

## Nigeria Policemen's Abuse of Power Memes as Reformatory Indices

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### ABSTRACT

Several Studies have investigated Nigerian police discourse. However, digital memes deployed to reflect corruption-related activities at police checkpoints have attracted inconsequential research. This paper, therefore, examines selected Nigeria Police digital memes with the aim to analyse qualitatively embedded socio-semiotic functional loads instantiated digitally to satirise corruption-related activities of some Nigeria policemen at police checkpoints and how these privileges reformatory advocacy in Nigeria. Seven digital memes that thematised Nigeria policemen's abuse of power at checkpoints were purposively selected from Opera News Nigeria, an app that allows African bloggers to create online content and share such with a fast-growing subscriber base. In interpreting the selected digital police memes, this paper adopts the theoretical underpinnings of Gunther Kress' (2010) social-semiotic theory of multimodality. Through its theoretical apparatus, results established that functional loads such as contemptible open extortion, symbolic blind allusions, duty deviance, wrong motif towards checkpoints, detrimental frustration, checkpoints' main duty negligence, and lawlessness characterised the police memes. These characteristics, in sequence, highlight the prevalence of corrupt practices within the force, wilful demonstration of ignorance in the face of systemic policing issues, ill-commitment of some Nigeria policemen to duties, wrong motif towards checkpoints, and their potential misuse. This paper affirms that the satirical philosophy inherent within most Nigeria policemen's abuse of power digital memes points towards reformation and reorientation of members of the Nigeria Police Force. This investigation, therefore, contributes to a nuanced understanding of how digital communication tools can serve as catalysts for reformatory advocacy within the context of law enforcement reforms.

**Keywords:** digital memes; Nigeria Police Force; satire; social-semiotics

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, there exists a broad assemblage of government-owned security institutions, of which the Nigerian Police Force (henceforth called NPF in this study) is the most prominent. The NPF is a centrally-administered federal security institution with a uniform national structure (Owen, 2012) established to be a vital part of Nigeria's political order. The nature of this political order essentially lies in the enforcement of "specific rights policies, either protecting rights where violations are threatened" (Carter & Marenin, 1979:46-47), or averting acts of malefaction where necessary. Largely, the NPF has the constitutional mandate of crime prevention and eradication; apprehension and prosecution of criminals; protection of lives and property through proactive policing in Nigeria.

The act of policing in democratic Nigeria by the NPF is complex. As an agency of the Nigerian criminal justice system, the NPF engages in a wide array of behavioural problems, each perplexing in its own way. In dealing with the prevailing crime dynamism, protection of human rights, terrorism, kidnapping, maintenance of order, conflict resolution, and other special duties, the NPF is considered to be task-filled. This policing complexity is further problematised by "diversities and contradictions arising from population heterogeneity, urbanization, industrialization, conflicting ideologies on the

appropriate socio-political and economic form of organization” (Alemika & Chukwuma, (2001:2), and technological advancement, among others. Given this complex nature of NPF’s duties and operational challenges, a high degree of integrity, well-designed arrangements and organisation in discharging their duties are expected. However, these have been defectively upheld over the years. As a matter of course, there have been efforts to reform the NPF’s institutional operations, accountability and oversight frameworks such as making the institution more democratic, improving public confidence and mitigating corruption. Yet, all these reformatory measures are still not well grounded in the NPF, especially in the area of corruption that is still a major murky water in which the NPF wallows.

Ivković (2014:305) describes police corruption as “a form of police misconduct...defined as a violation of penal codes, administrative agency rules, or the codes of ethics.” Kempe (2016:5) illustrates this further when he states:

...police corruption is any action or omission, a promise of any action or omission, or any attempt of action or omission committed by a police officer or a group of police officers, characterised by the police officer’s misuse of the official position and motivated in significant part with the achievement of personal/private or organisational gain or advantage.

