

A Semiotic Analysis of the #EndSARS Protest

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**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE
FACULTY OF ARTS
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BENIN CITY.**

MAY 2024

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
ENGLISH AND LITERATURE, FACULTY OF ARTS,
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, NIGERIA, IN
PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE
AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF MASTERS OF ARTS (M.A.)
ENGLISH AND LITERATURE**

MAY 2024

CERTIFICATION

I certify that this study entitled A Semiotic Analysis of the #EndSARS Protest

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in the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of
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CERTIFICATION OF THESIS ON PLAGIARISM

We, the undersigned attest and declare that the thesis of Philip Ola
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Dr. Mrs. Stella Igene
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Date

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Head of Department

Date

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of the #EndSARS protesters who tragically lost their lives at Lekki Tollgate on the 20th of October 2020.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere gratitude goes to God almighty for the gift of life, good health, wisdom, knowledge and understanding needed for the success of this work.

I am forever grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Mrs Stella Igene for her encouragement, support, care, motivation, and constructive criticism during the course of this research work. For me, she is more than a supervisor, but a mother who encouraged and contributed immensely towards the completion of this thesis. Words cannot express how grateful I am for all you have done. God will continue to bless you.

I cannot but appreciate my lovely mother, Mrs. C.F. Ologbonyo for your prayers, financial support, words of encouragement and undiluted love. I am blessed to have you as my mother. Frankly, my siblings, Ruth Ologonyo, Joshua Ologonyo, and Ebenezer Ologonyo are the best in the world. They have been my source of inspiration and motivation.

I am also grateful to Dr. Andrew Egba and Dr. Deborah Olatunji for the many times they went out of their ways to help me with ideas, correction, words of encouragement and studying materials. I want to appreciate my lovely friends, Daodu Olutope Raymond, Esther Ola, Peace Obaze, Laura, Caro, Nicholas, Ose Uteze, Rose, and the most special one, Oyinkansola Tracy Igbinosa.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title	i
Title page	ii
Certification	iii
Certification of Thesis on Plagiarism	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Table of Contents	vii
Abstract	x
CHAPTER ONE	
Introduction	1
1.1 Purpose of the Study	1
1.2 Scope of Study	1
1.3 Methodology	2
1.3.1 Data Collection	2
1.3.2 Sampling Method	2
1.3.3 Method of Data Analysis	3
1.4 Theoretical Background	3
1.4.1 Semiotics	3
1.4.2 The Concept of Sign	5
1.4.2.1 The Symbolic Sign	7
1.4.2.2 The Iconic Sign	7
1.4.2.3 The Indexical Sign	8

1.4.3 The Concept of Code	8
1.5 The Concept of Text	9
1.6 Protest	10
1.7 The #EndSARS protest	11
1.8 Review of Related Scholarship	12
1.9 Justification of Study	18
1.10 Thesis statement	19
CHAPTER TWO	
SYMBOLIC SIGNS IN THE #ENDSARS PROTEST	
2.1 Introduction	20
2.2 Data Analysis	20
2.3 Summary	45
CHAPTER 3	
ICONIC SIGNS IN THE #ENDSARS PROTEST	
3.1 Introduction	47
3.2 Data Analysis	47
3.3 Summary	67
CHAPTER FOUR	
INDEXICAL SIGN IN THE #ENDSARS PROTEST	
4.1 Introduction	68
4.2 Data Analysis	68
4.3 summary	77
CHAPTER FIVE	
SUMMARY AND FINDINGS	
5.1 Summary	79

5.2 Findings	80
5.3 Contribution to knowledge	81
5.4 Recommendation for Further Studies	82
Work Cited	83

ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to examine the End Special Anti-Robbery Squad (#EndSARS) protest from a semiotic perspective. The objectives were to investigate the meaning potential of #EndSARS text as a semiotic system; analyse signification strategies in the use of signs as presented by protesters on the internet; and explore the role and impact of signs in mobilizing participants and shaping the movement's outcomes.

The data for the study were media posts, memes, protest photographs, and artwork (cartoons). A total of 100 #EndSARS-related datasets were collected, and they were screened based on certain criteria such as, the need for the data to be exclusively #EndSARS, and the inclusion of the presence of either verbal or visual elements containing relevant keywords related to #EndSARS, which resulted in the eventual selection of thirty. The study adopted the sign typology by Charles Sanders Peirce to categorise the #EndSARS protest sign, and used Saussure's dyadic model of sign to analyse the data.

The study found that the #EndSARS text functioned as a complex semiotic system, comprising various constituent units such as hashtags, images, slogans, and gestures, as well as, the interactions among these units contributed to the #EndSARS text's overall meaning by highlighting the cyclical nature of societal challenges in Nigeria. Signification strategy of colour (red, yellow, black, and green), gestures (raised fist, raised flag, and sitting of protesters), attire (hijab, hair tie, and face mask) were employed by agitators as sign of resistance, urgency, justice for the Nigerian youths, and socio-political change. Hashtags like #ENDSARS, #ENDSWAT, #ENDPOLICEBRUTALITY and #ALUTA CONTINUA were used in mobilizing participants by creating a sense of solidarity and collective identity among protesters.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Study

This study examines the End Special Anti-Robbery Squad (henceforth #EndSARS) protest from a semiotic perspective. It focuses on how signs like hashtags, images, colours, and gestures are used in projecting the protest against social issues within the Nigerian sociocultural and political context. The study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of semiotics in contemporary socio-political movements, particularly in the context of police brutality and corruption. By examining the semiotic aspects of this movement, the study sets out to achieve the following objectives:

- i. Investigate the meaning potential of #EndSARS text as a semiotic system. The investigation involves identifying the constituent unit in the semiotic system and examining how these units interact to make meaning and the meaning-making that help us to interpret the #EndSARS text.
- ii. Analyse signification strategies in the use of signs as presented by protesters on the internet.
- iii. Explore the role and impact of signs in mobilizing participants and shaping the movement's outcomes.

1.2 Scope of Study

The study is limited to the #EndSARS protest led by Nigerian youths from 8th to 20th October 2020. It covers physical demonstration and online activism against the unjust arrest, and detention of young people by the police, and demands justice for the victims of police brutality, and for the safety of Nigerians. It focuses on #EndSARS text, encompassing visual and textual signs, their meanings, and their broader implications. The online protest which reflects the physical protest gone viral, as a result, Nigerians abroad and international bodies

are able to witness the protest. The 2020 #EndSARS protest involves various actors or participants, which are the Nigerian youths (the protesters), the Nigerian Police (SARS), the Nigerian government and Yahoo boys (Internet fraudsters). These actors have different viewpoints and different contributions towards the #EndSARS protest. However, the signs are analysed from the Nigerian youths' viewpoint and in line with semiotic theory.

1.3 Research Methodology.

The methodology employed in this research is qualitative. The qualitative research approach is defined by as data collection processes that result predominantly in open-ended, non-numerical data that is then analysed primarily using non-statistical methods (Dornyei 24). This approach enriches writer's interpretation because focus is given to the search for meanings, perspectives and the understanding of signs as deployed in the #EndSARS protest. The texts were obtained from the Google search engine which enables us to utilize specific keywords, topics, and dates to source data. It enables users to filter and sort content based on different criteria. They can be accessed from anywhere and maintain extensive archives that provide diverse representation possibilities from various sources, collectively reflecting the media's perceptions.

1.3.1 Data Collection

The data for the study are obtained through Google search engine by entering the keywords #EndSARS, SARS, and Police brutality. A diverse range of data are sourced, including social media posts/tweets, meme, protest photographs, and artwork(cartoon) to capture signs used during the #EndSARS protests. A total number of 100 #EndSARS related data are collected, and they comprise social posts, protest pictures and art works (cartoons). These are however screened based on certain criteria, which results in the eventual selection of thirty. The criteria used to determine the suitability of the selected data for the study includes the data needed to be exclusively 2020 #EndSARS and the inclusion in the dataset requires the

presence of either verbal or visual elements containing relevant keywords related to the 2020 #EndSARS.

1.3.2 Sampling Method

In this semiotic analysis, a purposive sampling technique is employed. Purposive sampling involves selecting specific texts or sources that are deemed relevant and representative of the research objectives. The data on #EndSARS is voluminous, and it has a repetitive pattern. Therefore, a text is selected to represent a set of reoccurring data set to avoid repetition. As a result, a total number of thirty data are selected from 100 samples.

1.3.3 Method of Data Analysis

The study adopts the sign typology by Charles Sanders Peirce to categorise the #EndSARS protest signs into three categories: symbolic, iconic, and indexical signs. The categorization facilitates analysing the signs in light of their function within the text.

The study uses Saussure's dyadic model of sign as consisting of a signifier (the form of the sign) and a signified (the content of the sign) to analyse the data. This method enables us to understand meaning relations or signification that exist between the form and the content of the sign. Within the Saussurean framework, the study adopts Daniel Chandler's method of semiotic analysis which relates signifiers to signified against the background of interpretative codes to arrive at meaning (Chandler, 113). These codes are cultural, religious, social, and environmental practices that help us to understand why and how signs derive their meanings.

1.4 Theoretical background

This study is based on the theory of semiotics.

1.4.1 Semiotics

Semiotics is the scientific study of signs. Semiotics is concerned with how messages are encoded in signs as well as how meanings are decoded from sign. It was founded by the Swiss

linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who is regarded as the father of modern linguistics. In his collection of works titled *Course in General Linguistics*, he outlined the fundamentals of semiotics. Alongside Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce, Charles William Morris, Roland Barthes, Algirdas Greimas, Yuri Lotman, Umberto Eco, Julia Kristeva, and Thomas Sebeok are also important figures in the development of modern semiotics.

Semiotics has been specifically described by Leeds-Hurwitz as “the study of communication, i.e. the Way in which any sign functions in the mind of an interpreter to convey a specific Meaning in a given situation”. This means that the study of texts through the lens of semiotics concentrates on the communication phenomenon in its entirety, including non-verbal communication (anything that stands for something else) and verbal language in speech and writing. Barthes states clearly that almost everything in society, such as cars, dresses, and other items, has significance and can serve as an important symbol to a speech community (qtd in Igene, 7).

In the same vein, Katic Wales sees semiotics as the "analysis of signs and sign systems and their meanings specifically those involved with communication between humans in different societies and culture (Chandler, 416). She goes on to define the scope as "verbal language in different media of speech and writing and also non-verbal communication systems such as gestures, movements, dress and the mass media (Chandler, 416). Thomas Sebeok sees semiotics as "sign action the subject matter of which is communication, which is concerned with the study of signification" (12-13).

Charles Williams Morris in his own definition sees semiotics as "the study of ordinary objects in so far as they participate in semiosis" (Chandler, 20). He asserts that semiotics is "the process by which something functions as a sign" (Chandler, 3). This definition of semiotics focuses on the use of the sign in a social context and situation. Included in this definition, is sign action in relation to the creation and interpretation of meaning. In a similar

light, Charles Sanders Pierce defines semiosis as "an action, or an influence which involves a cooperation of three subjects such as signs, its objects and its interpretant" (qtd in Igene, 8).

This process of semiosis, Daniel Chandler says dates back to the Greeks and involves the following factors:

- that which acts as a sign (the sign vehicle)
- that which the sign refers to (the designatum)
- the effects of some interpreters in the virtue of which the thing in question is a sign to that interpreter (the interpretant)
- the interpreter (the sense made of the sign) (qtd in Igene, 15)

In this sense, semiotics and semantics have a common concern with meaning but as John Sturrock puts it, Semantics is concerned with what signs mean while Semiotics is Concerned with how signs mean" (qtd in Igene, 22).

The late Italian semiotician, Umberto Eco defines semiotics as "everything that can be taken as a sign" (7). Semiotics is perhaps best thought of as a way of looking at the production of meaning from a particular critical perspective. Semiotics is a field of research that studies signs as an essential part of cultural life and communication.

1.4.2 The Concept of Sign

Considering that the text is an assemblage of sign, an understanding of the concept of sign is essential in any semiotic study. Sign here is defined as "everything that, on the grounds of previously established social conventions, can be taken as standing for something else" (Eco, 16). The sign is generally defined as a meaningful unit, which is interpreted as standing for something other than itself. Signs are considered here in terms of their functions in the communication process as vehicles or carriers of meaning. There are two dominant models of what constitutes a sign. The Linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, proposed one and the other is by the philosopher, Charles Sanders Pierce. Saussure presents a dyadic model of the sign as

consisting of the “signifier”: the “form” which the sign takes and the ‘signified”, the concept the sign represents. According to him, “the sign is the whole that results from the association of the signifier and the signified.’ This relationship is known as “signification” (Saussure 67). He further asserts that a sign must have both a signifier and a signified within a particular code. He argues that “a sign is more than the sum of its parts...its value is determined by the relationship between the sign and other signs within the system as a whole” (113).

It is important to note, as Chandler rightly observes, that signifiers cannot be arbitrarily chosen for any Signified outside of its social use within a code. This would cause chaos in communication. In the study, sign is defined as anything that has a meaning value to anyone.

Other scholars like Louis Hjelmslev, Roland Barthes and Christian Metz have also supported the Saussurean’ concept of the sign, which of course has undergone some modification over time. Hjelmslev uses the terms expression` and content to refer Saussure’s signifier` and `signified’. About the same time as Saussure was formulating his model of the linguistic sign, the philosopher and logician, Charles Sanders Peirce, formulated his own model of the sign, semiotics and the taxonomies of signs, Peirce offers a three-pronged model often popularly referred to as the semiotic triangle. It consists of the following components:

The representamen: the form which the sign takes; (similar to Saussure`s signifier).

The interpretant: not an interpreter but the sense made of the sign; (signified)

The object: to which the sign refers (does not feature directly in Saussure`s model)

Within this framework Peirce defines the sign as:

Something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody- that is, it creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates is the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something- its object. It stands for that object not in all

respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which is the grounds of the representamen (qtd in Igene, 16).

The interaction between the representamen, the object and the interpretant is referred to by Pierce as 'semiosis' (483). Other variants of the Piercean model, also basically triadic, present the three elements of the sign. They present the model of the sign as:

- Sign vehicle: the form of the sign.
- Sense: the sense made of the sign.
- Referent: what the sign stands for.

Whatever notion of the sign one chooses to adopt, signs generally take the “form of Words, images, sounds, odours, flavours, acts or objects and even gestures. Such things have no intrinsic meaning and become signs only when we invest them with meaning (Chandler, 5).

The various notions of the sign indicate that the sign takes different forms. The most general is the linguistic sign which takes the form of words, phrases etc. Pierce offers the typology for signs which has broadly characterized signs into three forms: - the symbolic sign, the iconic sign; and the indexical sign.

