new government, which would wave a magic wand and make all challenges vanish. However, with a year and some months of existence of Buhari administration, events did not actually unfold as anticipated even as the country celebrated her 56th Independence Anniversary. Thus, the cartoon, captioned in this paper as 56th Independence Day Broadcast is a response to the state of Nigeria at 56.

The cartoon captures a despondent Nigeria at 56. The drawing presents an old-fashioned television powered by a mini-generating set, named I pass my neighbor in the Nigerian context. Showing on the television is a caricatured Muhammadu Buhari, giving a live broadcast on the 56 Independence Anniversary of Nigeria. What is significant in the cartoon is the cartoonist's striking use of symbols. A close examination of the cartoon reveals an ambiance of poverty and stagnancy. The old-fashioned television is symbolic of Nigeria, a country stuck in the past; a crippled giant, characterized by a lack of advanced, developed or progressive economy. As economic experts have observed, Nigeria has been experiencing economic turbulence since late 2014, and in 2016, Nigeria's economic performance deteriorated

as it entered a recession. This is a state engendered by a plunge in crude oil prices, a decline in oil production, and a reduction in non-oil exports, all of which contributed to the acute scarcity of foreign exchange (KPMG, 2017). A similar symbol, in the cartoon, which gives Nigeria away as a weak country are the empty plates with spoons, which help in portraying poverty in its highest degree. The unfilled plates show that despite PMB'S promises, hunger is ravaging the country. Apart from the perennial food insecurity, brought about by the vagaries of climate change, wrong economic policies of agriculture and insecurity in the North East among others, hike in food prices due to the 2016 recession gives credence to this unpalatable situation. This serves to reinforce the position of the United Nations, the African Development Bank, and the British Prime Minister, Theresa May that Nigeria is the global poverty capital. The destitution of Nigeria and her people is also conspicuous in the I pass my neighbor (mini-generator), which is symbolic of a country that is still incapable of providing electricity for productive use.

The political cartoon under analysis, at this point, has inherently made use of symbolism as its persuasive humorous technique, and to further give a wholesome interpretation to the encrypted humorous message, the workings of pragmeme should be incorporated. Thus, in doing this, it is ascertained at this point that beyond the fact that the symbols in the cartoon represent the ugly circumstances of the nation at 56, the notion of symbolism in the cartoon speaks volume of the striking contrast between the odious state of the country and the commonly shared campaign

promises of PMB in 2014/2015. According to President Muhammadu Buhari:

“Our nation urgently needs fundamental political reform and improvement in governance more transparent and accountable (sic). If you nominate me in December 2014 and elect me in February 2015, my administration will make our economy one of the fastest-growing emerging economies in the world with real GDP growth averaging at least 10-12% annually.... Guarantee a minimum price for all cash crops and facilitate the storage of agricultural products to overcome seasonal shortages of selected food crops.... Generate, transmit, and distribute electricity on a 24/7 basis whilst simultaneously ensuring the development of sustainable/renewable energy, by 2019. (Vanguard, May 28, 2015)”

In spite of this, it was in 2016 that Nigeria’s Gross Domestic Product further contracted negatively in the fourth quarter. According to the country’s National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), “for the full year 2016, GDP contracted by 1.51 percent, indicating real GDP of N67,984.20 billion fo'r the year, the worst in more than 30 years” (Sun, March 1, 2017).”

This contraction spelt a difficult season for Nigerians, who were confronted with the high cost of food, inflation, shrunken foreign reserves, insubstantial currency, fuel shortages, and problematic electric power supply. In this regard, there is an indication that symbolism in the cartoon is a rallying point for the humor that is entrenched in the cartoon. It is quite humorously critical that President Buhari, despite his change rhetoric, could not make Nigerians feel any difference even with a year and some

months of his administration. At 56, the biting hardship in Nigeria is a far cry from the president's appealing campaign promises. Symbolism, in the cartoon, is subordinated to the pragmeme of political humor, which appeals to the audience as regards the incommensurability in Buhari's slowly otiose campaign promises and the Nigeria despairing episode at 56.

The next cartoon titled, Happy 56TH Birthday/Anniversary, is in the same category with cartoon 1a above as it is also targeted at the 2016 Independence Anniversary.