Going by these archetype conceptualisations, the NPF, characteristically, has reputation for institutional corruption which has undermined its institutional recognition as a law enforcement agency. Though the Nigeria Police Act, signed into law in September 2020, makes provision for a well organised police force driven by the principles of transparency, accountability in operations, protection of human rights and management of resources among others, the act has not engendered any notable transformation among many members of the NPF. As much as there exists what can be relatively considered as a new Police Act (2020), the retention and sustenance of the same culture of corruption and impunity among police officers underlies the fact that as far as policing in Nigeria is concerned, it is still business as usual. Nwite (2022, p.1) illustrates the extent of decadence and rot in the NPF with the involvement of a decorated, senior police officer in drug trafficking. According to him:

The arrest of Nigeria’s hero “super cop” Abba Kyari over his involvement in drug trafficking has once again; put the Nigerian police Force (NPF) on the spotlight. Kyari who was under investigation for his involvement in a \$1.1 million internet scam was suspended by the Police in July. His ability to still run a team that intercepted a drug deal while under suspension has put a question mark on anything integrity left with the Nigerian Police. To many, it is not surprising though. The NPF has overtime, by its actions and inactions, refused to put on the image that will earn it public trust. There are more stories of police involvement in criminal activities than there are of actual criminals in Nigeria – the reason the EndSARS protest happened.

In addition to the fold of the NPF’s unlawful activities is the aura of corruption that pervades security checkpoint – checkpoint extortion. Security checkpoints, also known as roadblocks in the Nigerian context, which are strategically mounted to forestall crime, have become brazen extortion points, ubiquitous sites of police impunity and abuse of power. In essence, many men and women of the NPF stationed at these checkpoints are known to be more concerned with the naira notes they illegally collect from motorists than diligent policing and prevention of crimes. An editorial opinion of *The Guardian* (2022, p. 5) validates this illegal strand of NPF excesses thus: “the menace

of extortionate security men at check points is nationwide. Successive IGPs have had to order their men off the road because they do not do what ought to by law...they tend to go beyond their briefs." Nevertheless, with this effort, the level of compliance to the discontinuation of extortion-points has not been so convincing. Further efforts were averred in April 2021 by Usman Alkali Baba, the IGP to present a police force guided by the principles of public accountability, conformity with the rule of law, and as compassionate servants and helpers of citizens. However, the conducts of police officers at checkpoints still negate these good intentions of the IGP with regard to present day policing.

At different capacities, attempts have been made to instil sanity of ethical policing that underscores norms and style associated with democratic-style policing into the NPF. For instance, successive administrations in the current democratic dispensation, had initiated reforms to revitalise the NPF. In a similar capacity, "Nigeria has a strong record of independent organisations promoting reform. [...] many Nigerian academics, analysts, politicians, advocacy groups have recommended ways in which the NP can be reformed" (Hills, 2008:219-220). In a significant way, media, in this case, news, social, web and print among others, have been utilised to draw the attention of the public to the alarming corruption, notoriety and the exigency of reforms in the NPF. The social media, essentially, amongst all, is an archetype digital sphere where NPF and contaminative policing are predominantly portrayed by virtue of unrestricted netizenhip. The representations of the NPF, though satirical, capture a critical ambience of the need for reformation and reorientation of the police. This reformative satirical act has been effectively achieved on the social media through digital memes. In describing meme and its characteristics, Shifman (2014:4) affirms that "like many web 2.0 applications, memes diffuse from person to person, but shape and reflect general social mindsets". The NPF digital memes are products of shared (direct and indirect) societal experiences with the rank and file of the police. These memes are the creations of sociocultural overt reproduction, constructed through edifying artefacts (photoshopped images) and made prominent in contemporary digital culture.

The concept of meme and its semantics which originally is the creation of Richard Dawkins, an Oxford biologist in his book, *The Selfish Gene*, 1976 and 1989 respectively, has since been reappropriated by the internet and morphed into what Shifman (2014:15) describes as "(post)modern folklore, in which shared norms and values are constructed through cultural artefacts such as photoshopped images or urban legends". Dawkins, having characterised meme as basic unit of cultural transmission that is analogous to genes, portrayed meme as an idea, behaviour or style that spreads from person to person by copying or imitation. Dawkins illustrates meme technically to include tunes, ideas, catchphrases, clothes fashions, and ways of making pots or of building arches. According to Dawkins, "just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation" (1976:192). While memes today can certainly denote any of the above, they do not only spread from brain to brain, but now, they leap virally from one internet protocol address to another internet protocol address, via a process which in the broad sense, can be called imitation. Further than what Dawkins considered as meme driven by human representative and re-representative behaviours, Shifman (2014:2) guided by technological transformations in the light of digital technologies, yokes meme with internet, and affirms that "internet meme is commonly applied to describe the propagation of items such as jokes, rumors, videos, and websites from person to person via the internet". Meme is created or based in a real life event that spreads through the internet causing people to replicate it. Sometimes, it spreads in the same way and sometimes it spreads by means of change (Castaño Díaz, 2013). Digital

technology has provided the digital space that has become a fertile and unfettered ground for the inundation of (internet) memes with communicative implications. An investigation of internet meme in the digital space thus opens up the cyber ways of representing socio-political narratives together with their implications and functions.