1.4.2.1 The Symbolic Sign

This is the form of the sign that is fundamentally arbitrary or purely conventional such that the relationship between the signifier and the signified that constitutes the sign must be learnt in relation to the context of its usage. It is a sign which refers to the object it denotes by virtue of a law usually an association of general ideas which operates to cause the symbol to be interpreted as referencing to that subject” (Pierce, 249). In this sense, “all words, sentences, books and other conventional signs (linguistic signs in terms of their conventionality) are symbols”. Saussure, however, chooses to deal with linguistic signs not strictly as symbols since “the ordinary everyday use of symbols refers to examples like a pair of scales

(signifying justice) are never wholly arbitrary. They show a vestige of natural or rational connection between the signifier and the signified” (Pierce, 73).

1.4.2.2 The Iconic Sign

For Peirce, a sign’s status as icon is dependent on the subjective ability of the interpreter to see the sign as resembling something else. Iconicity speaks to the subjective possibility of an interpreter freely associating a sign with experience (Robins 4). According to Liszka, “an Icon is a relation between a sign and its object based on some rule of similarity; but actual icons can be produced in several different ways: mentally, phonetically, graphically, pictorially etc. (60). For example, a portrait, a cartoon, a scale-model, onomatopoeia, metaphors, realistic sounds in ‘programmed music’, sound effects in radio drama, a dubbed film soundtrack, imitative gestures.

Referring to the portrait of a person, for instance, Pierce asserts that as far as on the grounds merely of what I see, I am led to form an idea of the person it represents, it is an icon...” (qtd in Igene, 18). This is in fact a broad perception of the iconic sign. It is generally agreed that there are no pure` icons and therefore that there are in fact varying degrees of iconicity which are “always dependent upon the properties of the medium in which the form is manifest (18).

1.4.2.3 The Indexical Sign

An indexical sign is a sign that indicates something. According to Peirce, it is a sign whose signifier we have learnt to associate with a particular signified (qtd in Igene, 18). It based on a connection (physical or causal). This link can be observed or inferred: e.g. natural signs (smoke, thunder, footprints, echoes, non-synthetic odours and flavours), medical symptoms (pain, a rash, pulse-rate), measuring instruments (weathercock, thermometer, clock, spirit-level), signals (a knock on a door, a phone ringing), pointers (a pointing index finger, a

directional signpost), recordings (a photograph, a film, video or television shot, an audio-recorded voice), personal trademarks (handwriting, catchphrases).

These three well-established forms of relations between sign vehicle (representamen) and referent (object) form part of Peirce's triadic model of the sign. Although Peirce has broadly outlined these forms of the sign, there are no definite boundaries among them. The three forms are not mutually exclusive. The form of a sign depends on the way in which the sign is used in a particular context and the purpose for which the sign is used within the context.

1.4.3 The Concept of Code

The conventions of code represent a social dimension in semiotics. Code is defined as "a set of practices familiar to users of the medium operating within a broad cultural framework" (Chandler 2), for example, dress code, moral code, etc. Stuart Hall rightly observes that there is no intelligible discourse without the operation of a code" (131). Codes are, therefore, frameworks that help both producers and interpreters in creating and understanding texts. The selection and combination of signs are made relative to codes with which we are familiar. This, according to Turner, is "in order to limit... the range of possibilities of meaning that are likely to be generated when read by others (17). To interpret texts appropriately, the sign receiver has to read signs with reference to appropriate codes which are usually determined by various contextual cues provided in the texts and the environment in which the signs operate. The medium employed influences the choice of codes for interpretation" (Chandler 10). In Terry Eagleton's opinion, codes help to organize signs into:

Meaningful systems which co-relate signifiers and signifieds. When applying a code to a text, we need to be careful because we may find that a particular code may have to be revised and transformed. In this situation, continuing to read with the same code

may produce a different text which in turn modifies the code by which we are reading and so on (123).

Codes help to make communicating experiences easier. This concept is especially significant when a specialized use is made of a particular signifier within a context where the context works into the code, for example, jokes, puns, etc. Codes originate from the culture and society in general and are therefore dynamic systems that evolve over time. The interpretation of any text is likely to change as interpretative codes evolve. This is the reason the interpretation of the same text may differ from culture to culture and at different periods in time. A major part of the work in a semiotic study is to seek to identify the codes within which the production and interpretation of meaning in any text is achieved.

1.5 The Concept of Text

Text is defined in semiotics as “a system of signs in the form of words, sounds, images, gestures, etc. That is constructed and interpreted with reference to the conventions associated with a genre in a particular medium of communication” (Chandler Glossary` 67). For Goran Sonesson, text in semiotics is “that which is going in and out of culture, which should be or could be a particular system of interpretation” (qtd in Igene 13).

Text, in semiotic terms, therefore, is anything within the culture that can be understood or interpreted. In other words, text cannot exist outside of culture. It is distinct from non-text (that which cannot be constructed or interpreted in a culture). It has a Beginning, an end and a definite internal organization and is not just an amorphous accumulation of signs. Text, in semiotics, goes beyond just the language (written or spoken) and extends to anything that can be ‘read or investigated’ for meaning within a culture.

As an assemblage of signs, a text usually has no intrinsic meaning until it is invested with meaning in relation to a recognized code. The data from #EndSARS protest is not only a text in the linguistic sense but, more instantly, in the semiotic sense.

1.6 Protest

Protest, often known as civil agitation, is a type of activism that generally involves active advocacy to effect social or political change. Protests are associated with organized mass populations, social movements or social groups, trade unions, civil rights groups, occupy movements, individual activists, or university students in modern democratic societies, who engage in peaceful (or violent) demonstrations with the help of digital media technologies for mobilization and coordination.

Street demonstrations, sit-ins, and occupy protests, as well as industrial activities and strikes, are all examples of activism (Chiluwa, 49). Placards with comments and writings expressing the protesters' demands and opinions are frequently carried during street protests and protest discourses; some political protesters carry photos of their party candidates and chant party slogans; and they occasionally carry effigies that denounce certain political figures. Many social demonstrators hold banners with opposing beliefs or just demand social reform. Some nonviolent protests have taken the form of street protest marches or rallies in designated city centres. When demonstrators hold placards, sing songs, and/or perform musical instruments it is to draw attention to themselves.

Tragically, some peaceful protests have devolved into violence when demonstrators openly approach security officers, forcing authorities to employ tear gas, water/pepper canisters, or rubber bullets to disperse them. Some demonstrators have resorted to illegal actions like looting and damage of public property, necessitating security officers' use of force to restore order. In many incidents, what began as peaceful protests or rallies resulted in the loss of lives and property *(Chiluwa, 50).

1.7 The #EndSARS protest

The #EndSARS protest was two-week-long protest of young people in Nigeria against police brutality, specifically perpetrated by the much-despised, notorious, but now disbanded

tactical unit called Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The protest, which held between 8th and 22nd October, 2020, affected at least 26 states and more than 100 cities and towns across the country (WANEP), saw huge turnout, sometimes in tens of thousands of young people. Some of whom had been victims of the atrocities of this notorious police unit, and indeed police brutality in the country. The protest is a reaction to police abuse to human right and the Nigerian youths are the victim of this wicked act, aside the bad economy, poor infrastructure, inadequate educational system, poorly funded healthcare system, high unemployment rate and underemployment. The underdevelopment economy deprived Nigerian youths opportunities, this situation pushed some of the youths into eking living from desperate sources, including illegal means, though, the percentage of youths involved in social crimes are infinitesimal of the larger youth population.

Youths are labelled as too superficial in their way of life, lifestyle and thinking. Yet, there is empirical evidence to show that Nigerian youths are the main driver of changes, innovations and ideas from every angle; be it politics, technology, social life, entertainment, economy, peace and security etc.

SARS, which was created in 1984 to fight crime, but reorganized in 1992, has become a byword for brutality, and a reflection of bad governance. As noted earlier, the tactical squad was established to fight rising crime. Under normal circumstances, the Nigerian Police should be the friendliest agency to the people, as security remains a cardinal need of man. By extension, the police agents should be seen as the community's best companion. However, when the agency meant to ensure society's security goes rogue, it will become the worst enemy of the people. The criminal conducts of SARS officers have made many citizens to believe that they were recruited from among former criminals. Various reports, including the Human Right Watch (HRW) 2010 report on police conduct.

Amnesty International reports on impunity by SARS; Open Society Justice Initiative (OSJI) 2010 reports on police brutality, and various media reports have overemphasized the brutal conducts of SARS and Nigerian police, which could have provided any serious police authority or government ample opportunity and ideas on how to reform the police. From physical assault to sexual harassment, brutal torture, illegal arrests, illegal and long-running detention without access to family and legal representation, and physical brutalization. According to an Amnesty International June 2020 report on SARS (Amnesty International, 11), there were over 82 documented cases of abuse and brutality by the SARS between 2017 and 2020. On five different occasions between 2015 and 2020, Nigerian Police authorities claimed to have either reformed SARS or disbanded it. Yet, the reign of terror continued, while no SARS officer was reportedly prosecuted for the crimes (Amnesty International, 13).

The protests involved peaceful demonstrators, community organisation, relief provision for victims of police repression during the protest and citizen journalism. The social media became a tool for not just mobilization of youths, but also a tool for building international support for the protests. Within days, the #EndSARS hashtag became the most popular on twitter globally, and propelled many international figures to lend support, with the Twitter CEO creating an emoticon for the protest. Another feature of the protest was the commonness of cause and unity of purpose. Nigeria is renowned for divisive politics that have led to schism among citizens along political, religious, ethnic and creed lines.

1.8 Review of Related Scholarship

This section presents scholarly works on protest and within the field of semiotics.

In investigation linguistic and semiotic features from a pragmatic angle. Ukor J. Ihunayachi examines the use of verbal and visual aspects in the Nigerian #EndSARS movement, representing an attempt at such broader pragmatic analysis. The study analyses the use of verbal-virtual aspects in the 2020 #EndSARS protest using Mey's Pragmatic Act

Theory and Hoye and Kaiser's Visual Act Theory. Twenty-seven #EndSARS visual pictures that were found utilising the Google search engine served as the study's data. Twenty of the photos are qualitatively studied and divided into seven memes: stained flag, feminism, banners, neo-nationalism, and soke (peak up) solidarity. Identifying, informing, regretting, hoping, charging, appealing, demanding, encouraging, associating, stating, warning, instructing, reminding, commanding, vowing, praising, saluting, condemning, and challenging are the visual practises found in the data. The practs identified include naming, describing, charging, stating, and commanding. The usage of visual components such colour, gesture, contrast, satire, inference, reference, shared situational knowledge, colour, facial expression, and environment and clothing were noted during the study. It was discovered that in multimodal communication, pragmatic acts and visual pragmatic acts enhance one another (23).

In a study, Nnennaya Uchendu Ola states that #EndSARS protests represent symptoms of systemic issues in Nigeria. These concerns range from the ideological divergences among the various ethnic groups to the structural and constitutional imbalance in the relationship between politics and the economy. The paper makes put into perspective the effects of an excessive concentration of political and economic power. In order to achieve this, this study looks at the circumstances that led to the #EndSARS demonstrations as well as the numerous signs and symbols that came to represent the movement. To identify the systemic issues affecting Nigeria, semiotics theory is used as a conceptual framework and approach. Semioticians look for hidden patterns beneath events' outward manifestations. This study examines the social factors that contributed to the #EndSARS Protests while not discounting the influence of ideology, using semiotic theory as a framework. A meaningful national conversation between competing ethnic groups in Africa could benefit from the research's potential contributions to academic and socio-political/economic knowledge. The

author here proposes for decentralisation (restructuring or unbundling) of Nigeria into autonomous regions after laying out the consequences of its excessive centralization and the concentration of both political and economic power at the national level (96). In addition to being used as a symbol for young demonstrations against police brutality in Nigeria, the hashtag #EndSARS also served as a platform for other groups with grievances against the current administration to express their displeasure.

Gabriel B. Egbe highlights the significance of English in the formulation and counter construction of discourses by identifying the discursive strategies and semiotic resources used during the #EndSARS protest. The research employs Critical Discourse Studies and Multimodal Discourse Analysis to examine approximately thirty purposefully sampled posts from WhatsApp platforms during the protests. The study makes the case that social media gives users a forum to communicate without the gatekeeper restrictions of mainstream social media in order to forge new groups, disseminate ideas, and garner attention both domestically and internationally by utilising the English language to transcend linguistic and geopolitical barriers. The research also shows that, in contrast to the initial #EndSARS protest, which portrayed a well-organized, nonviolent, and rejuvenating group of young Nigerians seeking a better Nigeria—a Nigeria of sophisticated and progressive minds—the counter discourse glorifies disruption, destruction, and death, giving rise to the negative stereotype of thieves, looters, hoodlums, and criminals—a notion that the #EndSARS protest was meant to challenge and reject—temporarily solidifying the status quo and the mindset of business as usual in Nigeria(13-20).

Olabode Adefemi Lawal conducted research on the various ways social media was used in the Nigerian #EndSARS protests using the notion of the social construction of reality. For this study, Olabode spoke with 16 Nigerians who were involved in the #EndSARS movement, eight participated in-person while eight protested in-person and digitally (hybrid).

To better understand the roles social media played in influencing Nigerians' subjective reality at the time of the #EndSARS protests, participants were asked a series of pre-written questions on the demonstrations. This thesis suggests, via the use of thematic analysis, that the October 2020 #EndSARS protests were influenced by changes in some Nigerians' subjective realities. This research study analysed the role(s) human perception(s) played in shaping the subjective realities of some Nigerians in the case of the Nigerian #EndSARS protest. Through the data gathered for this research, it can be argued that the use of social media in the Nigerian #EndSARS protests had some positive impact on the protests. Through the help of social media, the participants of the #EndSARS protest were able to record what happened and information was instantaneous. This act helped spread details about what was happening at different times, informing the online activists and non-activists about the #EndSARS protests. This research also indicated that everyone's experience of police brutality and the presence of shared experience helped some Nigerians collectively agree that police brutality exists and creates objective conditions for the Nigerian government (78-90).

Agbedo, carried out a study on protests against the removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria. The government of Nigeria had subsidized the price of fuel but decided to raise the price from 65 Naira to 141 Naira. There was a public outcry, which led to protests and eventually the rise of the 'Occupy Nigeria Movement'. Agbedo looked at the language used in protests by analysing the language that was displayed on the placards. The theoretical framework used was Halliday's SFG that analysed the context stratum, where field, tenor and mode were studied. The findings revealed that protestors collectively made their demands by using language resources. In addition to the initial protest against the removal of fuel subsidies, the protestors also challenged the government on poor leadership. This protest was successful because the oil prices were dropped to 95 Naira from 165 Naira. At least, their main demand was accepted (39-52).