Cartoon 1B: Happy 56TH Birthday/Anniversary



Cartoon 1b, like 1a, encrypts the hopeless state of Nigeria at 56 with the aid of symbolism, irony and labeling. Through the label, NIGERIA, at the nethermost part of the bunk, the entire hospital-ward pictorial representation symbolizes Nigeria. It does not only indicate that the recession is a prominent ward in Nigeria, but it also suggests the ubiquity of recession in Nigeria in 2016. As signaled above, in 2016, Nigeria was being plagued by economic recession which affected lives and livelihood of her citizens, especially, the middle and lower class across the country, and this in turn translated into severe hunger, ill-health (which could not be reversed due to outright lack of resources) and death.

Typical of this poverty-stricken situation is the malnourished patient on the bed, who is symbolic of ordinary Nigerians who were the ones that were actually battered by the biting recession. From the metaphorical label, TRULY, RECESSION IS A WARD.. CORRUPTION VICTIMS WARD, a recession is foregrounded to have been accommodated and had also taken its toll on certain people in Nigeria; particularly people who directly suffered the root cause of recession – which is corruption. This discourse is validated in the words of Magu, Chairman, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), (quoted in *ThisDay*, 2017), who submits that “corruption is virtually the sole reason for the country’s current economic slump.... I maintain that the economic recession is caused by corruption. About 90 percent of the cause of recession is corruption...” Magu is of the view that unscrupulous people stole state funds, which have been kept where the funds cannot be reached. The focal point is that it is the people, especially, public officials, who have access to public funds that divert it, and once this is successfully carried out, it affects the populace who should have benefitted. For instance, in 2016, Diezani Alison Madueke, Nigeria’s former Minister of Petroleum was alleged to have looted \$20b, Patrick Akpobolokemi, who was at a period the boss of Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) was as well suspected to have looted ₦12b (see *Pulse.ng*, December 12, 2016). Indeed, this form of personal aggrandizement is at the detriment of the populace, who could have benefitted from it. Oby Ezekwesili (cited in *Africanews*, 22 November 2018) sums up this scenario when she states that

“corruption is a tax on the poor”. What is more to the situation being described by the cartoon is the use of irony. The beautiful and colorful card labels – Happy 56th Birthday/Happy 56th Anniversary and the red symbolic ribbon are ironical. They emphasize years of cheeriness, happiness, health, and prosperity; which should have been the state of Nigeria considering the years of independence amidst the atmosphere of gloom, depression, and economic despondency.

With the aid of irony, label, and symbol, this cartoon is advertently encrypted with humorous intent, of which it could be avowed that readers or viewers were able to decrypt by virtue of shared background knowledge. This is the humor that is affirmed to have evolved as a means of honestly signaling compatibility within local groups (in this case, the cartoonists and mostly Nigerian readers) by relying on the detection of encrypted information, their cognition of which is then signaled via honest laughter (Flamson & Bryant, 2013). However, besides the honest laughter, there is the certainty that the readership barely understood the hidden message, hence the need to resort to the framework of pragmeme.

The Independence Day of a country, like birthdays, is a revered day that must be ever so great and perfect. Such a day, among other features, expresses victorious emancipation from oppression and all forms of subjugation. Nigeria celebrated her 56-independence anniversary in 2016, but not without internal teething challenges such as the economic recession. In view of this situation, the symbolism, labels, and irony deployed in the present cartoon are used to assemble the force of the humor

entrenched in it. The extremely sick fellow in the cartoon, who is symbolic of Nigeria, Nigerians, and their aggravated state of poverty during the recession, wittily encapsulates narrow-minded heraldry of the Nigerian government on economic matters. Successive governments relied on oil because it accounts for more than 90 percent of foreign income, and failed to truly diversify the Nigerian economy due to selfish interests. Therefore, in 2015 when oil prices fell significantly, the naira suffered serious devaluation. Worse still, President Buhari could not prevent the recession that ensued after the collapse in oil prices due to a lack of clues on economic transformation strategies. Next to the symbolism is the irony of the colorful greeting cards and red ribbon. These do not express any form of worthy celebration at 56; instead, they humorously depict the celebration of poverty, hopelessness, confusion, and lethargy engendered by the economic recession. At 56, Nigeria celebrated non-payment of monthly salaries, industrial actions, and worsening health care facilities. The labels, in particular, TRULY, RECESSION IS A WARD.. CORRUPTION VICTIMS WARD is a form of lampoon on Nigeria leaders, whose selfish interests and actions have incapacitated the Nigerian economy and ordinary citizens. Thus, it could be established that the symbolism, irony, and labels in the cartoon are subordinated to the pragmeme of humor, which impels rudderless, corrupt, and self-centered leadership that is unveiled in the perception of Nigerians. The next cartoon captures the anti-corruption crusade.