Memes have characteristics that guarantee virality. According to Dawkins (1989), memes possess three characteristics: longevity, fecundity and copying-fidelity. In the words of Shifman (2014:17):

...All three are enhanced by the internet. Online meme transmission has higher copy-fidelity (that is, accuracy) than communication through other media, since digitization allows lossless information transfer. Fecundity (the number of copies made in a time unit) is also greatly increased – the internet facilitates the swift diffusion of any given message to numerous nodes. Longevity may potentially increase, as well, because information can be stored indefinitely in numerous archives.

Beyond these identified characteristics, Shifman (2014) stresses that the meme is the best concept to encapsulate some of the most fundamental aspects of the internet in general or web 2.0 culture in particular. Thus, owing to these fundamental aspects (which may include but not limited to reproduction, replication), memes have been ascribed three main attributes which are relevant to the analysis of contemporary digital culture: a gradual propagation from individuals to society, reproduction via copying and imitation, and diffusion through completion and selection. All these attributes engender Shifman (2014:18) to claim that memes are “pieces of cultural information that pass along from person to person, but gradually scale in a shared phenomenon. They spread on a micro basis, their impact is on the macro level: memes shape mindsets, form behaviour, and actions of social groups”.

Internet memes are social constructs consciously designed to communicate deep-seated discourse that signals social concerns and seeks justice. They are cyber weapons now integrated into our digital social life and discourse structure. “...we live in an era driven by a hypermemetic logic, in which almost every major public event sprouts a stream of memes”, Shifman (2014:4). In the past, and at this present time, the NPF and its officers have constituted one of the major public discourses that have provoked internet memes from Nigerian netizens. These memes incorporate, to a large extent, Eno-Abasi's (2023, p.2) description of the ignominious activities of some men of the NPF:

“I will kill you and nothing will happen.” “If you say anything again I will just waste you. I've wasted many of your type, so you will not be the first or the last.” These and many more obscene lines have become part of the refrain that some officers and men of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) bandy when they get berserk and try to ride roughshod over citizens that they are supposed to protect. Across that country, scarcely does a day pass without a trigger-happy belligerent policeman brutalising, robbing, maiming, or extorting an innocent member of the public that has the misfortune of crossing their path.

The critiquing of this level of policemen's abuse of power which reflects lawlessness, impunity and corruption by Nigerian netizens in diverse memetic forms is a pop/cyber culture that may appear humorous and inconsequential. However, a critical examination of these pieces reveals that they possess inherent salient points beyond being amusing.

There have been a number of scholarly linguistic works on police discourse. Beyond the shores of Nigeria, scholars in the humanities have critically engaged police discourse in the areas of policing

and intelligence operations, police interview discourse, police and criminal justice discourse, police comments, policing and racial profiling, dynamics of power and resistance in police interview discourse, respectively (cf. Atkinson, 2023, Jenkins, 2022, Methven, 2018, Haworth 2009 & 2006, Glover, 2007). In the same line of discourse, previous studies in Nigeria have investigated the English language competence of the men of NPF, conversational strategy in police-suspect interaction, forensics of police investigation reports and court proceedings, Nigerian police-suspect discourse, and concealment in police-suspect interaction, respectively (cf. Udo 2015; Akinrinlola & Farinde, 2018; Oche, 2020; Farinde, Oyedokun-Alli & Iroegbu, 2021; Akinrinlola, 2021; Akinrinlola & Ajayi, 2022). However, a linguistic consideration of corruption-related activities of officers of the NPF at police checkpoints has not been devotedly given the required attention. Thus, this current investigation departs markedly from the highlighted works above given that it concentrates on Nigeria policemen's abuse of power digital memes – multi-moulded socially constructed Nigeria police discourse, instantiated digitally to satirise NPF's abuse of power at police checkpoints and privilege reformative advocacy. The rationale for focusing on such archetype of meme is because policemen's abuse of power at checkpoints is a popular public discourse in Nigeria.