Aghaegbuna Haroldson Uwaezuoke and Greg Orji Obiamalu carried out a study on the communicative philosophy of terminology, this research investigates how language was used to create the terms End SARS and COVID-19. In order to clearly highlight the two ideas' smallest morphological units, they are first presented in accordance with Leipzig's glossing rule. This is followed by an analysis that is guided by the communicative theory of terminology. According to the analysis, the sounds /ko/, /vi/, and /d/ stand for "coronavirus-2 disease," and the number "19" pragmatically denotes "2019," the year when the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS-CoV-2) coronavirus variant was first observed globally. Additionally, while "End SARS" appears to be a clear call for the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, its true meaning extends to express dissatisfaction with the Nigerian government's apathy towards numerous evils plaguing the country, such as police brutality against civilians, insecurity brought on by Boko Haram insurgents and banditry, and rising living expenses. When naming COVID-19 and End SARS, linguistic and pragmatic factors were taken into account, and the terms were chosen to facilitate communication (90-111).

Mame Semou Ndiaye carried out a study on a semiotic analysis of non-verbal signs of Y en a marre protest in Kenya. The study focuses on visuals as a kind of nonverbal communication. The Y en a marre movement uses this method of communication in order to combat President Abdoulaye Wade's political system. The movement's actors are railing against the system's flaws. Its goal is to use Roland Barthes' semiological technique to understand the enigmatic meanings of pictures. However, the investigation identifies issues such as Senegalese individuals' terrible living conditions, democracy, corruption, and authoritarianism. As a consequence, these findings help to have a grasp of the communication nature of pictures in the Y en a marre movement's struggle (17).

Arege Jackline Bonareri examines the linguistic and semiotic resources used in labour protest by Kenya's public university in 2017. This study focuses on three consecutive labour

demonstrations by public university academic staff in Kenya in 2017. The study's major goal was to investigate the underlying meanings of linguistic forms and semiotic resources used in protest genres. This study focuses on the use of modalities in protest and their roles in interpersonal relationships, the linguistic choices and their underlying meanings in protest, the thematic organization of protest messages, and the use of semiotic resources and their underlying meanings. The data is analysed using the Critical Discourse Analysis theoretical framework. The study looked at four semiotic resources used in protests: slogans, placards, press conferences, and banners. The study included 31 public universities as participants. Data is gathered via downloading articles from Kenya's well-known websites, including the Daily Nation, The East African Standard, You Tube, and the National Television and Citizen TV stations. A total of 84 texts were purposively collected and descriptively analysed from 51 placards, 14 banners, 10 slogans, and 9 press conferences. The study discovers that protest genres are constructed utilizing both linguistic and semiotic resources. Protesters used lexicalization to communicate their views as well as expose the government's shortcomings on labour problems. The application of modalities highlighted social communication and underlying meanings in protests. While semiotic resources were used to communicate to relevant stakeholders during the protest (58-72).

In a study titled “A Pragma-Semiotic Analysis of Emoticons in Social Media”, Ali M. Al- Mjdawi researched on distinctive features use of emoticons as a way to express users’ emotions in digital settings. This study employs both qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques to pinpoint the pragmatic and semiotic roles that emoticons play in social media. The study's corpus was gathered from YouTube and Twitter. Following the Three Levels Pragma-Semiotic Model, the data is analysed. Emoji usage with text appears to enhance expressivity and overall sentiment scores of positive and negative opinions comparatively more than neutral opinions, according to quantitative analysis. Additionally, it

demonstrates that emoticons work best when combined with text or other emoticons. The current study's qualitative analysis has shed light on the social media users' emoticon usage habits (43-46).

Innocent Chiluya used online materials, based on Facebook posts. The demands of the protestors were the same in that they wanted the government to withdraw the “oils subsidy removal,” that they had introduced. Chiluya used Critical Discourse Analysis to analyse the Facebook posts and Van Dijk’s (2001) ideological representation model to analyse data. The study analysed two hundred and forty-five (245) Facebook posts, of which one hundred and eighty (180) were from individuals, while sixty-five (65) are from groups. Chiluya acknowledges that some of these posts are from Nigerians residing in Nigeria, while others are from the Diaspora, although some posts could have come from non-Nigerians who are sympathers. The study is qualitative, and it adopts CDA as the theoretical framework. The study reveals that protestors defined themselves as ‘We,’ while they defined the government as the ‘Other.’ Many posts on the government were constructed negatively, with the use of words such ‘cruel’, ‘unfair’ and devilish’ (55). The Nigerian Government is portrayed as being insensitive, wicked and the government officials were termed as embezzlers of public funds. The ‘We’ group is not well defined, as the protestors are divided amongst themselves with some supporting the government and some not. Some of the posts become personalized, showing that some of the protestors did not write from group ideology. The protestors demanded the president’s and Finance Minister’s resignation, which could have been influenced by the Arab Spring movements in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, where protestors asked their sitting presidents to resign. The study also finds out that protestors use code switching, pidgin and local language words as a means of expressing solidarity amongst themselves. The study by Chiluya informed the current study in that both look at protest

discourse. The study uses critical discourse analysis as a tool for analysis while our study uses semiotic approach.

1.9 Justification of Study

Our study reveals that the 2020 #EndSARS protest involved various actors or participants, including Nigerian youths (protesters and innocent citizens), the Nigerian Police (SARS), an incompetent and brutal agency, the Nigerian government (corrupt and failed), and Yahoo boys (Internet fraudsters and unruly youths). These actors played different roles before, during, and after the #EndSARS protest.

The study explores the meaning potentials of the #EndSARS protest as a system of signs. It examines the process of signification within the context of different interpretive codes present in society (religious, social, political, and ethnic) and how these contribute to constructing the reality of Nigerian youths facing brutality and injustice from the security agency meant to 'serve and protect' them, as well as being betrayed by the government.

In conclusion, the #EndSARS protest against police brutality and corruption in Nigeria serves as a significant example of how semiotics played a crucial role in conveying a message, uniting a movement, and driving change.

1.10 Thesis statement

The #EndSARS protest against police brutality and corruption in Nigeria effectively employed symbolic signs, indexical signs, an iconic sign to communicate a powerful message of a corrupt government using brutal and incompetent agency to control unruly youths as a result of the Nigerian government's impunity at the expense of the innocent Nigerian youths.

CHAPTER TWO

SYMBOLIC SIGNS IN THE #ENDSARS

2.1 Introduction.

Symbol is a sign that has no similarity or connection to the item it refers to and has no logical relationship with the object it refers to. Peirce posits that all words, sentences, basically linguistic signs, and other conventional signs such as road signs, traffic light, and numbers are all symbols. Their intended meanings are not intuitively obvious such that comprehending symbolic signs are entirely dependent on interactants' knowledge of conventions or applicable rules of a requisite code. Without the appropriate code, signs might fail to convey their meaning or be misunderstood. Peirce posits that the interpretation of symbols is based on a habitual relation, rule, or law, which is essentially an association of general notions that causes the symbol to be understood as referring to an object, either abstract or concrete (213). Various symbolic signs will be analysed as it appears in the data.

2.2 Data Analysis

Through an exploration of the visual elements and symbolism within these photographs, this analysis aims to shed light on the themes of oppression, resilience, and the pursuit of justice.

Fig. 2.2.1



An #EndSARS protester giving an officer of Nigeria security and Civil defence corps a drink. This image encapsulates a moment wherein a protester and a Civil Defence Corps officer converge in a singular frame. The photograph, portraying a complex intersection of narratives, invites a nuanced exploration of the symbolism embedded in their actions. This analysis delves into the layers of meaning conveyed by the individuals' gestures, examining how the juxtaposition of the protester's passionate stance and the officer's vigilant demeanour symbolizes the ongoing struggle for justice and freedom in the Nigerian context.

The photograph depicts a resolute protester, with a nylon bag filled with drinks in her right hand, poised to amplify her voice in the ongoing protest against police brutality. In contrast, a Civil Defence Corps officer stands on the opposite side, sipping from a plastic bottle while maintaining a vigilant gaze on the surroundings. His firm grip on the bottle cap

and the presence of a rifle across his chest underscore his dual role of peacekeeper and observer. The backdrop further contextualizes the scene, featuring a Security and Civil Defence Corps vehicle manned by another officer.

This moment captures the convergence of disparate worlds—the impassioned protester representing the fearless spirit of Nigerian youth, and the Civil Defence officer duty-bound to uphold peace amid the protest. The juxtaposition of these contrasting roles encapsulates the multifaceted nature of the ongoing struggle for justice and freedom.

The white top serves as a significant signifier, as the colour white symbolizes peace and purity. The inscription "EndSARS" on the top is a direct reference to the protest movement against police brutality in Nigeria, indicating the wearer's support or affiliation with the cause. The choice of wearing this specific message on her clothing suggests a desire to express solidarity or raise awareness about the issues surrounding the #EndSARS movement. The black trouser with a slit on the knee region, the colour black symbolizes power, elegance, and strength. The slit signifies defiance, as it deviates from traditional trouser designs and adds an element of edginess to the outfit. The black sneakers contribute to the overall aesthetic of the outfit, signifying a casual and comfortable style. Sneakers are often associated with youth culture and activism, aligning with the narrative of the #EndSARS movement being predominantly driven by young people.

Amidst this charged atmosphere, the seemingly simple act of offering drinks emerges as a symbol of goodwill and kindness, transcending the traditional dichotomy between protesters and law enforcement. The protester's gesture of quenching the thirst of the Civil Defence Corps officer becomes a visual metaphor for bridging the gap between 'us' and 'them.' This symbolic act serves as a testament to the potential for unity and understanding even in the midst of a charged sociopolitical context.

This image vividly portrays a multifaceted narrative unfolding amidst the protest for justice. The protester's gesture of offering drinks symbolizes both kindness and a quest for peace, reflecting the genuine spirit of Nigerian youth. This gesture not only highlights the inherent goodness among the youth but also serves as a powerful statement against injustice, brutality, and corruption in Nigeria. The choice of a white top reinforces the message of peace, further underscoring the protester's commitment to non-violent resistance.

Fig. 2.2.2



Protesters sitting on the concrete roadblocks. This image represents resolute protesters seated on concrete roadblocks, each gesture conveying a narrative of endurance and resilience. Examining the distinct gestures—legs crossed, hands interlocked, elbows resting on knees, heads bowed in weariness, and arms folded in determination—reveals a profound icon that underscores their unwavering commitment, especially amidst the challenges of fatigue. The visual language captured in Fig. 2.2.2, shedding light on the symbolic power of these gestures as a testament to the enduring spirit of the protesters in their protracted struggle.

The crossed legs, a central motif in the image, evoke a sense of unity and shared determination. As the protesters sit with legs intertwined, it signifies a collective commitment

to the cause, showcasing their solidarity even in moments of physical strain. The hands resting on one another and the elbows leaning on knees suggest a communal strength, signifying mutual support and resilience. These gestures collectively symbolize a bond forged through shared hardship, a visual testament to the protesters' commitment to the cause.

Notably, the image captures the weariness in the bowed heads, a representation of the strenuous activities of their prolonged struggle. In this vulnerability, however, lies a paradoxical strength. Unable to stand, the protesters find empowerment in sitting—a metaphorical act that transcends physical limitations. The folded arms further emphasize their determination, signifying an unwavering resolve to persevere in the face of adversity. The visual contrast between weariness and determination encapsulates the essence of their struggle, portraying a profound resilience that persists even in moments of exhaustion.

This captivating photograph illustrates as a visual narrative of the enduring fight of the protesters. The symbolic language embedded in their gestures transcends the physical realm, communicating a collective commitment and resilience that withstands the challenges of fatigue. As the crossed legs, interlocked hands, and folded signify unity and determination, this image signifies the unwavering spirit of those engaged in a protracted struggle and the strength inherent in the pursuit of justice.

Fig. 2.2.3



This visual analysis examines a photograph depicting a scene involving a young person pinned to the floor, subjected to violence by a SARS officer. The image portrays a stark contrast between the victim's plight and the symbolic representation of human rights organizations, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

In this image, a young individual pinned to the ground with a severely beaten face, while a SARS officer attempts to strike them with a police baton. The officer's leg is oppressively placed on the victim, symbolizing dominance and control. From the upper right angle of the picture, a hand representing Amnesty International holds a flashlight, illuminating the scene. Just below, another hand representing Human Rights Watch holds a magnifying glass.

The battered face of the victim is signifier for the violation of their human rights by the SARS officer. The bruises on the victim's face not only depict physical harm but also symbolize the broader impact of systemic abuses. The oppressive act of the officer placing

their leg on the person on the floor underscores the abuse of power and the dehumanizing nature of the encounter.

In contrast, the light from the flashlight held by Amnesty International is a symbol of hope and justice. The victim, despite their dire situation, attempts to see where the light is coming from, indicating a glimmer of optimism amidst the darkness. This symbolic use of light suggests the potential exposure of the injustice and the possibility of accountability.

The hands holding the flashlight and magnifying glass represent Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, respectively. Amnesty International's flashlight serves as a beacon of transparency, shedding light on the human rights violation. Meanwhile, Human Rights Watch's magnifying glass signifies a meticulous examination and scrutiny of the incident, emphasizing the organizations' dedication to uncovering the truth.

The SARS officer's reaction to the light is a pivotal element in the photograph. The officer's glance towards the direction of the light, accompanied by an expression of anger, suggests an awareness of impending exposure. The fury in the officer's demeanour signifies resistance to accountability, emphasizing the potential consequences of their actions coming to light.

This photograph encapsulates a moment of human rights violation and the simultaneous presence of hope for justice. The Pic. 3 portrays the oppressive act of a SARS officer and the resilience of the victim seeking justice. The representation of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch introduces a narrative of accountability and scrutiny, highlighting the power of human rights organizations in exposing systemic abuses. This analysis underscores the complexities and contradictions inherent in the pursuit of justice within contexts marked by oppression and the tireless efforts of organizations dedicated to human rights advocacy.

Fig. 2.2.4



This is a photograph capturing a group of protesters, focusing on a lady wearing a facemask and holding a placard with a conditional and consequence statement. The inscription on the placard, written in black and red, reads, "na guy wey comot come protest nahim we go give bobbi," translating to 'The guy who comes out to protest is the one we will provide emotional support for.' Through an exploration of colour symbolism, linguistic elements, and the semiotic relationship between condition and consequence, this analysis aims to unveil the nuanced layers of meaning within the image.