Cartoon 2A: The broom and its selective political victims



A major victory convener that made Buhari to hit a home run in the 2015 presidential election was his anti-corruption profile, which stems from antecedent as a former military ruler, and the series of campaign promises he vouched before the election. One of these promises was the pledge to combat corruption, which has been institutionalized in the Nigerian system. In his words:

“If you nominate me in December 2014 and elect me in February 2015, my administration will prevent the abuse and misuse of Executive, Legislative and public offices, through greater accountability, transparency, strict, and implementable anti-corruption laws, through strengthening and sanitizing the EFCC and ICPC as independent entities... (Vanguard, May 28, 2015)”

Upon his election, and swearing-in as President of Nigeria on May 29, 2015, Buhari, did not only prevent the abuse of public offices by changing the leaderships of key anti-

corruption agencies in Nigeria, he also commenced waging war on corrupt politicians and government officials who, mostly, functioned in the immediate administration. For instance, at the inception, Buhari's anti-corruption crusade unearthed how the security funds, which were approved by the previous government for the purchase of arms through the office of the former National Security Adviser, Colonel Sambo Dasuki (Rtd) were diverted into private pockets. In the list was the \$9.1 billion pilferings in terms of fund and asset that was revealed with the restructuring of the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), and recently, the Chief Justice of the country's Supreme Court, and several other politicians and government officials were made to undergo trials on several financial improprieties.

As impressive as Buhari's anti-graft campaign is, it has been flawed by the perception that it is selective, insincere, and vindictive. Precisely, opinions and political interpretations and feedbacks have it that the war against corruption by the administration of Buhari is meant to witch-hunt members of the opposition party, People's Democratic Party (PDP). It is, therefore, this mixed reaction towards the anti-corruption crusade that informs cartoon 2a titled *The broom and its selective political victims*.

Cartoon 2a encrypts PMB's activities within the anti-corruption crusade with the aid of symbolism, caricature, and labeling, and by virtue of mutual knowledge, somewhat decryption of the message of the cartoon is probable. However, to fully engage in the comprehension of the implication of the cartoon, insight from pragmeme is crucial. From the cartoon, the

two twin apartments symbolize the two sovereign political parties in Nigeria: the opposition party, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and the ruling party, All Progressive Congress (APC). What foregrounds this symbol further are the umbrella, in green-white-red colors, hung on the top of the first apartment; which is symbolic of PDP, and the broom, suspended on the top of the second apartment signifying APC. Conspicuously next to this is the caricature of President Buhari through the exaggeration of distinctive facial features. The costumes: starting from the bandana, the single-barrelled gun, the revolver, hanging in his side-waist and the seemingly uniform cum native clothing symbolize battle, and at the same time, portray the president as a man entirely engaged in warfare. To cap it all, the flame emission from the single-barrelled gun lying on his shoulder is symbolic of an ongoing war against some set of people. And who are this set of people? They are those in the first apartment – the PDP members. The shattered door signifies that the dwellers are not at peace. This is evident in the lifeless body being dragged away by President Buhari.

This notion of selective anti-corruption battle is validated in the words of Onueze Okocha, a top lawyer and Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN). According to him:

“It is very obvious. So far, those that have been accused, arrested, and arraigned for corruption-related offenses are members of the PDP. We have not lost sight of the fact that many of the party’s members defected to the APC. The former PDP members have been accused of wrongdoing, but they are

untouched. I think the war is lopsided and waged with an altruistic motive (The Nation, July 14, 2016). “

However, this submission was invalidated by Femi Adesina, Special Assistant to the President on Media and Publicity, when he states:

“Why won’t the president be selective, do you expect to just enter the street and begin to arrest everybody because he’s fighting corruption? Of course no. you must have to select only those who are corrupt and as a matter of fact, not every Nigerian is corrupt (Daily Post, August 20, 2018).”

