Chapter 8

Representing Trump and Trumpism Through Caricature: A Semiotic Analysis of Selected Editorial Cartoons Published in Nasoweseeam

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the Nigerian media representations of Donald Trump’s controversial policies, statements and style of government. It specifically examines Nigerian caricaturists’ criticism of these aspects of American politics through a semiotic analysis of six editorial cartoons penned by Boglo G. and published in the Nigerian online magazine Nasoweseeam, from 2016 to 2018. In the light of the semiotic analysis conducted in the study, the chapter argues that Nigerian political cartoonists have continuously given a remarkable attention to U.S. politics (notably Trump’s presidency), particularly exploring the angle of U.S. policies’ impact on Nigeria(ns). Their cartoons have been tapping into both universal myths and local idiosyncrasies to represent the Trump administration in particular, and the American nation as a whole. Such a representation has mostly been negative. Icons, indexes and symbols have thus, most often been mobilized in their cartoons to associate Trump, Trumpism and/or America as a whole with such negativities as racism, Islamophobia, Nazism, xenophobia and authoritarianism, among others.
INTRODUCTION

Like in many other countries of the world, American politics has persistently fueled the socio-political discourse and has inspired various aspects of popular culture in Nigeria. Indeed, major political events in America notably the U.S. Presidential elections, U.S. foreign policy, U.S. military involvement in specific regions of the world and even America’s domestic policies among other things, have often had the effect of influencing socio-political discourse in Nigeria, especially when such domestic or foreign policies have serious potential to affect the lives of Nigerian nationals or immigrants in the U.S. One remembers how issues such as Obama’s elections in 2008 (as the first Black U.S. President) as well as America’s legalization of homosexuality and her resolve to make gay rights advocacy a major feature of her foreign policy in Nigeria in 2015 variously fuelled debates in almost all quarters of the Nigerian society, thereby becoming the talk of the town. Page (2017) has for instance noted how Obama’s 2008 rise to the American Presidency was greeted with widespread euphoria in Nigeria; while Adaobi (2015) lamented how America’s legalization of homosexuality inspired widespread fears and resentments of the U.S. foreign policy in Nigeria. Such fear and resentments were mainly expressed through both traditional media and social media platforms. Adaobi actually noted that:

Many Nigerians are genuinely terrified of gay marriage. And they are distraught over the U.S. Supreme Court’s recent decision to legalize gay marriage in America. They express sadness and pity for what is supposedly God’s Own Country. They predict America’s inevitable decline. But the emotion most potent in their words is fear. The kind you might expect from news of an impending tsunami. (Adaobi, 2015, para 2-3)

In line with this tradition of developing a strong interest in anything American, the recent rise of trumpism in the U.S. has progressively and remarkably become a serious topic for socio-political discourse in Nigeria. Simply defined as the outrageous and controversial statements made by Donald Trump as well as the American-centric policies advocated for by the Trump administration, trumpism has since the year 2016 implicitly or tacitly inspired political and media discourse in Nigeria. Some of the popular ways in which Nigerian media houses and politicians have chosen to discuss this political current have been editorials, gossip and opinion columns and more especially political cartooning. In effect, as an instrument par excellence of
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