This paper adopts Gunther Kress' (2010) social-semiotic theory of multimodality taking into account that it enables a deeper comprehension of multimodal components. Kress' social-semiotic theory of multimodality came to rival the general semiotics (cf. Saussure, 2022; Peirce, 1931; Chandler, 2017; Bühler, 2011; Jakobson, 1960), and evidently shows Kress' generalist linguistic orientation in the universals of *sign-making* and understanding, and displays his ideological engagement which puts the *interests* of the sign user first and *motivation* – in Saussure's sense – above all else (Stöckl, 2023). The socio-semiotic theory diverges critically from Saussure's fundamental principle that affirms that language should be viewed as a system of arbitrary signs governed by rules which fix the inherent variability of language and keep it stable. As an alternative to this, the theory claims that language is intrinsically fluid and dynamic because the relationship between the material form of the sign (the signifier) and its meaning (the signified) is not arbitrary but motivated by the sign-maker's *interest*. As affirmed by Kress and Jewitt (2003:10), people “use the resources that are available to them in the specific socio-cultural environments in which they act to create signs”, so signs (a fusion of form – the signifier and meaning – the signified) are *motivated*, and not arbitrary. Signs are not static; they are always newly made according to context of use. Thus, the meanings of signs are constantly transformed as sign-makers select the most *apt* sign from the *available resources* based on context and sign-maker's *interest* (Bock, 2016).

Signs exist in all *modes*. Kress (2010:79) conceptualises mode as “a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning”. Mode, according to Kress (2010) includes such examples as image, writing, layout, music, gesture, speech, moving image, soundtrack and 3D objects deployed for representation, communication and essential contributory phenomenon to the meaning of a *sign-complex*. Humans engage with the world through these socially made and culturally specific resources and they do so in ways that arise out of their interests. With these magnitude properties of mode, Kress (2010) argues that the meaning of any message is distributed across a range of modes and that language which “had been seen as a full means of expression; as the foundation of rationality; sufficient for all that could be spoken and written, thought, felt and dreamt is now seen as a partial means of doing these” (Kress, 2010:84). Mode is said to offer meaning-laden means for making the meanings that we wish or need to make material and tangible – realising, materialising meanings. Modes, in their varying affordances, make it possible to make

meanings material with specific ontological effects, according to the intentions of rhetor and designer.

In realising meanings, design is another concept central to the socio-semiotic theory. It anchors on apt specifications deployed by sign-makers to achieve meaning in totality. Design, in the submissions of Kress (2010:139), refers to “the use of different modes – image, writing, colour, layout – to present, to realize at times to (re-) contextualize social positions and relations, as well as knowledge in specific arrangements for a specific audience”. Design in socio-semiotic does not recline on language alone. It is encompassing in nature in meaning representation; enhanced by contemporary media.

Based on this background, this paper examines Nigeria policemen's abuse of power digital memes – multi-moulded socially constructed Nigeria police discourse, instantiated digitally to satirise NPF's abuse of power at checkpoints and provoke reformatory advocacy. Nigeria policemen's abuse of power digital memes fit into Kress' (2010) theoretical underpinnings of socio-semiotic theory because they are *modes* with *sign-complexes* and specific *designs* driven by *motivation* and *interest of sign-maker* (meme-maker); *apt* contextually. Moreover, Kress' (2010) socio-semiotic theory, in this current investigation, is suitable as it facilitates a deeper understanding of Nigeria policemen's abuse of power memes in a digital context. In this regard, this paper is able to bridge digital satire with reformatory discourse by investigating how these policemen's abuse of power memes might serve as communicative tools to prompt awareness, dialogue, and influence reformatory advocacy in the context of policemen's misconduct at checkpoints in Nigeria.

## 2. METHOD

For data, this study gave preference to *Opera News* by virtue of the fact that this news feed is one of the most used news and content apps in the world. Besides this rationale, the flexibility of *Opera News* allows African authors and bloggers to create online content and share such with the fast-growing *Opera* user base of more than 350 million users worldwide (Partner, 2020).