Indeed, not every Nigerian is corrupt but Buhari, through the anti-corruption agencies, has to select only those who are corrupt. The fact that the second apartment which houses APC members remains un-attacked by the rampaging Buhari indicates that they are not culpable of corrupt offenses. Nevertheless, labeling: ...AND WHEN HE SAW THE BROOM, HE PASSED OVER the US reinforces and contextualizes the cartoon’s non-verbal features. The labeling, apart from being an allusion to a verse in the Holy Bible, Exodus, chapter 12, verse 13, “...and when I see the blood, I will pass over you...”, has been distorted to accommodate the phenomenon of Buhari’s selective anti-corruption judgment. Thus, it reinforces and contextualizes the fact that members of APC in the undamaged apartment are undeniably corrupt, but they have been redeemed from the wrath of the law and the anti-corruption weaponry of the president by virtue of being APC members. The broom, like the biblical blood, sets them free legally from sentence and condemnation, which would have come upon them as a result of their corrupt profiles.

Among those assumed to have been set free is the former governor of Rivers State, Rotimi Amaechi, who became a governor as a PDP member but later crossed the carpet to APC. Rotimi Amaechi is alleged to have expended \$140 million on Buhari's campaign and stole €500 million (TheTrent, 2016). In this list is also Umar Ganduje, the governor of Kano State, who is alleged to have been seen in a scandalous video collecting huge American dollars taken to be bribe settlement from a public works contractor.

Cartoon 2a is indeed impacted with honest laughter because the cartoonist and his audience share the same political background and knowledge. However, there is more to the cartoon than the mere common amusement. Further interpretation of the cartoon is aided through insights from the workings of pragmeme.

Pragmeme, in this case, stretches the end products of the symbolism, caricature, and labeling used in cartoon 2a beyond the various readings accrued to them in the immediate paragraphs. As a matter of fact, the symbols, caricature and labeling that are deployed in the cartoon are forces for the message of humor in the cartoon. There are glaring absurdities in Buhari's anti-graft war since the war has several times been punctured as being selective and not addressing the whole gamut of corruption blindly. The symbols, the caricature (showcasing Buhari in the duty-post of selectively fighting corruption) and the labeling (revealing that APC members are consecrated to corruption) scorn the anti-corruption crusade, and foreground the imbalance in the crusade. This asymmetrical face-off against corrupt Nigerians could be

succinctly observed in the looters' list published from the Federal Ministry of Information in 2018 which contains the names of PDP officials alleged to have acquired millions as well as billions of naira from the office of the former National Security Adviser to the President Goodluck Jonathan, Sambo Dasuki. According to a US-based political commentator, Badru Remi "the fact that the APC government...presented a list that reflected the opposition alone is a confirmation that the fight against corruption under President Buhari is merely political and must be dismissed with a wave of the hand" (Punchng.com, April 7, 2018). Hence, with all these, the symbolism, caricature and labeling in the cartoon are subordinated to the pragmeme of political humor, which appeals to the audience on the insincerity, non-holistic, and the political prejudicial nature of the anti-corruption crusade.

Cartoon 2B: Lame Buhari-EFCC dog



Cartoon 2b is in the same category as cartoon 2a. Its thematic direction is also on the subject of corruption and anti-

corruption crusade of President Buhari. This cartoon is also encrypted, essentially, with symbolism and labeling, and by virtue of the reason that the audience and the cartoonist are grounded in the same socio-political orientation, the cartoon signals honest laughter. The dog, well-labeled EFCC, symbolizes the foremost anti-corruption agency in Nigeria, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission. The posture of the dog and the fact that its tongue inclines out from its mouth is symbolic of a dog that wants to attack its victim but changes to a friendly mood towards its victim because its owner is present. This implies that the EFCC assumes an affable disposition towards a political situation that should be unequivocally inimical for the reason that it has been deinstitutionalized. This is a political circumstance given that the broom that has made the dog/EFCC responsive is symbolic of the ruling party, All Progressives Congress (APC); the headless entity holding it is President Buhari, and the entity, kneeling down, rapping his hand around Buhari's leg, and at the same time deriding the anti-corruption agency, is the former Minister for Defence in Goodluck Jonathan administration, Senator Musiliu Obanikoro (politically nicknamed, Koro). The labeling: NTOOR scornfully uttered by Koro, with his left index finger close to his eyes, KORO on his cap and CORRUPTION CASES lying on the floor underpin and situate the cartoon's symbolic features.