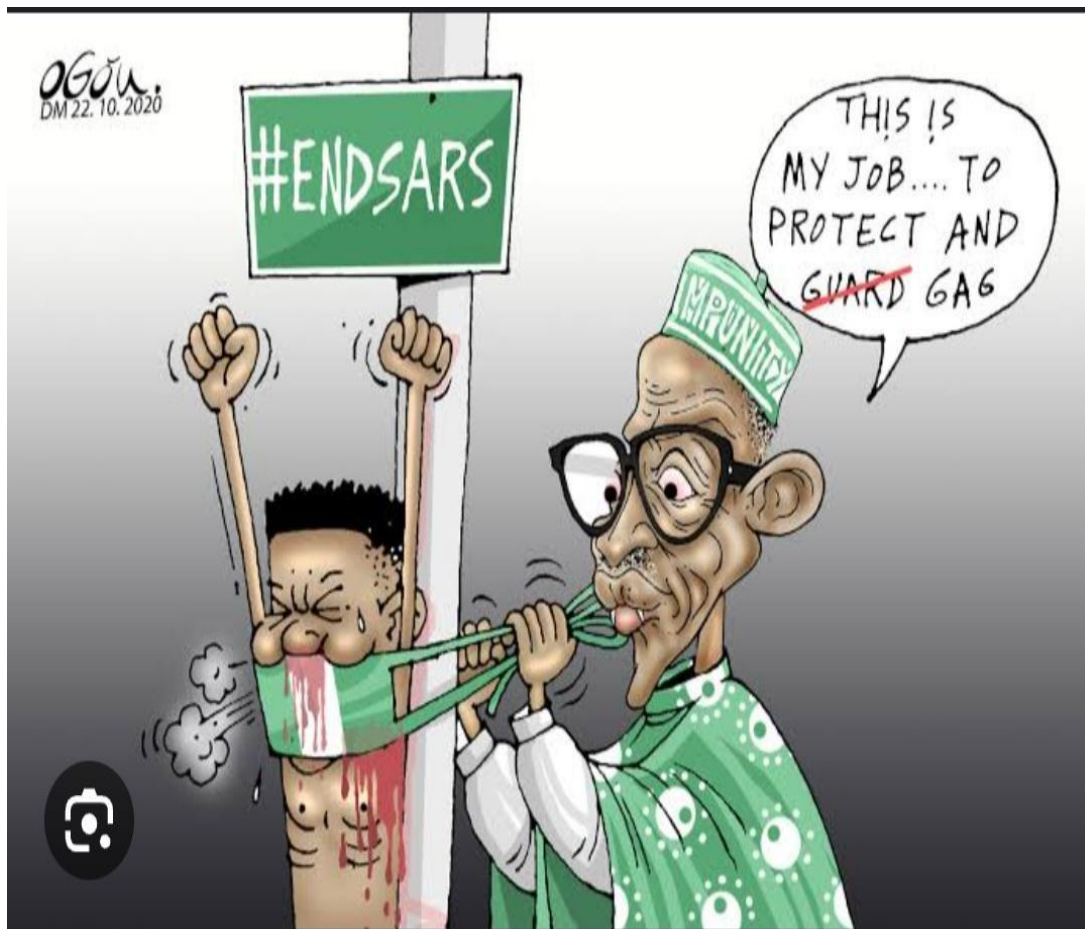
The lady at the centre of the photograph becomes a focal point, her determined gaze reflecting the gravity of the message she conveys. The placard, serving as a semiotic sign, introduces a conditional and consequence statement. The linguistic elements of the message are crucial in unravelling the intended meaning, highlighting the importance of participating in the protest and the subsequent provision of emotional support.

The use of colours in the inscription adds another layer of semiotic significance. The choice of black for 'na guy wey comot come protest' and red for 'na him we go give bobbi' is deliberate and symbolic. Black often conveys seriousness and gravity, emphasizing the condition of attending the protest. Red, a colour associated with passion and intensity, is reserved for the consequence, emotional support. The intentional use of colour enhances the visual impact and reinforces the emotional tone of the message.

The message itself functions as a conditional and consequence statement, a linguistic structure often employed to convey cause and effect relationships. In this context, 'na guy wey comot come protest' serves as the condition, outlining the action required, and 'na him we go give bobbi' represents the consequence, signifying emotional support as the outcome of participating in the protest. The term 'bobbi' introduces an additional layer of symbolism. While it can be translated as 'emotional support,' its colloquial usage in Nigerian Pidgin English carries connotations of camaraderie, understanding, and solidarity. The emotional support offered extends beyond a mere acknowledgment, implying a deeper connection within the protest community.

The conditional and consequence statement, reinforced by colour symbolism and linguistic elements, conveys a message of empowerment and community support. The deliberate choice of colours, the determined gaze of the protester, and the nuanced use of language collectively contribute to the semiotic richness of the image, illustrating the profound impact of symbols and messages in the context of protest movements.

Fig. 2.2.5



The photograph portrays an older man clad in a green-white-green agbada attire forcefully silencing a young protester with a facemask gag bearing the national colours. The older man, marked by a face full of wrinkles, glasses, and a cap inscribed with the word "impunity," shows a stark lack of empathy for the suffering of the young man. Pinned against a pole labelled #EndSARS, the young protester defiantly raises both fists in resistance. The gag, uncomfortably tight, restricts the young man's breathing, resulting in visible distress and bleeding. An inscription attached to the older man reads, "This is my job, to protect and gag." This analysis will uncover the semiotic elements within the image, elucidating the symbolic layers related to the #EndSARS movement, authority, resistance, and the repercussions of dissent.

The older man's choice of clothing aligns with the Nigerian national flag, using the green-white-green colours. This symbolizes a connection between the act of suppression and

a broader national context, possibly commenting on abuses of power within the nation. Cap with "Impunity" Inscription: The cap with the word "impunity" introduces a powerful semiotic layer. It signifies a disregard for consequences or accountability, aligning with the broader context of police brutality and human rights abuses addressed by the #EndSARS movement. The visibility of this word on the cap amplifies its impact, connecting it directly to the protester's suppression.

The green-white-green facemask gag reinforces the connection between the act of silencing and the national context. By using the colours of the flag, the symbolism extends beyond a mere act of suppression, suggesting an attempt to stifle dissent within the nation. #EndSARS Pole Inscription: The pole labelled #EndSARS provides a direct link to the larger protest movement. It positions the scene within the specific context of the call to end police brutality in Nigeria. The symbolism of the pole connects the act of silencing to the very issues the protesters are rallying against.

The young man's defiant raising of both fists serves as a powerful symbol of resistance. Despite the oppressive act, the raised fists signify a refusal to be silenced and a commitment to the cause. This gesture becomes emblematic of the resilience within the #EndSARS movement.

The severity of the gag, uncomfortably tight and causing visible distress and bleeding, becomes a poignant symbol. It illustrates the physical and emotional toll of dissent within the protest context. The bleeding suggests the sacrifice individuals are willing to endure in their pursuit of justice.

The inscription attached to the older man, stating, "This is my job, to protect and gag," introduces a layer of acknowledgment. It suggests a blatant admission of the role in

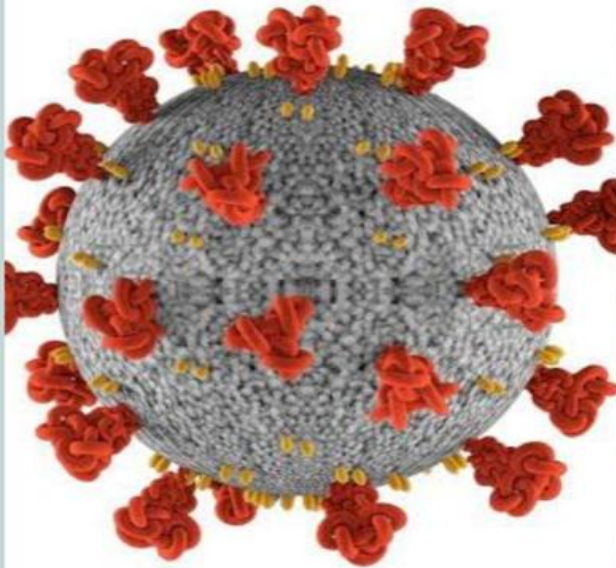
suppressing dissent, aligning with the broader critiques of impunity and abuse of power within law enforcement.

This image encapsulates a complex narrative within the #EndSARS protest context. The deliberate use of symbols—national colours, traditional attire, and specific inscriptions—introduces layers of meaning that extend beyond the immediate act of silencing. The older man, embodying authority, represents the very structures protesters seek to challenge. The facemask gag, bleeding, and the defiant fist gesture collectively embody the struggle against suppression and the resilience of those advocating for change.

The symbols and the visual narrative in fig. 2.2.5 contribute to the understanding of the struggle depicted. The image becomes a visual discourse on the abuses of power, the resilience of protesters, and the sacrifices individuals are willing to make during the #EndSARS movement. Each semiotic element—colours, attire, gestures, and inscriptions—serves as a potent signifier, inviting viewers to engage with the complexities of the protest narrative and the quest for justice and accountability.

Fig. 2.2.6

Lorem Ipsum Dolor



The first image, which is the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2, henceforth COVID-19), is at the left side of the entire space, while the second image, which is the special anti-robbery squad unit within the Nigerian police force, is placed at the right side. It is crucial to state that the SARS-COV-2 is not part of the data for the study. There is a reference to the virus because the virus and special anti-robbery squad share the same acronym and both happened simultaneously.

SARS-COV-2 in a spherical, grey, and red spiky fuzz ball-like. This appearance is a signifier of the virus in 2019, and that it is not an actual picture, rather it is a symbol. Its representation is arbitrary and conventional; that is, there is no direct relationship between the disease and the image. Moreover, the virus is wrapped in numerous colourful clumps i.e., grey, yellow and red. Covid-19 is a deadly disease that is spread through respiratory droplets released during coughing or sneezing or through contact with objects or surfaces that have the virus present. This disease is said to have claimed many lives during its breakout between late

2019 and 2020. While these three colours could mean that the disease have difference appearances in its victims, each of these colours highlight the effect of the disease on its victims.

In social code, the colour grey is often associated with uncertainty, indifference, and things that are not clearly defined, much like the concept of a grey area. Grey in the COVID-19 image, symbolizes the uncertainty surrounding the virus, its possible symptoms, and its effects on those infected. These symptoms include difficulty breathing, sore throat, shortness of breath, loss of consciousness, and the potential for loss of life, among others. What makes the situation more complex is that these symptoms overlap with those of other diseases like malaria, typhoid, and lassa fever. This ambiguity in the signification of the SARS-CoV-2 virus is interestingly similar to the ambiguity surrounding the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). Both entities are associated with the colour grey. The actions of SARS are often uncertain, as they have been accused of engaging in unlawful detention, extortion, illegal stop and search, and prosecution without due process, among other allegations. This uncertainty and lack of clarity make it difficult for individuals to predict or understand how they might be affected by either COVID-19 or the actions of SARS.

The second image (special Anti-Robbery squad) is presented in a human form. The man is dressed in the Nigerian Police Costumes-Police uniform with a badge (NPF), a bullet proof jacket with an inscribed name (Police), a sash that represent a gun, and a mask covering the face. These costumes are similar in colours to Covid-19 -grey, yellow (lemon green) and red.

The use of different colours to mask both the virus and the activities of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) within the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) carries significant relational meaning. Traditionally, the NPF is entrusted with the protection of lives and properties. However, the juxtaposition of the two images creates a signification relationship

that portrays the NPF as an entity contradicting its intended purpose. Instead of combating crimes and ensuring safety, the NPF, as depicted in the symbolic representation, is engaged in perpetrating violent acts and criminal behaviour. The visual representation of COVID-19 is strategically employed to amplify the mental representation associated with the brutal actions of this security agency. The use of a mask on the human face in the image signifies as a symbolic representation of how the criminal activities of the agency are concealed under the guise of the NPF's reputation as a national security organization.

Finally, the bullet proof jacket and gun establish the power status of his agency. Just like the virus is powerful and resulting in the death of many of its victims or leaving others vulnerable, so also is the NPF. The NPF through the activities of SARS have killed many innocent people while some others are left physically assaulted or with physical disabilities. Thus, the NPF signifies a powerful oppressor in the country.

Fig. 2.2.7



#ENDSARS

The signifier is the hashtag "#EndSARS," which serves as a powerful symbol conveying a message of protest against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The verbal signifier, "END" signifies a tone of resistance and revolt, reflecting the public's dissatisfaction with the actions of SARS.

The colours used in the hashtag and template, black and red, carry negative symbolism such as death, evil, and danger. The red, in particular, is used to signify the brutality of SARS and the negative impact it has had on the Nigerian populace, symbolizing the bloodshed and death of innocent people. The black background represents the corrupt and wicked nature of the Nigerian government.

The use of these colours and the hashtag is intended to evoke an emotional response from the audience, highlighting the dire situation in Nigeria and the need for action. The post aims to spur activism and further protest, urging the government to disband SARS and address the underlying issues in the country.

Fig. 2.2.8



The image presents the first signifier as a crowd with placards. The setting of the crowd with placards revolting actions as marked by imperatives (SAY NO TO ILLEGAL STOP & SEARCH) written in red and white colour on a black background, (#EndSARS Now) written in white colour on a red background and an assertion (WE SAY NO TO POLICE BRUTALITY) identifies the object) written in yellow on a black background with an image of a SARS officer holding a gun.

The imperative "SAY NO TO ILLEGAL STOP & SEARCH," written in red and white on a black background, carries a strong directive tone. The use of "SAY NO TO" signifies the protesters' refusal to accept or tolerate illegal stop and search practices. The colour red, symbolises urgency and danger. The black background symbolizes the seriousness of the issue and the need for immediate action.

Similarly, the message "SAY NO TO POLICE BRUTALITY, #EndSARS Now," written in white on a red background, reinforces the protesters' stance against police brutality.

The repetition of "say no to" signifies their refusal to accept such actions. The use of the hashtag #EndSARS Now signifies a call for immediate action to end the brutality perpetrated by SARS. The colour red, again, symbolises a sense of urgency and importance to the message, while the white text stands out against the red background, making the message clear and visible.

The assertion "WE SAY NO TO POLICE BRUTALITY," written in yellow on a black background, further reinforces the protesters' stance. The use of "WE" emphasizes the collective nature of the protest and the solidarity among the protesters. The colour yellow, often associated with caution and warning, signifies the urgency of the message, while the black background provides a stark contrast that makes the message stand out.

The language used on the placards conveys a clear and powerful message against police brutality and the specific actions of SARS. The use of imperatives, repetition, and assertive language reflects the protesters' determination and resolve to bring about change. The inclusion of the image of a SARS officer holding a gun signifies a reminder of the violence and intimidation faced by the protesters, further fuelling their resolve to bring about change.

In addition, the gestures from the protesters (raising placards above the head, pointing of the finger, gloomy face, opening of the mouth) signify their seriousness in demanding a change in the power relations under which the country is being governed, and the hopeless and depressing Nigerian situation caused by abuse of power.