There are other social media platforms and online forums but this investigation relies on the *Opera News* for its data specifically because it accommodates a great number of memes of various contents on the Nigeria Police Force unlike others. From the *Opera News* forum, seven (7) digital police memes that portray abuse of power at police checkpoints were purposively selected. This research endeavour focuses on Nigeria policemen's abuse of power at checkpoints because such discourse has essentially become a complex and multifaceted issue that resonates with the populace because of their experience with the Nigeria policemen, and moreover, reports of abuse by some policemen at checkpoints has gained visibility through user-generated content than other policemen-related discourse.

It is important to also state that some of the selected memes comprise known public figures in Nigeria. With respect to ethical consideration, *Opera News* is a public-oriented forum where user-generated and algorithmic contents are meant for public consumption. More to this is that the public figures used in the memes require lower expectation of privacy because of their profession, and the content with which they have been used involves no potential harm to them. Thus, requesting for permission to carry out a scholarly investigation of the memes that involve them may not be necessary. This study is, therefore, motivated to subject the selected Nigeria policemen's abuse of power digital memes to qualitative analysis through Kress' (2010) socio-semiotic theory. In effect, a qualitative analysis in this paper is intended to provide an in-depth understanding of the socio-

semiotic variables inherent in the memes by uncovering the nuances of motivations, embedded messages and the contextual aptness of signs, contributing to a comprehensive interpretation. The method of analysis, therefore, involves a comprehensive analysis of motivational factors, interests, modes of communication, design elements, aptness within socio-cultural context, sign-complexes, and functional loads to understand and reformulate the discourse around Nigeria policemen's abuse of power at police checkpoints through the selected digital memes.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION



*Figure 1. Meme taken from the Opera News Nigeria*

Figure 1 is a socio-semiotic mode borne out of the meme/sign-maker's social interaction with the officers of the NPF. It is an image with five major signifiers (e.g. a police man, a naira-note, a driver's hand, a vehicle and the caption – "Anything for the boys?") culminating into a sign-complex with functional loads. The meme-maker, no doubt, must have, at a number of occasions, experienced what is fully designed in the entire mode. The mode showcases an embedded culture of the NPF at a supposed checkpoint – a policeman extorting a naira-note from a driver in the full glare of the public. Hence, the meme-maker is motivated to put all the signifiers together because this sort of unenviable police conduct in Nigeria, especially at checkpoints mounted by the officers of the NPF, has been discredited as corrupt practices over time. The motivation that underscores this meme is further established as by the *Daily Post* reporter (2019, p.3) thus:

The Nigerian Police Force has expressed concern over the activities of some officers collecting money especially from motorists at police checkpoints. The Deputy Inspector General of Police supervising north-west zone, DIG Aminchi Sama'ila Baraya stated this during an inspection tour and meeting with political stakeholders held at the Jigawa State police command headquarters in Dutse. He strongly condemned the act and other forms of dehumanisation or collection of money especially at motorist checkpoints.

The display of unprofessionalism and official corruption by the officers of the NPF constitutes built-in discourse in Nigeria that cannot but attract concerned interest such as the meme above. The picture signifiers: a police man, a naira-note, a driver's hand and a vehicle are apt contextual signifiers of this condemnable act. This is further corroborated by the caption – "Anything for the boys?". "Anything for the boys?" is a recurring question asked by the officers of the NPF at police checkpoints in Nigeria. It is a jocular way of illegally requesting money or other inducement from motorists. Largely, therefore, these signifiers are apt and persuasive given that as sign-complexes, they in unison expresses a signified of satire in the context of this contemporary topical issue such as contemptible

bare police extortion which proves the NPF's progressive degeneration of policing; thereby suggestive of reorientation and reformation advocacy of the NPF.

The NPF is undeniably a very sensitive security agency constitutionally saddled with the responsibility of maintaining public law and order. However, and regrettably so, some officers of the NPF are neglectful of these civic duties. Figure 2 is created to respond and reflect on such dereliction. As a socio-semiotic mode, it can be ascertained that this meme is a product of the meme maker's direct or indirect encounter with some exploitative officers of the NPF. This unwholesome encounter informs the motivation for this sign. The meme is designed with two major apt signifiers (e.g. images of three police men, non-police individual and a text on the top of the images). Naturally, the activity being embodied in the mode – three police men apprehending a man, is reasonably representative of what law enforcement agents should do especially in cases of alleged crime. However, the signifier 'You wear red shirt inside a black car, how many cult you dey [lit. You wear a red shirt in a black car. How many cult groups do you belong to?] ostensibly exhibits the nature and goal of such apprehension. Although a mere appraisal of the text signifier and the image signifier (e.g. the non-police individual) shows evident contradiction, given that the individual in question does not 'wear a red shirt but a red cap'. Nonetheless, a critical engagement of these ensemble sign-complexes characterises the meme maker's interest as it affects the NPF. Similar to what motivates the sign maker's interest is what Adediran (2019, p.3) underscores when he asserts that:

Several victims of police harassment recounted their ordeals in the hands of the officers at a press conference in Lagos on Thursday. The press conference organised by the Network on Police Reforms in Nigeria, focused on cases of police corruption and abuse across Nigeria and the need to drive a holistic reform in the Force. Among the excesses of the police force raised by NOPRIN are indiscriminate arrest and detention of young men, violation of human rights, raid of public places by rogue police, use of torture to extort information from suspects, and many other oppressive activities of police officers



Figure 2. Meme taken from the Opera News Nigeria

The internet meme is a highly exploitable tool for civic communication by grass root action since it could reach audiences outside their usual demography (Harbo, 2022). The sign in question, represented by the meme, is a civic mode with apt signifiers. The image signifier (e.g. three police men and non-police individual) and the text signifier (e.g. You wear red shirt inside a black car, how many cult you dey [lit. You wear a red shirt in a black car. How many cult groups do you belong to?]) portray the level of unprofessionalism and crass abuse of office by some officers of the NPF. The misrepresented notion such as being cladded in a red shirt and in a black car to connote being a member of a cult by a supposed professional body is shockingly bad and myopic. Hence, this



collection of image and text is apt signifiers deployed to express a satire that unearths symbolic blind allusions to some wrong societal beliefs initiated by some officers of the NPF to harass and deprive people, especially Nigerian youths of their human rights, especially the right to freedom of dressing; thereby calling for a re-education of the NPF of what their civic duties really are.

Figure 3 is analogous to the previously discussed meme. It is a meme, a socio-semiotic mode, with ensemble text signifier (e.g. Me the day #9japolice asked me for my jack after checking all my papers. [lit. This is me, the day Nigeria police officers asked me for my jack after checking all my vehicle documents.]) and image signifier (e.g. the confused and surprised-countenance of a young boy). This meme, ordinarily, depicts one out of the kinds of activities that transpire at police checkpoints. Significantly, the rationale for checkpoints is for the men and women of the NPF to ensure public safety and engage in or check what is lawfully required. Bailey (2022, p.1) confirms this when he states that “Olumuyiwa Adejobi, the acting Force Public Relations Officer has said that vehicle licence, drivers licence and certificate of insurance, especially for private car owners are the documents that need to be tendered to the police on demand at any checkpoint or routine patrol.”

Me the day #9japolice asked me for my jack after checking all my papers.



Figure 3. Meme taken from the Opera News Nigeria

This validates that any other request made by the men of the NPF drafted to checkpoints for mere routine checks is unlawful. The interest that therefore motivates this sign-complex is inherent in the deviant conducts of some officers of the NPF at mounted checkpoints who make absurd routine checks and demands of motorists. The vehicle *jack* being demanded for after checking vehicle documents as represented in the text signifier symbolises every other aberrant demands often made by some officers of the NPF at checkpoints. This is frequently done in order to probe for fault from an ill-informed/informed car owner or driver who may eventually become a cash cow for such men on duty even if such owner/driver has all required documents. The offshoot of such nonstandard gesture from the men of the NPF is often what is represented in the image signifier (e.g. the perplexed and surprised-countenance of a young boy). This archetypal sign-complex is apposite bearing in mind the hordes of similar human right violation-experience Nigerians have had with the officers of the NPF. As it is, “members of the public have been at loggerheads with some police officers at checkpoints over indiscriminate demand of car documents, laptops and even mobile phones receipts” (Olisah, 2022, p. 11). This pool of image and text signifiers that make up the meme is therefore apt given that it expresses a satiric signified which exposes some police officer’s duty deviance; thus hints that police officers should work within the ambits of their duties, and be retrained on human rights best practices.