Senator Musiliu Obanikoro is an ex-PDP official, who is now in APC. He had joined the ruling party, allegedly in order to evade a corruption case leveled against him by EFCC. Joining the ruling party to escape the hammer of the law was a trend when

APC became the ruling party. This position is evinced in Onyema et al (2018). According to their submission:

“Anecdotal evidence suggests an emerging trend of high-ranking and strategically important politicians joining the ruling party, in order to assure some reduction in the rigor of criminal investigation. For example, there have been limited reports with respect to the investigation of Mr. Musiliu Obanikoro (former minister under the People’s Democratic Party (PDP)), Mr. Godswill Akpabio (former Governor of Akwa Ibom) and Mr. Martins Elechi (former Governor of Ebonyi State) (2018:8).”

For Senator Obanikoro, he was apprehended by the EFCC in 2016, for his alleged role in the diversion of ₦4.7bn from the account of the office of the National Security Adviser in 2014. Though it was said that he returned some funds, on November 25, 2017, he decamped to the APC. Having defected, his CORRUPTION CASES were dropped, and he could scorn the EFCC, NTOOR! Obanikoro’s entire sins were forgiven, just as the party’s national chairman, Adams Oshiomole has declared – “we have a quite number of other leaders who have come. We have quite a number of other leaders, who have come...in fact, once you have joined APC, all your sins are forgiven” (Saharareporters, January 18, 2019).

By situating the features (symbols and labeling), and the entire cartoon, *Lame Buhari-EFCC Dog*, within the idea of pragmemes, it could be stated that, beyond the honest laughter which these features have engendered, the use of these specific symbols and labeling is effective in derisively revealing conduct that does not conform to the essential tenets of an incorruptible

anti-corruption scheme that works by an unswerving and uncompromising adherence to ethical principles and values. Senator Musiliu Obanikoro is alleged to have pilfered national security funds but because he retreated to the ruling party, the allegations of financial profligacy leveled against him suffered setbacks. Furthermore, the dog, which is symbolic of the EFCC in the cartoon, shows a slavish institution that is denied every capacity to act on its own. It can only perform its duties with full accountability to President Buhari. Thus, what the cartoon offers is an underlying pragmeme of humor effectively puncturing the whole anti-corruption system as deficient in integrity even though the scheme seems to be held in high esteem. The next set of cartoons to be examined revolves around the 2016 Appropriation Bill that was allegedly padded.

Cartoon 3A: Padding and Insertions



In the Nigerian context and in several other climes, the executive, headed by the president, is duly reserved the prerogative to prepare the country's appropriation bill expected to cater for a particular fiscal year. Having planned it, the

president presents the bill to the national parliament for onward approval, and after such endorsement, it becomes a budget to be implemented. This is such a smooth sailing process for any country's budget that takes this procedure. Unfortunately, the Nigeria 2016 Appropriation Bill did not take this course. It was flawed and enmeshed in controversy. It is the most contentious bill considering the history of budgeting in Nigeria. Its polemical nature stems from the news that it was missing after presentation and the fact that its financial statements were allegedly bloated beyond proportion. Nevertheless, the latter characteristic outstretched opinions. One of these views is lodged in cartoons 3a and 3b. The two cartoons are responses to the alleged padding of the 2016 Budget by some legislative officials of the National Assembly to the tune of ₦481 billion (Vanguard, July 27, 2016).