Fig. 2.2.9

The image presents a fist engraved with the names of the victims of the police brutality. The raised fist is a symbol of resistance, solidarity, and strength, commonly associated with protest movements. Engraving the fist with the names of SARS victims adds a layer of symbolism, honouring their memory and highlighting the human cost of police brutality.

The use of the colours green, white, and green, which are the colours of the Nigerian flag, creates a sense of national identity and unity among protesters. “ENDSARS, ENDSWAT” further reinforces the protesters’ demands for an end to police brutality and the disbandment of the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) unit, which was created to replace SARS but was seen by many as a mere rebranding.

The black background serves as a stark contrast to the vibrant colours of the Nigerian flag, symbolizing mourning, grief, and the darkness of the injustices faced by the Nigerian

youths. Signification strategy of fist engraved with victim names serve as remembrance, and catalysis to face oppression.

Fig.2.2.10



A lady is depicted wearing a black facemask, which is a protective covering worn over the nose and mouth. She is holding a placard with three hashtags: #EndSARS, #ENDPOLICEBRUTALITY, and #aluta continua. The placard also contains a message: “make I see husband marry,” which is a colloquial expression in Nigerian Pidgin English meaning “let me see a husband to marry.”

The woman’s facemask can be seen as a symbol of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the need for protection and safety measures. COVID-19 is a deadly virus that spreads all over the world. To mitigate its transmission, the World Health Organization recommended implementing total lockdowns, which were enforced globally. Amidst the out-break of COVID-19, Nigerian youths embarked on protests against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and corruption. This agitation during the pandemic is such a challenging time that

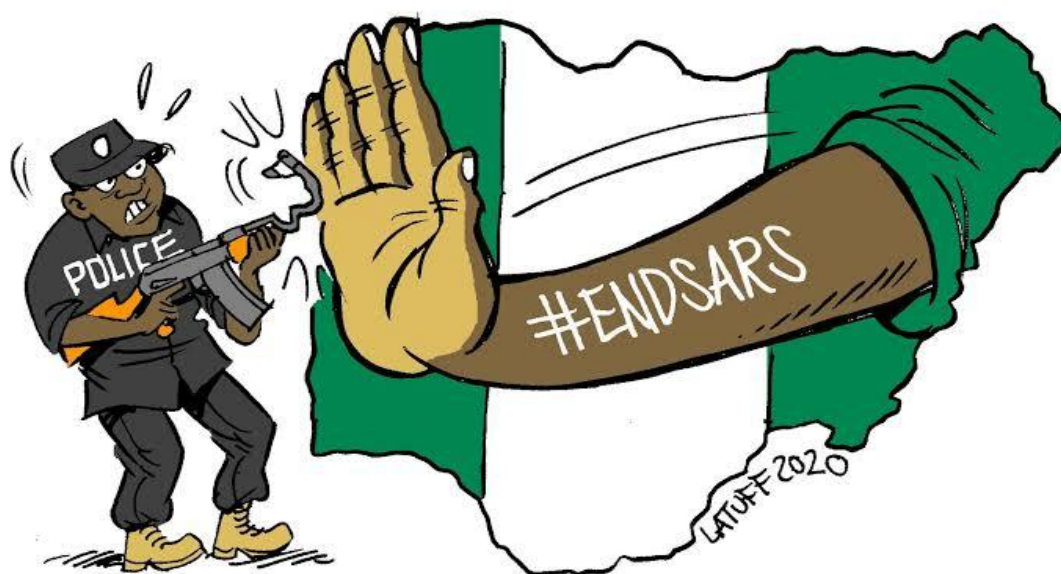
symbolizes the resilience and determination of the youth in protesting police brutality. It signifies the urgency of addressing the threat posed by SARS, which is perceived as more immediate and deadly compared to COVID-19, leading the youths to prioritize their demands for an end to SARS operations over concerns about the pandemic.

The placard also contains a message: #EndSARS make i see husband marry,” which is a colloquial expression in Nigerian Pidgin English meaning “let me see a husband to marry.” The word "end" serves as a signifier of resistance, indicating the dissatisfaction of Nigerian youths with the operations and conduct of the SARS. The phrase "let me see a husband to marry" is contingent upon the disbandment of SARS. SARS is known for its brutality and extrajudicial killings, particularly targeting young men. The expression "let me see a husband to marry" signifies the unjust killings of young men, which could lead to a significant reduction in the male population, impacting women's ability to find husbands in the future. The woman's plea to end SARS operations is rooted in her desire to find a husband, underscoring the urgency of the #EndSARS movement.

The hashtag “end police brutality” signifies as a rallying cry against the abusive and violent actions of law enforcement agencies, particularly the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), in Nigeria. The sign "END" functions as a signifier of cessation or termination, indicating the desire to stop or eliminate police brutality. It signifies a call to action, urging individuals to join the movement and demand accountability from authorities.

The hashtag "Aluta Continua," it is a motto of all Nigerian students’ union across all higher academic institution which signifies struggle continues. The hashtag #AlutaContinua symbolizes the enduring nature of the fight against police brutality and injustice. It symbolizes a message of hope and solidarity, inspiring people to remain steadfast in their quest for a more just and equitable society.

Fig.2.2.11



This picture presents a police man with a frowned face holding a gun, ready to shoot and a hand with the inscription of #ENDSARS stretched out of the Nigerian map bends the mouth of the gun.

The use of the gun in the officer's hand is a symbol of authority and control. It signifies the power dynamics at play in Nigeria, where the police force is often seen as using excessive force and violence against civilians, particularly the youth. The gun also symbolizes the threat of violence that looms over the #EndSARS movement, as protesters face the risk of being met with forceful suppression by the authorities.

Contrasting with the image of the police officer is a hand emerging from the Nigerian map, with the inscription #ENDSARS. This hand appears to be bending the mouth of the gun, symbolizing an attempt to disarm or neutralize the threat posed by the police force. The use of the Nigerian map as a backdrop adds a layer of national identity and solidarity to the message, suggesting that the #EndSARS movement is a collective effort to confront and challenge the status quo in Nigeria.

The inscription #ENDSARS on the hand further reinforces the message of the image. #EndSARS is a hashtag that emerged as a rallying cry against police brutality in Nigeria, specifically calling for the disbandment of SARS, a notorious police unit known for its human rights abuses. By incorporating this hashtag into the image, the artist aligns the message with the broader goals of the #EndSARS movement, which seeks to bring an end to police brutality and reform the Nigerian police force.

The act of the hand bending the mouth of the gun can be interpreted as a symbolic gesture of resistance and defiance. It suggests that despite the threats and intimidation from the police, the #EndSARS movement remains steadfast in its resolve to challenge injustice and demand accountability. The use of the hand also carries connotations of unity and solidarity, implying that the fight against police brutality is a collective effort that transcends individual actions.

The signification strategy gun, the hand, and the Nigerian map convey a message of resistance, solidarity, and defiance in the face of oppression. By juxtaposing the image of the police officer with the hand bearing the #ENDSARS inscription, the image creates a striking visual contrast that highlights the urgency and importance of the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria's sociopolitical context.

Fig.2.2.12



The image presents a man wearing a red singlet, a short and boot, holding a Nigerian flag in left hand and holding a lady's hand in his right hand while they were both running from flying bullets. The bullets pieced through the flag.

The man's attire, consisting of a red singlet, shorts, and boots, carries symbolic meaning. The colour red is often associated with passion, courage, and bloodshed. In this context, it symbolizes the passion and courage of the protesters, as well as the bloodshed and violence they are facing. The singlet and shorts suggest a sense of urgency and readiness for

action, while the shorts and boots symbolize readiness for action, in that protest involves moving around.

The Nigerian flag held by the man is a symbol of national identity and pride. However, in this image, the flag takes on additional symbolic meaning. The fact that the bullets have pierced through the flag signifies an attack on the nation itself, symbolizing the violence and oppression faced by the Nigerian people. Despite this, the man continues to hold the flag, symbolizing his resilience and determination to fight for his country.

The act of running is symbolic of the protesters' struggle for justice and freedom. It signifies their active resistance against oppression and their refusal to be silenced. The fact that they are running from flying bullets highlights the danger and risk involved in their protest, emphasizing the high stakes of their struggle.

The flying bullets are perhaps the most powerful symbol in the image. Bullets are universally recognized as symbols of violence, oppression, and death. In this context, they represent the brutal force used by authorities to suppress the protest. The fact that the bullets are piercing through the flag adds another layer of symbolism, suggesting that the violence is directed not just at the protesters, but at the nation itself.

This image is a representation of the #EndSARS protest and the struggle for justice and freedom. The signification strategy of the man's attire, the Nigerian flag, the act of running, and the flying bullets all come together to create a symbolic narrative of courage, resilience, patriotism, resistance as well as the determination of the Nigerian youth to stand up against injustice and demand change, even in the face of great danger.

Fig.2.2.13



A man is holding a white banner with an inscription “young Not criminal.” He has a frustrated facial expression. He is wearing a nose mask but shifted down to the neck. A person is walking by and seems he looks at the camera with a look of curiosity. There are lot of people in the image, some of them are the seat while most are on their feet."

In this image, the man's action of holding a white banner with the inscription 'young Not criminal' is a form of communication, using signs to convey a message. The colour white often symbolizes purity or innocence, contrasting with the message on the banner that states 'young Not criminal,' which is a direct assertion against the stereotype of young people as inherently criminal. The use of 'young' signifies a plea for understanding and empathy towards the youth, highlighting their potential and innocence in the face of societal prejudices. The phrase 'Not criminal' is a negation, rejecting the assumption of criminality often associated with young people, particularly in the context of the #EndSARS movement, which seeks to address police brutality and injustice.

The man's frustrated facial expression adds emotional depth to the message, signifying his dissatisfaction or anger with the current state of injustice. This expression

could be a reflection of the frustrations felt by many Nigerians, especially the youth, towards issues like police brutality, corruption, and social injustice.

The fact that the man is wearing a nose mask shifted down to the neck is noteworthy. Nose masks have become symbolic of the COVID-19 pandemic, but in this context, its position could signify a momentary pause in the pandemic-related practices, perhaps indicating a focus on more pressing issues such as the #EndSARS movement. It also symbolizes a form of resistance or defiance against the authorities' mandate to wear masks.

The presence of a person walking by and looking at the camera with curiosity adds a dynamic element to the image. This person could represent an outsider or observer, symbolizing the attention and scrutiny that the #EndSARS movement has garnered both locally and internationally. Their curiosity signifies a desire to understand the message being conveyed and possibly to learn more about the movement and its objectives.

The crowd in the background, with some people seated and most standing, adds context to the image. The mix of seated and standing individuals symbolize different levels of engagement or involvement in the movement, with some actively participating while others are more passive observers. The sheer number of people in the image highlights the widespread support and participation in the #EndSARS movement, symbolizing its significance and impact on Nigerian society.

Through the use of signs such as the white banner, facial expressions, and the presence of other individuals, the image effectively communicates the themes of solidarity, frustration, and defiance against injustice which are the objectives of the movement, urging viewers to reflect on the issues at hand and join the call for change.

Fig.2.2.14



This is an image of a lady wearing a white shirt with an inscription in red reading "SARS!!! AM I NEXT?!" and holding a yellow placard with the inscription "#iphone, laptop, styled hair, and living fresh isn't a crime" written in black, wine, and white colour, along with the Nigerian flag.

Starting with the lady's attire, the choice of a white shirt is significant. White symbolizes purity, innocence, and peace. In this context, it is a symbol of the innocence of the victims of police brutality, contrasting with the violent and unjust actions of SARS in Nigeria. The inscription, "SARS!!! AM I NEXT?!" is an expression of fear, anger, and defiance. The use of "SARS!!!" as the initial exclamation draws immediate attention to the notorious SARS in Nigeria, known for its history of brutality and human rights violations. The repetition of exclamation mark symbolises the urgency and intensity of the message, suggesting a sense of desperation and vulnerability felt by the speaker. The question "AM I

NEXT?" is deeply unsettling, as it signifies the fear and uncertainty faced by many in Nigeria who live in constant fear of being the next victim of police brutality. The use of the word "NEXT" signifies a sense of inevitability, suggesting that the speaker believes it is only a matter of time before they too fall victim to the same fate as others. This statement is a call to action, demanding an end to the violence and injustice perpetrated by SARS and highlighting the urgent need for reform and accountability within the Nigerian police force.

The inscription on the placard is also highly symbolic. The use of hashtags such as "#iPhone, laptop, styled hair" suggests a critique of the materialistic and superficial criteria often used by law enforcement agencies like SARS to profile and target individuals. By stating that these attributes "aren't a crime," the message challenges the unjust treatment and harassment faced by individuals who are targeted based on their appearance or possessions.

The colours used in the inscription on the placard - black, wine, and white - are also significant. Black is often associated with mourning, solemnity, and resistance, reflecting the sober mood of the protest and the resilience of the protesters. Wine, a deep red colour, can symbolize both love and anger, adding depth to the message and emphasizing the emotional intensity of the protest. White, as mentioned earlier, symbolizes innocence and peace, contrasting with the darker tones and adding a sense of hope and purity to the message.

The inclusion of the Nigerian flag on the placard adds a layer of national identity and pride to the protest. It symbolizes the unity of the Nigerian people in the face of oppression and injustice, reinforcing the idea that the protest is not just about individual grievances but about a collective demand for justice and reform.

2.3 Summary

The symbolic signs used in the #EndSARS movement serve as reminders of the injustices, brutality, and unlawful acts perpetrated by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in

Nigeria. These symbols, such as the image of a young man pinned to the ground with a severely battered face, evoke the harsh reality faced by many Nigerians at the hands of SARS. The act of running from flying bullets speaks to the fear and danger that citizens face in their daily lives.

Guns, bullets, baton, and face masks were originally intended to serve as tools of protection, safeguarding communities and upholding peace and order. However, in the context of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Nigeria, these items have become symbols of oppression and abuse of power. Rather than being instruments of safety, they have been perverted into tools of intimidation and human rights violations.

Additionally, the fist engraved with the names of victims of police brutality and the severity of the gag symbolize the suppression of voices and the lack of freedom of expression that characterize the Nigerian Police Force's actions. The illegal stop and search practices further highlight the disregard for the rule of law and basic human rights.

The protester's gesture of offering drinks symbolizes kindness and a desire for peace among the youth. This simple act speaks volumes about the true nature of Nigerian youth, highlighting their inherent compassion and goodwill. Despite the challenges they face and the injustices they protest against, the youth demonstrate a commitment to peaceful means and a willingness to extend kindness to others. This gesture serves as a reminder that amid turmoil and strife, there is still hope for unity and understanding, and that the youth are not just agents of change but also of compassion and peace.

Together, these symbols serve as a condemnation of the systemic issues within the Nigerian Police Force and a call to action for justice and reform.