Figure 4. Meme taken from the Opera News Nigeria

Figure 4 is a socio-semiotic mode with a conversational text signifier (e.g. Me: I passed a checkpoint today and #9japolice did not collect bribe from me. Popsy: ADONBILIVIT. [lit. Me: I passed a checkpoint today and Nigeria police did not collect bribe from me. Popsy: I don't believe it]) and image signifier (e.g. the agape and astonished image of a popular Yoruba comedian (name withheld)). The meme vividly relates what seems to be an amazing conversation between a son or perhaps a daughter and his/her popsy ('popsy' means father in informal Nigerian English) on passing through a police checkpoint without a bribe being demanded by the officers. Of a fact is that requesting for or inducing bribe from motorists appears to be the standard conduct of the police on any highway where checkpoints are mounted in Nigeria. In the words of Nwogbunyama (2020, p.2), "we are all used to the checkpoints Nigerian policemen mount on roads. These checkpoints can be on highway, intra state roads and even in streets. ...things like extortion, harassment and even bullying are what most Nigerians face." This constancy of checkpoints and what they are put up for is further corroborated by Iremeka (2022, p.5), who draws from *The Guardian* investigation which reveals that the "proliferation of police checkpoints across the country is mostly for economic considerations than provision of security". Hence, the design of the meme above with the sign-complexes is motivated by the diehard exploitative nature of police checkpoints in Nigeria. This obstinate exploitative characteristic of police checkpoints is portrayed in the image signifier – the agape and astonished image of a popular Yoruba comedian and the text signifier (e.g. ADONBILIVIT. [lit. I don't believe it]) –which allude to the incredibility of the text signifier (e.g. Me: I passed a checkpoint today and #9japolice did not collect bribe from me. [lit. Me: I passed a checkpoint today and Nigeria police did not collect bribe from me.]).

Essentially, the image signifier accompanied by the text signifier (e.g. ADONBILIVIT. [lit. I don't believe it]), in this context, is a morphological and syntactical deviation from the norm with the underlying sense of disbelief and sarcastic response made towards the text signifier (e.g. Me: I passed a checkpoint today and #9japolice did not collect bribe from me. [lit. Me: I passed a checkpoint today and Nigeria police did not collect bribe from me.]). This resource foregrounds the constant act of subornment at police checkpoints in Nigeria in place of what is expected by the law. Given this circumstances, it could therefore be affirmed that the image and text signifiers are apt in view of the fact that they bring to the fore a satiric signified which reveals the motif and proliferation of checkpoints; thereby calling for the invocation of the legitimate use of police checkpoints.

How #9japolice stares at you when they realise all your papers are complete, plus you even have fire extinguisher



Figure 5. Meme taken from the Opera News Nigeria

Figure 5 is a socio-semiotic mode that no doubt represents the meme-maker's social interaction with the men and women of the NPF. It is a mode which comprises a text signifier (e.g. How #9japolice stares at you when they realise all your papers are complete plus you even have fire extinguisher. [lit. How Nigeria policemen stare at you when they realise all your vehicle papers are complete, and in addition to this, you have a fire extinguisher]) and an image signifier (e.g. the relatively enraged image of a popular Nigerian actor (name withheld)). The two are combined into a sign-complex with functional loads.

The officers of the NPF who mount checkpoints in Nigeria often do so with the sole purpose of extortion and less otherwise. Thus, a direct means to extort motorists is to usurp some professional duties which are not directly theirs. They do this, among others, by requesting to check vehicle papers and other roadworthy car packages such as fire-extinguisher. Any vehicle user that does not have this becomes an immediate prey for exaction. In the same vein, they may get frustratingly livid (as represented in the image signifier) if vehicle owners have all that are being demanded. In such situations, officers of the NPF unsatisfyingly engage other means to induce bribes by simply looking for faults to point at. An online news outlet, *Thisdaylive* (2019, p.13) further authenticates how depraved policemen at checkpoints could be thus:

Exactly 89 years after its establishment, members of the force have emerged as predators, rather than protectors, {...} and become an icon of unbridled corruption, unprofessional conduct and violence in the country. Particularly common on the list of the groups the police extort most are commercial and private vehicle owners in the country. Most embarrassing are policemen who wilfully extort motorists or others even when they have not contravened the law.

Wilful extortion by Nigeria policemen at checkpoints is a by-product of characterised frustration, and this circumstance is what motivates the sign-complex of the represented signifiers as pertinently designed and impelled by the interest of the meme-maker. This sign-complex is, therefore, apt in this circumstance to depict a satiric signified of detrimental frustration of some officers of the NPF; thereby calling for a better oriented and funded force in order to guide against police assault and extrajudicial killings.