Cartoon 3a titled, Padding and Insertions are encrypted with symbolism, labeling, and caricature. Meanwhile, as a result of audience mutual knowledge regarding this issue in 2016, somewhat decryption which manifests in the form of honest laughter; especially from the distorted faces of the symbolic legislators in the cartoon, is probable. However, to fully grasp the full message of the cartoon, insights from pragmeme are of great importance. In cartoon 3a, the four centipedes-like beings labeled DOGARA and the full-bodied human being labeled JIBRIN are symbolic of notable officials of the Nigerian House of Representatives. The can, labeled HOUSE OF REPS symbolizes the House of Representative Chamber from which the legislators operate, and most importantly, it is symbolic of an ascertained allegation against the four officials contained therein. These

officials are the Speaker of the House of Representative himself, Yakubu Dogara, the Deputy Speaker, Yussuff Lasun, the Chief Whip, Alhassan Ado-Dogwuwa and Minority Leader, Leo Ogor, and lastly, the official outside the can is the Chairman, House of Representatives Committee on Appropriation, Abdulmumuni Jibrin. Hon. Jibrin was the legislator who raised the alarm and revealed that the 2016 budget had been padded and inserted with ill-funds. Jibrin had alleged, “the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Yakubu Dogara, and three other principal officers of the House of padding the 2016 budget to the tune of over N400bn” (Punch, December 30, 2017). He was reported to have stood by his allegations against Dogara, Lasun, Ado-Dogunwa, and Ogor (Punch August 19, 2016). What he holds like a shield in the cartoon is a summary of the allegations: PADDING AND INSERTIONS. As revealed in Vanguard newspaper:

“...the lawmakers ingeniously removed some key projects proposed by the executive or drastically reduced their costs and introduced many others not contemplated by the Presidency which prepared the budget. Among the projects which votes were surreptitiously jerked up without the knowledge of the executive, were Nigerian railway modernization project: Lagos - Kano standard gauge rail line project, which cost was raised by N32.5 billion and the consultancy dredging and river training works (609 million) under the Ministry of Transportation. Others, according to the document, are the Code of Conduct Bureau which had N4.4billion added to its vote, provision of broadband Internet Service to National Assembly Nigcomsat, N318 million, Training and

Consultancy for Nigcomsat 2 Projects, N3.5 billion, etc, in the Ministry of Communications. Most scandalous, according to the document, is the case of Ministry of Works, Power, and Housing where 82 new projects, principally roads, with a total provision of about N50.63 billion, were inserted in the budget. (July 27, 2016)“

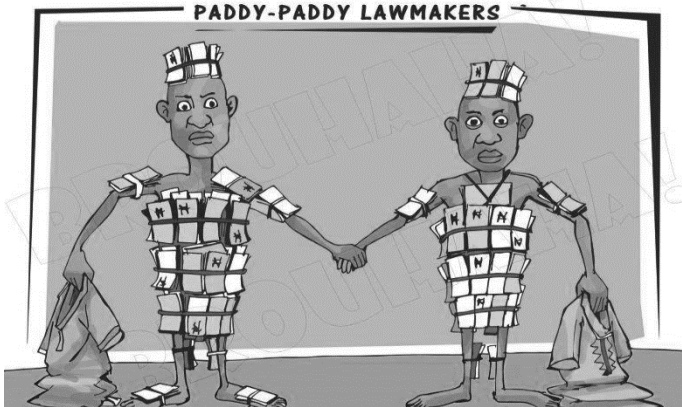
These series of allegations of PADDING and INSERTIONS revealed by Jibrin were not in tune with some officials of the House of Representatives, and this informs some measure of sanctions against Jubrin. Thus, the caricature of these officials into centipedes-like beings validates the sanctions and their predatory nature given the allegations leveled against them. This destructive character demonstrated in the cartoon toward their accuser, Honourable Abdul Jibrin, is displayed in his removal as Chairman, Committee on Appropriation by the leadership of the House of Representatives following the alarming revelations he made as regards the 2016 budget.

Therefore, the prominent features in this cartoon, namely, symbolism – which stands for some of our soi-disant honorable in the House of Representatives, labeling – which helps to situate the symbols and other non-verbal variables and caricature – used to provoke ridicule of the honorable, especially, the Honourable Speaker of the house who claims:

“I studied Law and I have been in the legislature and all this period I have never heard of the word ‘padding’ being an offense under any law” (Saharareporters, August 6, 2016)“; the horrific-hilarious faces of the Honourables which raise a poignant rhetorical question (such as why did you reveal our secrets?) are all subordinated to the pragmeme of humor. This humor shows

the dishonor in the alleged Honourables of the House of Representatives. It reveals their condemnable value and legislative misconduct and exposes the fact that though their portfolios bear legislature, they are lawbreakers being burlesqued for making a mockery of the House of Representatives, Nigeria's second bicameral legislature, the National Assembly. This same praxeme is also fully represented in the last cartoon 3b examined in this paper titled, Padded-Paddy-Paddy Lawmakers.