CHAPTER 3

ICONIC SIGNS IN THE #ENDSARS PROTEST.

3.1 Introduction

Iconicity speaks to the subjective possibility of an interpreter freely associating a sign with experience (Robins 4). According to Liszka, “an Icon is a relation between a sign and its object based on some rule of similarity; but actual icons can be produced in several different

ways: mentally, phonetically, graphically, pictorially etc. (60). For example, a portrait, a cartoon, a scale-model, onomatopoeia, metaphors, realistic sounds in 'programmed music', sound effects in radio drama, a dubbed film soundtrack, imitative gestures. This chapter focuses of iconic signs as a mode of sign that serves as an interpretative tool to explicate the semiotic and signification processes in ENDSARS protest. To put it in another way, the signifier is seen to be a close likeness to the signified, or to be emulating the signified.

3.2 Data Analysis

In this chapter, the aim is to analyse ENDSARS protest icons to explicate signification processes embedded in the images.

Fig. 3.2.1



Fig.3.2.1 presents the image of the EndSARS protesters led by an activist Aisha Yesuf. In this picture, the linguistic signs (ENDSARS, ENDSARS NOW, SAY NO TO POLICE BRUTALITY, THE CHANGE IS NOW) and the positioning of the participants presents two groups as social actors; the protesters and the human rights activist. Aisha Yesuf, a woman wearing a 'Hijab,' a facemask, sneakers, and carrying a crossbody bag. Aisha is depicted standing with legs apart, raising her right fist in the air, against a backdrop of a group of

people whose features are deliberately blurred, except for the* placards they hold. The colours and inscriptions on these placards.

The Hijab is a traditional Muslim headscarf, is an iconic symbol of modesty and religious identity. The act of a Muslim woman wearing Hijab carries cultural and religious significance, representing adherence to Islamic values and principles. Aisha's Hijab coloured in green, white, and green serves as an iconic symbol. The choice of these colours aligns with the Nigerian national flag, indicating a strong connection to national identity and the #EndSARS movement. Aisha's and the protester's raised fist carry iconic significance, reminiscent of iconic gestures in protest history. The raised fist is a universal symbol of resistance, strength, and unity, aligning Aisha with a long history of activism.

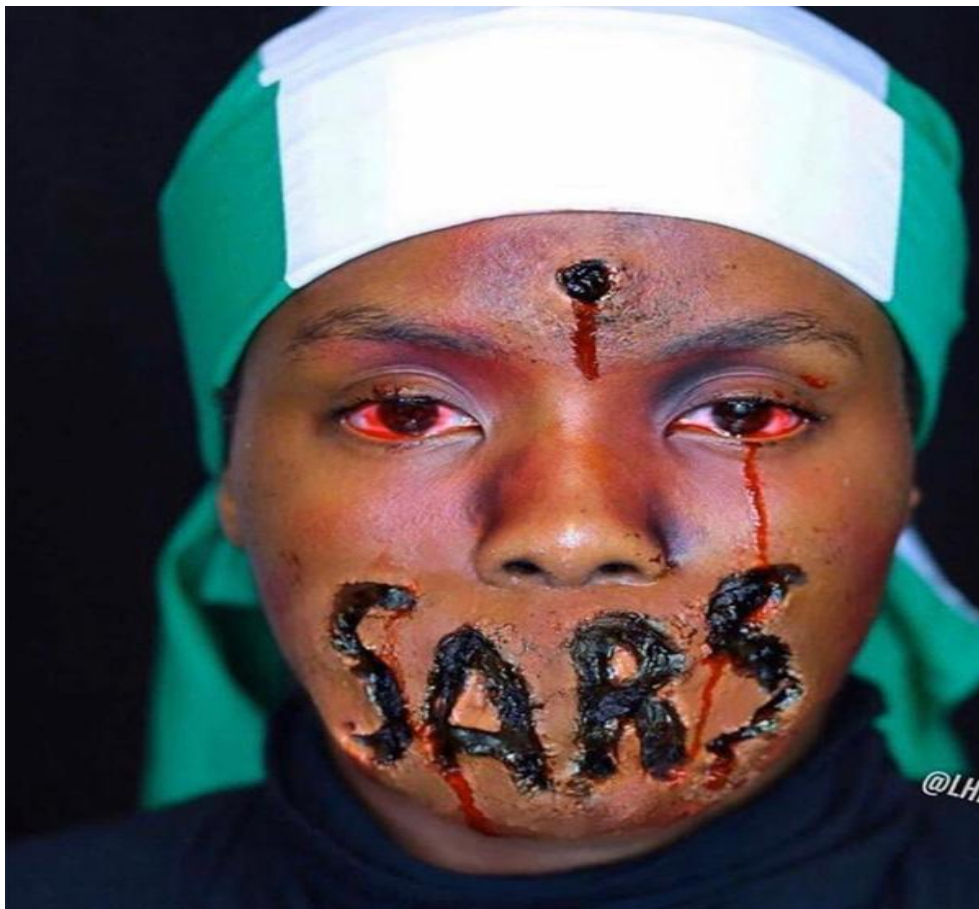
Aisha's 'Hijab' coloured in national flag hues, positions her as a symbol of national identity and resistance. The raised fist echoes iconic images of protest leaders, aligning Aisha with a legacy of activism. Her sneakers and crossbody bag add modern elements, signifying mobility and the contemporary nature of the struggle. Within the religion and social codes, Aisha as an icon, merge religious identity and activism through the portrayal of a Muslim woman wearing a Hijab and raising a fist. This combination challenges prevalent stereotypes and societal expectations linked to Muslim women. She is an icon of bravery which signifies as a visual representation of how one's religious beliefs and expressions of faith can harmoniously coexist with active involvement in sociopolitical causes. The semiotic significance stems from the deliberate blending of cultural and religious icons with a bold and assertive gesture, deviating from established norms and expectations. The deliberate blurring of the group foregrounds Aisha, making her the central iconic figure. This technique emphasizes the individual within the collective, suggesting that anyone can be a representation of resistance.

Aisha Yesuf is a mother of two. Mothers are instinctively protective of their children, often putting their own lives at risk to ensure the safety and security of their offspring. This protective role extends beyond biological ties to encompass a broader sense of care and compassion for all. Aisha Yesuf's presence in the protest highlights this protective instinct, as she stands as an icon of strength and resilience in the face of adversity. Her willingness to advocate for change and challenge injustice reflects the fierce protective nature of motherhood.

The placards held by the group members introduce iconic symbols through colours and inscriptions. The colours white, red, and black are iconic in conveying specific meanings. White symbolizes peace and change, red represents urgency and activism, while black signifies resistance and opposition. This shows that the #EndSARS protest was staged to negotiate for a peaceful and unified nation in the midst of chaos and tyrannical oppressive rule from the Police Force. Moreover, the inscriptions on the placards further contribute to the iconic semiotic narrative. "#EndSARS now" on the red placard communicates urgency and demands immediate action. The black placard with "Say no to police brutality" conveys a direct message of resistance. The white placard inscriptions, "The change is now" and "Youth are not the enemy of the state," embody aspirations for positive change and challenge societal perceptions.

Therefore, the use of iconic signs—colours, gestures, attire, and blurring techniques—constructs a narrative of resistance, urgency, and a collective call for change. The image becomes a visual discourse on the aspirations and challenges faced by Nigerian youths. Each iconic sign serves as a potent signifier, inviting viewers to engage with the complexity of the protest narrative and the enduring quest for justice and social transformation. The implication of these signs is that the protesters are projected as an icon of national peace rather than as antagonists and threat to the Nigerian federation.

Fig. 3.2.2



This image presents person with hair tie coloured green-white-green. A gunshot wound on the forehead that bleeds, blood-like tears rolling down from the eyes with black eyes. A rough inscription of SARS on the mouth region without a trace of the mouth.

The hair tie coloured in green-white-green is iconic with a direct connection to the Nigerian national flag. The green-white-green hair tie serves as a signifier of national identity and solidarity. Its presence signifies that the person identifies strongly with Nigeria and as a participant in the #EndSARS movement, that seeks positive change within the nation.

The gunshot wound and bleeding serve as iconic elements, representing physical harm and resistance. Wounds often evoke a sense of sacrifice and struggle, suggesting that the individual has been subjected to violence or injury because of injustice. The blood tears rolling down from the eyes, combined with black eyes, create an iconic representation of

suffering and pain. Black eyes traditionally represent physical trauma, and the tears reinforce the emotional toll of the depicted experience. The gunshot wound and bleeding, coupled with blood-like tears and black eyes, create an evocative iconicity of physical and emotional struggle. The wound signifies inflicted pain and the toll of resistance, emphasizing the SARS' victims experience of injustice.

The rough inscription of SARS on the mouth region, devoid of a trace of the mouth, introduces an iconicity loaded with political and protest-related connotations. The absence of the mouth, is an iconic representation of silencing, aligns with the broader narrative of the #EndSARS movement against police brutality and censorship.

The rough inscription itself becomes a distinctive icon within the #EndSARS movement. The acronym SARS is emblematic of the law enforcement unit that has been widely criticized for alleged human rights abuses and misconduct. Placing this inscription on the mouth region is a deliberate choice, using the visual element as an icon to represent the systemic silencing of voices within the movement.

The mouth is a universal symbol of communication, expression, and individual agency. Its absence in the visual depiction implies a deliberate act of suppression and silencing. By choosing to represent the mouth as erased or obscured, the image suggests a direct commentary on the stifling of voices and the curtailing of free expression, both fundamental aspects of democratic societies.

This visual metaphor resonates deeply with the experiences of individuals who have faced oppression and censorship, particularly those protesting against SARS. The intentional erasure of the mouth symbolizes the challenges and dangers faced by activists and citizens who speak out against injustice. It communicates a narrative of systemic attempts to quell dissent and hinder the ability of individuals to voice their concerns and grievances.

Moreover, the inscription on the mouth region serves as a call to action within the #EndSARS movement. It becomes a symbol of resistance against not only the physical abuses associated with SARS but also the broader oppression of civic engagement and freedom of speech. The visual portrayal becomes a rallying point for those advocating for change, highlighting the urgent need to break free from oppressive systems that stifle dissenting voices.

In essence, the rough inscription of SARS on the mouth region transcends its visual impact to become a potent symbol of the struggles inherent in the #EndSARS movement. It communicates a narrative of resilience, defiance, and the collective demand for justice and freedom of expression. The deliberate choice of this symbolic representation invites viewers to reflect on the challenges faced by the victims of SARS, injustice and amplifies the urgency of addressing systemic issues within law enforcement and the broader sociopolitical landscape.

Fig. 3.2.3



A young man on the road, picks a tear gas and throw it away during the protest. The image captures a moment of resistance and defiance, offering a rich semiotic landscape that encompasses symbols of protest, political struggle, and the individual's power in the face of oppression using socio-political code. The tear gas smoke serves as an iconic symbol that is universally associated with protests and civil unrest. Its presence in the image immediately establishes the sociopolitical context, a signifier for the authorities' attempt to control or disperse the crowd. The smoke signifying the challenges faced by the protesters in their quest for justice.

The presence of a young man on the road positions him as a central figure within the protest narrative. The youth have been prominent participants in the #EndSARS movement, symbolizing the vigour and passion of a generation seeking change. The road becomes a signifies space where the struggle for justice unfolds. The action of the young man picking up the tear gas is a powerful iconic element. It signifies not only an individual's agency but also a defiance against oppressive tactics. This gesture challenges the intended use of tear gas as a means of control, transforming it into a symbol of resilience and turning the tool of oppression against the oppressor.

The act of throwing the tear gas away signifies of resistance and reclaiming agency. This action transforms the tear gas canister from a tool of suppression into an iconic act of defiance. The trajectory of the thrown tear gas becomes a dynamic element in the image, capturing the moment of rebellion against authority. Collectively, these iconic signs construct a semiotic narrative of resistance, courage, and reclaiming power. The tear gas smoke signifies the oppressive response of authorities, while the young man's actions depict a refusal to be subdued. The road, the site of the protest, becomes an iconic arena where the struggle for justice unfolds, and the act of throwing tear gas away becomes an iconic action of control into a symbol of protest.

The deliberate choice of signifiers—the tear gas, the young man, and the act of defiance—forms a powerful visual discourse on the complexities of resistance and the resilience of individuals within a broader sociopolitical movement. The image captures a moment where icons and iconic action converge to convey a narrative of protest, embodying the spirit of the #EndSARS movement and the struggle for justice.

Fig. 3.2.4



A photo showing a young man standing on a police booth. Holding a stick with #EndSARS and Nigerian flag on it. In the socio-political code, the police booth serves as a powerful semiotic signifier. It signifies authority, law enforcement, and the institution that has become a focal point of critique within the #EndSARS movement. The image positions the young man as a central figure of significance. Youth participation has been a defining characteristic of the #EndSARS movement, and an icon of vigour and determination of a generation

advocating for change. His elevation on the police booth metaphorically places him above the structures of authority, signifying a moment of defiance against the established order.

The #EndSARS flag held by the young man becomes a powerful symbol within the image. The hashtag, now iconic, represents a collective call to end police brutality in Nigeria. The stick, grasped firmly, serves as an extension of the individual's agency, transforming the flag into a tool of resistance. Its presence signifies a visual commitment to the cause, aligning the young man with the larger sociopolitical movement.

In tandem with the #EndSARS flag, the Nigerian flag held by the young man introduces an additional layer of semiotic complexity. The national flag becomes a symbol of collective identity and unity, suggesting that the struggle against police brutality is intricately linked with the broader notions of national integrity and justice. The dual flags signify a harmonious blend of local and global concerns.

The vertical positioning of the young man, standing on the police booth, introduces a dynamic element to the semiotic analysis. This verticality signifies an inversion of power dynamics, where the individual rises above symbols of authority. It becomes a visual metaphor for the elevation of the collective voice over oppressive structures, reinforcing the narrative of resistance.

These iconic elements weave a semiotic narrative of resistance, national identity, and the reclaiming of power. The young man's stance on the police booth, coupled with the symbolic flags, encapsulates a moment of defiance and collective assertion against systemic injustices. The visual composition creates a dynamic interplay of signs, fostering a discourse that transcends the confines of the image itself. This analysis unveils the profound layers of meaning embedded in the photo of the young man standing on the police booth, holding #EndSARS and Nigerian flags. The iconic elevation of the young man, and the flags—constructs a visual narrative that transcends the immediate context of the image. It becomes a

powerful discourse on resistance, national identity, and the ongoing struggle for justice within the #EndSARS movement.

Fig. 3.2.5



This photo depicts a young man, partially unclothed, wearing only boxer pants and sneakers, holding a Nigerian flag. Around him are protesters who are holding a placard one of the

placards reads "Nigerian Police Force, protect us, don't kill us." The inscriptions on the placard are in black and red colours. The phrase "Nigerian Police Force, protect us" is written in black, while "don't kill us" is written in red.

In social code, the partial nudity of the young man is a bold visual semiotic choice, serving as an icon of vulnerability. This deliberate exposure of the body to reveal how fitted and bodily built he is signifies the tenacity, diligence, and drudgery of the youths against the notion that "Nigerian youths are lazy." In Nigerian society, partial nudity is perceived as defiance and uncelebrated, so, it becomes an emblematic representation of the exposed and defenceless state of the populace against police brutality. The choice of boxer pants and sneakers signifies a raw and unfiltered response, emphasising the authenticity of the protester's expression.

The Nigerian flag held by the young man introduces a national symbol into the visual narrative. The flag, clasped tightly, becomes an iconic representation of the collective identity and unity of the protesters. The act of holding the flag, even in partial undress, communicates a profound connection to national pride and a simultaneous call for protection against harm.

The inclusion of other protesters in the image forms a collective iconic sign. They share in the vulnerability expressed by the partially unclothed young man, forming a unified front against injustice. The placard they hold becomes a textual and visual semiotic signifier, conveying a specific message of plea and resistance. The inscriptions on the placard introduce a textual semiotic layer. The deliberate use of black and red colours is not incidental; it carries specific connotations. The phrase "Nigerian Police Force, protect us" in black signifies a direct appeal, while the phrase "don't kill us" in red intensifies the urgency and highlights the gravity of the plea. The use of colour becomes a crucial iconic sign amplifying the emotional impact of the message.

The contrast between black and red colours is iconic. Black, often associated with seriousness and formality, underscores the gravity of the appeal for protection. Red, on the other hand, conveys urgency, passion, and the severity of the threat being protested. The intentional use of these colours amplifies the emotional resonance of the message, creating a visual tension that aligns with the protest's underlying emotions.

The vulnerability of the partially unclothed young man juxtaposed with the national flag signifies the personal sacrifice and collective struggle for justice. The protesters, united in their plea, hold a placard that encapsulates both a desperate appeal for protection and a firm demand for the cessation of violence. The colour choices within the placard add layers of meaning, shaping the emotional and visual impact of the image.

In the cultural context of Nigeria, the national flag represents a shared identity, and the plea for protection resonates deeply with citizens who have faced systemic issues within law enforcement. The partial undress of the young man, far from being gratuitous, becomes a visceral representation of the exposure and vulnerability experienced by individuals in the face of police brutality. Each iconic sign—the partially unclothed young man, the Nigerian flag, the protesters, and the placard with its specific colour choices—contributes to a visual discourse on vulnerability, collective identity, and the urgent plea for protection. The image serves as a broader sociopolitical movement, where signifiers converge to communicate a

narrative of resistance, resilience, and a fervent call for justice.

Fig. 3.2.6

In this photograph, a lady is capture in front and side view. A crying lady is sitting on a lion statue and a holding a twisted Nigerian flag.



This image presents an iconic representation of the #EndSARS protest in Nigeria. The statue of a lion, traditionally signifies strength and courage, serves as a metaphor for the protesters' defiance against oppressive forces. The lady sitting on statue is an icon, representing the struggle of the Nigerian youth against oppression and injustice, portraying hope, resilience in the face of adversity and challenging authority.

The lady's tears are emotions, signifying pain and suffering caused by police brutality and corruption. Her tears can also be seen as an icon of mourning for the victims of injustice, highlighting the human cost of systemic oppression.

The meaning of the twisted flag is going to be reached through the social code and against a flying flag. A flying flag represents the pride, sovereignty, and peace of a country. The squeezed flag signifies the loss of a nation's pride and peace as a result of the inability to protect its citizens (youths) by security agents who are supposed to protect and secure but turned out to be the perpetrators of evil. The twisted flag signifies the incompetent law enforcement agency and the brutality it represents. This image captures the emotional turmoil and determination of the protesters, highlighting their quest for justice and change.

The signification strategy of lion statue, tears, and twisted flag convey a message of resilience, courage, and hope in the face of adversity. The image represents the collective struggle of the Nigerian youths against oppression and injustice, and their determination to bring about positive change.

Fig. 3.2.7



In this image, a lady wearing a facemask but drawn below the mouth and wearing a white top with red spots is being carried up by young men around her, she places her right hand on a man's to support herself to avoid falling down. She raises her left hand up, just at the same

level as her head, and the hand is stretched forward while her palm is opened, and a placard is raised beside her with the inscription #ENDSARS NOW. The placement of the lady's right hand on a man's head to support herself is iconic. Physically, it signifies her need for stability and support to avoid falling. Metaphorically, it signifies her reliance on others for support in her stance against injustice. This gesture highlights the importance of unity and cooperation in the #EndSARS movements, emphasizing that individuals working together to provide strength and stability to each other in the face of challenges.

The position of her left hand, held up straight with the palm facing outward, is a gesture of defiance or determination. This posture signifies that she is holding her head up high, facing the challenges ahead with courage and conviction. It reflects her strong resolve and willingness to stand firm in her beliefs.

In the social code, the white top with red spots worn by the lady, carries an iconic significance in the context of the protest against police brutality. The colour white traditionally signifies purity, innocence, and peace. In this context, it represents the pure intentions and innocent nature of the Nigerian youths who have been victims of police brutality, particularly by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The red spots on the white top signifies the bloodshed of Nigerian youths who have been brutalized and killed by SARS. Red is associated with blood and violence, and in this context, it represents the suffering and sacrifice of the victims of police brutality. The combination of white and red in the lady's clothing serves as an iconic reminder of the human cost of police brutality and the urgent need for justice and reform.

Furthermore, the placard held up beside her with the words "ENDSARS NOW" raised next to her reinforces her active participation in the protest and her unwavering commitment

to the cause. The prominently displaying this placard, expresses demand for an immediate end to police brutality and injustice, signalling her solidarity with the #EndSARS movement.

These actions and gestures represent the lady's active engagement in the protest, her reliance on collective support, and her unwavering determination to bring about change. The underscore the power of unity, determination, and collective action to positively influence #EndSARS movement outcome and to bring about sociopolitical change.

Fig. 3.2.8



A young man who looks depressed and tired is holding a banner while the focus is on and the people in the background are blurred. The banner has the written words ‘STOP KILLING THE LEADERS OF TOMORROW #END POLIC BRUTALITY. The banner has mint green, white, and mint green as its background colour, while the writing words are in red, white, black, and mint green.

The young man's expression of depression and fatigue serves as an icon of the emotional toll of the situation. His body language, likely conveying weariness and despair,

symbolizes the exhaustion and frustration felt by many in the face of ongoing issues, particularly police brutality. This aligns with the broader context of the #EndSARS movement, which emerged as a response to police brutality in Nigeria.

In socio-cultural code, the phrase "LEADERS OF TOMORROW" carries specific cultural meaning. In Nigeria, for example, young people are often referred to as the "leaders of tomorrow," highlighting their potential and role in shaping the future. The use of this term in the context of police brutality underscores the tragic impact of violence on the country's youth and the potential loss of future leaders. The text "STOP KILLING THE LEADERS OF TOMORROW" condemns the violence against young people but also signifies that those being harmed are the very individuals who should be shaping the future. This connects with the broader societal implications of police brutality, highlighting its impact on the future of the nation.

The use of hashtags, such as "#END POLICE BRUTALITY," reflects the digital activism and social media engagement characteristic of modern social movements. These hashtags serve as iconic markers, linking the physical protest to the online sphere, where conversations and organizing efforts are amplified.

The colour scheme of the banner is also significant. The choice of mint green, white, red, black, and mint green again creates a visually striking contrast. Mint green and white, as background colours, signifies peace, hope, and purity, contrasting with the severity of the message. The use of red, black, and white in the text adds a sense of urgency and seriousness, drawing attention to the call to action.

The blurring of people in the background is a deliberate choice to foreground the man's facial expression and message on the banner. This technique serves to amplify the urgency and importance of the message being conveyed, emphasizing the need for attention

and action regarding police brutality and the essence to preserve the lives of the youth in that they are the leader of tomorrow.

The image of the young man holding the banner serves as an icon of resistance and advocacy against police brutality. Through its semiotic icons, the image conveys a message of urgency, highlighting the emotional toll of violence on young people and calling for action to protect the "leaders of tomorrow."

Fig. 3.2.9



The picture presents a policeman with a pig face holding a man with his right hand and holding a gun in his left hand. The person held by the policeman has a big question mark in his head region with a statement, "who is next?". The policeman's foot is on the flag of Nigeria. The image has the inscription #ENDSARS.

In the social code, a person of pig-like character, behaviour, or habits, as one who is gluttonous, very fat, greedy, selfish, or filthy. The police officer with a pig face is a metaphorical representation to signify corruption, greed, and inhumanity. The use of an animal face to represent the police officer signifies a dehumanization of the police force,

portraying them as monstrous, greedy, and devoid of empathy. This emblematic portrayal of police brutality and corruption, suggesting that those in power have lost their humanity and become oppressive forces.

The act of the police officer holding a man with a question mark on his head adds another layer of meaning to the image. The question mark signifies uncertainty, fear, and the unknown. It signifies that anyone could be the next victim of police brutality, highlighting the pervasive sense of fear and insecurity in the face of unchecked police power. This icon also serves as a call to action, challenging viewers to question the authority and actions of the police force.

The fact that the police officer is standing on the Nigerian flag represents the iconicity of disrespect and disregard for the nation and its people. It suggests that the police force is acting against the interests of the country and its citizens, further emphasizing the extent of police corruption and abuse of power. This icon also serves to connect the image to the larger #EndSARS protest, which seeks to reform the Nigerian police force and address issues of corruption and brutality. The inscription "#ENDSARS" serves as a clear and direct message, linking the image to the broader protest movement. This image is a commentary on the #EndSARS movement and its goals of ending police brutality and reforming the police force. The use of the hashtag also suggests that the image is meant to be shared and circulated on social media, amplifying its message and impact.

This image is a provocative commentary on police brutality and corruption in Nigeria. The use of iconic elements such as the pig-faced police officer, the question mark, and the desecration of the Nigerian flag create a compelling narrative that challenges viewers to confront the realities of police violence and oppression.

Fig. 3.2.10



The image described presents a woman expressing anger, holding a white placard with the inscription #ENDSARS, and a fist painted in the colours of the Nigerian flag, green white green.

The woman's facial expression of anger serves as a signifier, conveying a sense of frustration, determination, and urgency. Anger is a universal emotion often associated with protest and resistance, signalling a strong emotional response to perceived injustices. In this context, the woman's anger is directed towards the issues represented by the #EndSARS movement, particularly police brutality, SARS, and corruption in Nigeria.

The white placard with the inscription #ENDSARS serves as a textual signifier, conveying the central message of the protest movement. The hashtag #ENDSARS has become a symbol of the movement, used widely on social media and in protests to call for an end SARS, a controversial police unit in Nigeria known for its brutality and human rights abuses. The use of the hashtag on the placard represents the woman's alignment with the goals and values of the movement.

The colours green, white, and green are symbolic of Nigeria's national identity and are used to represent unity, peace, and progress. By painting the fist in these colours, the woman is not only showing her support for the #EndSARS movement but also aligning herself with the broader aspirations of the Nigerian people for a better and more just society.

The icon elements in this image work together to convey a message of resistance, solidarity, and determination. The woman's facial expression of anger, coupled with the symbolic use of the #ENDSARS hashtag and the Nigerian flag colours, creates a visual statement that demands attention and calls for action.

3.3 Summary

In this chapter, the protesters employ iconic signs such as colours (the green-white-green hair tie serves as a signifier of national identity and solidarity), gestures (throwing of tear gas, raised fist, standing on police boot, and angry face), attire (flag, hijab, stained top, and hair tie), and blurring techniques—constructs a narrative of resistance, urgency, and a collective call for change. Each iconic sign serves as a potent signifier, inviting viewers to engage with the complexity of the protest narrative and the enduring quest for justice and social transformation.

Aisha's portrayal as an icon merging religious identity and activism is a powerful statement challenging stereotypes associated with Muslim women. By wearing a hijab and

raising her fist in protest, she defies societal expectations and stereotypes, which often limit the role of Muslim women to the private sphere. Her image is an icon of bravery and resilience, demonstrating that one's religious beliefs and practices can coexist harmoniously with active engagement in sociopolitical causes. This challenges the misconception that Muslim women are passive or oppressed.

CHAPTER FOUR

INDEXICAL SIGN IN THE #ENDSARS PROTEST

4.1 INTRODUCTION

An indexical sign is a sign that indicates something. It is a sign whose signifier we have learnt to associate with a particular signified (18). It is based on a connection physical or causal relation which can be observed or inferred e.g. natural signs (smoke, thunder, footprints), signals (a knock on a door, a phone ringing), pointers (a pointing 'index' finger, a directional signpost), recordings (a photograph, a film, video or television shot, an audio-recorded voice), personal 'trademarks' (handwriting, catchphrases).

4.2 Data analysis

In this chapter, the signs are analysed as indicators of the dehumanization, violence, social stereotypes, and injustice inflicted upon youths by both SARS and the Nigerian government.

Fig. 4.2.1



Two men wearing a SARS crested vest, a mask revealing their eyes, carrying rifles with smoke coming out of them and they are walking away from a dead man in a pool of blood in void environment and they are chatting about the dead man,

SARS OFFICER 1: did you see his phone?

SARS OFFICER 2: yes, I think he is a YAHOO BOY

The SARS crested vest serves as a signifier of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a controversial unit of the Nigerian Police Force. The vest indicates authority and power, but in the context of the above image, it signifies abuse of power and impunity. The vest becomes an index of fear and oppression, highlighting the systemic issues within the police force. The mask covering the men's faces, except for their eyes, adds a layer of anonymity and dehumanization. Masks are often used to conceal one's identity, allowing for actions to be carried out without fear of reprisal or accountability. In this context, the mask

serves as an index of deception and concealment, reinforcing the idea of impunity and lack of accountability.

The rifles carried by the men, emitting smoke, are powerful indicators of violence and aggression. The smoke signifies immediacy and danger, indicating that the rifles have recently been fired. The presence of firearms in the picture signifies power and control, highlighting the asymmetrical power dynamics at play in the scene. The image of the SARS officers walking away from a dead man in a pool of blood is an indicator of violence, lack of empathy, and death. The dead man indicates the ultimate consequence of the actions (gunshot) taken by the SARS, highlighting the human cost of their actions. The pool of blood signifies a visceral reminder of the brutality and inhumanity of SARS officers, evoking feelings of shock and horror.

The void environment, devoid of any context or background, indicates isolation and hopelessness. It signifies the impunity and lack of accountability that often characterize cases of police brutality, where such acts occur without consequences or repercussions.