Cartoon 3B: Padded-Paddy-Paddy Lawmakers



No doubt, cartoon 3b has been encrypted with symbolism, caricature, and labeling, thereby engendering some honest laughter among audiences who are abreast of the case of disproportionately large funds inserted into the 2016 budget. However, on the farther side of the honest laughter, there is the praxeme of humor. Taking a look at cartoon 3b, unequivocally, those who have been symbolically exemplified in the cartoon are Honourable Abdul Jibrin, to the left and Honourable Speaker, Yakubu Dogara, to the right. The naira, padded to their bodies, is

symbolic of the funds accruable having made the budget proposal outrageous than the projects contained in its demand. The glaring fact that Jibrin holds tight to the hand of Dogara signifies and points to the culpability of Yakubu Dogara in the alleged budget padding scandal.

The leadership of the House of Representatives relieved Jibrin of his office as Chairman, Committee on Appropriations, based on the allegations that he alone fixed the budget. As relayed by Vanguard (July 27, 2016),

“...the House of Representatives...alleged that Jibrin, singlehandedly changed the budget estimates presented by President Muhammadu Buhari to the National Assembly by adding N250 billion into it.” However, Jibrin responded that rather than tell the truth, the leadership created the impression that he was sacked because he padded the 2016 budget (Punch, July 22, 2016).”

These fragments of events thus justify the grabbing of Yakubu Dogara’s hand by Abdul Jibrin, directing attention to deals jointly perpetrated. This nonverbal gesture is substantiated in bold labeling: PADDY-PADDY LAWMAKERS. The semantics of PADDY in the Nigerian context is friendship contracted to conceal a crime. Thus, the labeling describes Dogara and Jibrin as lawmakers who are cronies in the enterprise of padding for pecuniary gains. This suggests that none of the lawmakers may be exculpated from the stuffing of the 2016 budget beyond the estimated funds. To, therefore, understand this cartoon to its fullest extent, perceptions from pragmeme is significant. Without casting doubt, the cartoon’s essential features are subordinated to

the pragmeme of humor of the legislative arm of government that should, in actual fact, be in the business of making laws that will have a lasting impact on Nigerians and advance the progression of Nigeria, but whose leadership is snowed under what profits them and not what benefits Nigerians. It also bares Honourables who are in the House for their own selfish ends, as portrayed in the symbolic naira notes padded to their bodies, and not in the interest of Nigerians.

Conclusion

Several scholarly works (Taiwo 2007, Abioye 2009, Adegaju & Oyeboode 2015, to name a few) have investigated humor in Nigerian political discourse, but much lately attention has not been directed towards some recent notable political events in the year 2016. This paper has examined the pragmeme of humor in the events of Nigeria's 56th Independence Anniversary, the crusade against corruption, and the alleged 2016 budget padding scandal in selected cartoons. In interpreting the selected political cartoons, this paper engages the theoretical technicalities of the encryption theory of humor and pragmeme theory. With the former theory, it is ascertained that audience who are well informed on these political happenings are able to decrypt the cartoons because they share the same political knowledge with the cartoonist; thus honest laughter is produced, and with the latter theory, the paper unveils embedded actual pragmatic forces (of otiose campaign promises and the Nigeria despairing episode at 56; self-centered leadership, and that the worst form of corruption is selective justice) in the cartoons beyond the honest laughter they render. Hence, these findings are with the intent to

enhancing public perception of our political actors and highlighting the need for rethinking the receptivity in political acts, promises, and decisions.

Given that 2016 is filled with striking political events, future research could further engage in and examine the linguistic (and non-linguistic) implications in political incidents that are yet to be studied. This could be in debates, parliamentary proceedings, interviews, or those in forms of jokes, cartoons, satirical drawings, and several others.

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