The dialogue between the two SARS officers indicates their callousness and dehumanization of the victim. Their casual conversation about the dead man, focusing on his phone and labelling him as a “Yahoo Boy” (a term used to describe internet fraudsters), further devalues his life and justifies their actions in their eyes and an indicator of the SARS lackadaisical attitude and inability to carry out a proper investigation. “Did you see his phone?” indicates something extraordinary, like, being expensive and sophisticated. The mention of the victim’s phone indicates a motive or justification for the killing. It indicates that the victim’s possession of a phone is seen as incriminating or suspicious, reflecting the arbitrary nature of police brutality and the profiling of Nigerian youths based on stereotypes.

This image is an indexicality of the realities of police brutality and impunity faced by youths in Nigeria. Through its visual and verbal elements, it signifies the dehumanization,

violence, and injustice faced by Nigerian youths at the hands of law enforcement who are supposed to serve and protect.

Fig. 4.2.2



This is a picture of the Nigerian flag with red Splashes (blood) during the #EndSARS protest at the Lekki toll gate on the 20th of October, 2020.

In the socio-political code, in the image is representation of the transformation of the Nigerian flag into a symbol of tragedy and loss during the #EndSARS protest. The flag, traditionally indicates unity and national pride, takes on new meanings in the context of the protest, reflecting the sacrifice and suffering of the protesters as well as their struggle for justice and reform.

In the former Nigeria national anthem, “our flag shall be a symbol that truth and justice reign in peace or battle honour’d and this we count as gain, to hand on to our children, a banner without stain”. The Nigerian flag is typically associated with notions of unity, patriotism, and national identity. It is a powerful indicator that represents the diversity of Nigeria’s people and cultures coming together under one banner. However, in the context of the #EndSARS protest, the flag is transformed into a symbol of tragedy and loss. The blood-

soaked flag serves as a reminder of the human cost of the protest, highlighting the sacrifice and suffering of the protesters who were injured or killed during the army shooting at the Lekki tollgate.

Furthermore, the image of the blood-soaked flag also signifies the failure of the government to protect its citizens and uphold their rights. The flag, which is supposed to indicate the unity and strength of the nation, and without stains becomes an indicator of betrayal and disappointment. The protesters, many of whom were young people calling for an end to police brutality and corruption, felt let down by the government's response to their demands. The image of the blood-soaked flag reflects their loss of faith in the authorities and their belief that the government had failed to live up to its responsibilities.

Fig. 4.2.3



The signifiers in this image include giant policeman, holding a gun, pointing it at a skinny protester, skinny protester, putting his feet at the tip of the gun, and policeman looking a bit surprised. These signifiers contribute to the overall signified meanings and relationships within the scene.

The giant policeman signifies authority and power, as his size and stature suggest dominance. The act of holding a gun and pointing it at a skinny protester conveys aggression and intimidation, highlighting the potential for violence. This action not only indicates the policeman's authority but also instils fear in the protester and those witnessing the scene.

On the other hand, the skinny protester signifies vulnerability and weakness in contrast to the imposing figure of the policeman. Despite this vulnerability, the protester also embodies resistance, as indicated by their presence in the face of danger. The act of the skinny protester placing his feet at the tip of the gun can be seen as a symbol of defiance, bravery, and a desperation to end police brutality. This action is an index of a bold and courageous stand against oppression, challenging the authority and aggression of the police. It reflects a deep-seated desire for change and justice, highlighting the protester's

determination to resist and bring an end to the cycle of violence and abuse perpetrated by law enforcement.

Fig. 4.2.4



The image from the #EndSARS protest captures a moment of unity and commitment within the protest movement. The scene depicts a lady and a man seated together on the ground, surrounded by protesters. The lady, who is proudly displaying her left hand with a ring on the fourth fingers (also known as ring finger) with an expression of joy on her face.

The man beside the lady holds a placard bearing an inscription in Nigerian Pidgin English: “na woman wey follow us protest we go propose to”. It conveys the man’s intention to propose marriage to a woman who actively participates in the protest. This gesture is not just a personal expression of love and commitment but also a symbolic recognition of the invaluable role that women play in supporting their man, driving social change, and standing up against injustice.

In social code, wearing a ring on the fourth finger of the left hand also known as ring finger is a public declaration of love and commitment to another person. The signification strategy of ring serves as a bond between two individuals, signifying a promise to stand by each other through thick and thin. In the case of a protest, wearing such a ring can be seen as a statement of commitment and solidarity not just to one's partner, but to a larger cause or movement. In this specific scenario, the woman's decision to display a ring while protesting against police brutality signifies not only her personal commitment to her partner but also her dedication to fighting against injustice and violence. By wearing the ring, she is essentially saying that her fight against police brutality is not just about herself or her partner, but about creating a better future for everyone.

In a broader sense, her act of displaying a ring while protesting can be seen as a form of resistance. In the face of violence and oppression, she is using a symbol of love and commitment to assert her humanity and her right to a better future. It is a reminder that even in the darkest of times, there is hope and love that can drive us to create a better world. The juxtaposition of these two elements – the lady's display of her ring and the man's inscription on the placard – highlights the interconnectedness of personal and collective struggles.

Fig. 2.2.5



A hand holding a placard with the inscription NO TO SARS NO TO CORRUPTION NO TO INJUSTICE #ENDSARS. NO TO is written in black colour and SARS, CORRUPTION, INJUSTICE, and #ENDSARS is written in red colour.

The hand holding the placard is an indexical sign, indicating the protester's direct action and message. By physically holding the placard, the protester communicates their stance against SARS, corruption, and injustice. The act of holding the placard also signifies the protester's agency and empowerment, as they actively participate in the protest and advocate for change.

The first inscription, "NO TO SARS," directly addresses the issue of police brutality and the demand for the disbandment of SARS. "No" is a negation to the activities of SARS. The second inscription, "NO TO CORRUPTION," broadens the scope of the protest, indicating a rejection of systemic corruption within the government and law enforcement agencies. This reflects a deeper societal issue that the protesters are seeking to address. The third inscription, "NO TO INJUSTICE," encapsulates the overarching theme of the protest, which is a call for justice, fairness, and accountability. It indicates a rejection of the status quo and a demand for a more just and equitable society. The hashtag #ENDSARS serves as a rallying cry and a unifying symbol for the movement, encapsulating the protesters' main objective. Overall, the image conveys a clear and concise message of defiance, solidarity, and determination in the face of oppression and injustice.

The use of colours in the placard adds depth to its meaning. The choice of black for "NO TO" may signify a call for an end or a rejection of the issues highlighted. Black is often associated with mourning, seriousness, and authority, suggesting a strong and serious tone in the protester's message. In contrast, the use of red for "SARS," "CORRUPTION,"

"INJUSTICE," and "#ENDSARS" can symbolize passion, urgency, and importance. Red is a colour that signifies danger, warning, and activism, highlighting the critical nature of the issues being addressed. The placement of "NO TO" in black before each term in red creates a visual hierarchy, emphasizing the rejection of these issues. The repetition of "NO TO" before each term suggests a categorical refusal or denial, reinforcing the protester's position against SARS, corruption, and injustice. This repetition also serves to unify the message, making it clear and impactful.

The hashtag is a symbol of online activism and social media mobilization, indicating that the protest is part of a larger movement. The use of the hashtag also suggests a call for visibility and solidarity, as protesters seek to amplify their message and reach a wider audience.

Fig.2.4.6



The image of two ladies staring and facing each other, both adorned in black t-shirts with overlay grey and black jackets and black nose masks with the inscription while holding burning candles, carries profound semiotic significance.

Firstly, the choice of attire is significant. The black t-shirts symbolize mourning and solidarity, often associated with protests and remembrance. The overlay grey and black jackets add a layer of sophistication and formality, suggesting a serious and sober mood. The black nose masks with the inscription "ENDSARS" not only serve the practical purpose of protection but also act as symbolic markers of the cause they are advocating for. The inscription itself, "ENDSARS," is a direct indexical sign referring to the movement against police brutality in Nigeria, particularly the call to end SARS.

The act of holding burning candles adds another layer of indexicality. Candles are often used in vigils and memorials to signify hope, remembrance, and solidarity. They are mourning the victims of police brutality. The flames flickering in the darkness can be

interpreted as a metaphor for the light of justice and truth shining in the midst of adversity and oppression. The burning candles also suggest a sense of urgency and activism, implying that the movement is alive and burning with passion and determination.

The posture and gaze of the two ladies further enhance the semiotic message of the image. Their direct and intense stare at each other signifies a sense of unity and determination. It indicates a shared purpose and a strong bond forged through their commitment to the cause. The act of facing each other can be seen as a confrontation, not with each other, but with the issues and forces they are protesting against.

4.3 Summary

In the context of the #EndSARS protest, indexical signs are pivotal in conveying the gravity of the situation faced by Nigerian youths. In this chapter, the signs analysed serve as direct indicators of the dehumanization, violence, social stereotypes, and injustice inflicted upon youths by both SARS and the Nigerian government. One of the most potent indices is the transformation of the Nigerian flag, typically revered as a representation of strength and unity, into an index of governmental failure and its inability to ensure the rights and safety of its citizens.

The use of indexical signs in the #EndSARS protest is not just about highlighting individual cases of injustice but also about drawing attention to the larger patterns of abuse and neglect faced by Nigerian youths. These signs served as a call to action, urging both the government and society at large to address the underlying issues that had led to such widespread suffering and disenfranchisement.

In essence, the indexical signs used in the #EndSARS protest acted as a powerful tool for shedding light on the realities faced by Nigerian youths. They served as a stark reminder

of the urgent need for change and justice, challenging both the government and society to confront the systemic issues that had allowed such injustices to persist.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

5.1 Summary

The #EndSARS protest in Nigeria was a multifaceted movement that utilized a variety of semiotic elements to convey its message and objectives. Among these elements, symbolic signs such as colours, images, hashtags, and gestures played a crucial role in representing the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) as a symbol of brutality and oppression. These signs served as a mental, ideological, and physical representation of the agency's notorious reputation, depicting it as an instrument of stifling dissent and perpetuating injustice.

One of the key symbolic signs used in the protest was the colour red, which is often associated with urgency, danger, and revolution. Many protesters wore clothing with red print or spot, inscriptions in red colour, or carried Nigerian flags red spots to signify blood, using this colour as a symbol of their determination to bring about change. The use of images, such as posters and banners depicting police brutality, also served to symbolize the oppressive nature of SARS and its impact on Nigerian society.

Hashtags played a significant role in the #EndSARS protest, serving as a digital rallying cry that united protesters both online and offline. The use of hashtags like #EndSARS, #EndSWAT, #AlutaContinua, #WESAYNOTOPOLICEBRUTALITY, #EndSARSNOW and #EndPoliceBrutality helped to amplify the message of the protest and draw international attention to the issue. These hashtags became symbolic of the broader movement for justice and reform in Nigeria, symbolizing the collective call for change.

Gestures are another important semiotic element used in the protest, with raised clenched fists, kneeling, throwing of tear gas, and standing on police boot symbolizing resistance and solidarity. These gestures were often accompanied by chants and slogans, further reinforcing the message of the protest and creating a sense of unity among protesters. Iconic signs such as colours, gestures, attire, and the blurring technique were also used to create an iconicity of resistance and urgency in the #EndSARS protest. The use of the colour green, white, green in the Nigerian flag, for example, signifies the hope for a better future and

a reminder of the unity of the country. The blurring technique, which is used in photographs to create a sense of motion and urgency, adding to the iconicity of the protest, highlighting the need for immediate action.

The indexical signs used in the #EndSARS protest serves as indicators of the dehumanization, violence, social stereotypes, and injustice suffered by Nigerian youths at the hands of SARS and the Nigerian government. The Nigerian flag, which is traditionally seen as a symbol of strength and unity, became an index of a failed government and its inability to protect the rights and safety of its people. Visual and verbal signs, such as photographs and testimonies of brutality, served as indexical signs of the systemic issues plaguing Nigerian society.

The #EndSARS protest stands as a compelling example of how semiotics can be used to convey a powerful message and mobilize a movement for change. By employing symbolic, iconic, and indexical signs, the study illuminates the cyclical nature of Nigeria's challenges and underscore the urgent need for reform. The study demonstrated that unless these systemic issues are addressed, the cycle of corruption and brutality is likely to persist, perpetuating a cycle of injustice and unrest.

5.2 Findings

The following are the findings of this semiotic study:

1. The #EndSARS text function as a complex semiotic system, comprising various constituent units such as hashtags, images, slogans, and gestures, as well as, the interactions among these units contributed to the #EndSARS text's overall meaning by highlighting the cyclical nature of societal challenges in Nigeria.
2. Signification strategy of colour (red, yellow, black, and green), gestures (raised fist, raised flag, and sitting of protesters), attire (hijab, hair tie, and face mask) are

employed by agitators as signs of resistance, urgency, justice for the Nigerian youths, and socio-political change.

3. Hashtags like #ENDSARS, #ENDSWAT, #ENDPOLICEBRUTALITY and #ALUTA CONTINUA are used in mobilizing participants by creating a sense of solidarity and collective identity among protesters.
4. Symbols such as clenched fists and kneeling were employed to signify resistance, unity, and peaceful protest, creating a visual language that resonated with participants and observers.
5. Just like covid-19 virus is masked in different colours to convey its brutality, so is the SARS unit of the NPF. The Nigerian Police Force is originally saddled with the protection of lives and properties. However, the relational meaning the signifier in the image gives to the signifier in the second image establishes the activities of the Nigerian Police Force as an antithesis. Simply put, rather than the Nigerian Police Force to combat crimes and violent activities in the country, they are the ones perpetuating such crimes. Thus, the image of Covid-19 is used to enhance the mental representation and interpretation of the brutal actions/activities of this security agency.
6. Aisha Yesufu is an icon of bravery which serves as a visual representation of how one's religious beliefs and expressions of faith can harmoniously coexist with active involvement in sociopolitical causes.

5.3 Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to knowledge in several ways:

1. The study provides a deeper understanding of how signs are utilized in #EndARS protest, highlighting the intricate signification strategies employed by the agitators.
2. The study extends the frontiers of past research by providing information on the linguistic role of icons, symbols, and indices in activism.

3. It contributes to the knowledge of ` rhetorical and persuasive power of signs in online activism.

5.4 Recommendations for Further Studies

These are some recommendations for further research:

1. Explore the cross-cultural applicability of semiotic strategies used in the #EndSARS protest, comparing them with similar movements in other regions to identify universal and culturally specific signifiers of protest and resistance.
2. Explore the ethical implications of semiotic manipulation in protest movements, including the use of images and symbols to evoke emotional responses or misrepresent realities, and consider the implications for media literacy and democratic participation.

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