Figure 6. Meme taken from the Opera News Nigeria

Figure 6 is a socio-semiotic mode with a conversational text signifier (e.g. #9japolice; PARK WELL!!!! \*driver stretch out hand with N100\* #9japolice; [lit. Nigeria police: park well (driver stretches out his hand with N100) #9japolice (smiles)]) and an image signifier (e.g. the cheery image of a one-time famous Nollywood actor (name withheld)). This mode, with sign-complexes, has functional loads. For instance, the text signifier (e.g. PARK WELL), uttered by policemen in the context of police checkpoints in Nigeria often portends an occasion to induce extortion. This is completely a shared knowledge, in particular, for motorists that at such moments, naira-notes necessarily change hands. This comes readily handy from motorists (e.g. driver stretches out hand with N100) towards a set of already-smiling avaricious policemen to establish the normalcy of such act, and moreover, avoid being delayed by such policemen or a means of distraction to checkmate being checked. As established by *Premium Times* (2013, p.5), “cases of extortion by the officers are so commonplace that most citizens consider them the norm”. In the same vein, Onwuka (2022, p. 5) corroborates this model of operation at police checkpoints when he confirms that “the extortion of money from motorists at police checkpoints has become a routine that it has taken on the nature of a standardized tool”. This motivated ensemble of text and image signifiers as displayed in the meme in question propels and symbolises a common culture of extortion, where the motorist already knows that s/he has to part with some naira-notes and the officers on duty are privy to this.

The circumstance portrayed in the meme is motivated by the interest of the meme-maker to signal certain signified in relation to the operation of some officers of the NPF at checkpoints. The sign-complex that makes the body of the meme is indeed apt given that it exemplifies a force that is material-conscious rather than public safety-conscious. Thus, a satiric signified of checkpoint's main duty negligence is established; by this means convening for a conscientious force in the line of duty.



Figure 7. Meme taken from the Opera News Nigeria

Figure 7 is a socio-semiotic mode with a blend of a text signifier (e.g. This is #9japolice when they catch you with expired Driver's licence [lit. This is Nigeria policemen when they catch you with expired driver's licence) and an image signifier (e.g. images of some policemen dancing). The synthesis of the two in the body of the mode, therefore, has its functional load.

In Nigeria, there are many law enforcement agencies. According to the Constitution of Nigeria, and other federal laws establishing the agencies, each agency has its own clear duties and functions. Nevertheless, there have been controversies on which agency checks a driver's licence between the NPF and the Federal Road Service Commission (FRSC). Either way, a driver's licence is one of the major documents that vehicle users must possess to navigate Nigerian roads. Hence, as re-counted by Toromade (2022, p. 9), "according to the spokesperson of the NPF, Muyiwa Adejobi, police officers can only ask you for three things at checkpoints: vehicle licence, driver's licence and certificate of insurance". This, thus, confirms that the demand to view driver's licence is one of the operational jurisdictions of the NPF. But, as stressed by Adejumo (2018, p. 5), NPF men "compromise their official duty by taking arbitrary 'fines' from motorists whose vehicle licence or insurance papers are outdated or missing". This official circumstance of misconduct, therefore, motivates the design of the meme at the centre of discourse. The text signifier (e.g. This is #9japolice when they catch you with expired Driver's licence [lit. This is Nigeria policemen when they catch you with expired driver's licence) and the image signifier embody the men of the NPF, who regale at the instance of traffic infractions such as that of using expired driver's licence by motorists in Nigeria. This further implies a set of officers of the NPF who privileges and exploits breach of law for financial gains.

On the whole, therefore, these signifiers are apt and persuasive given that as sign-complexes, they altogether articulate a signified of satire in the context of some Nigeria policemen who are supposed to sustain and keep the law, but encourage lawlessness because of illicit pecuniary gain derived through driving with an expired driver's license thereby suggestive of reorientation and reformation advocacy of the NPF.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In a divergence from the concentration of the identified extant literature on police discourse, this paper has examined Nigeria Police digital memes – multi-moulded socially constructed Nigeria police discourse, instantiated digitally to satirise NPF's abuse of power at checkpoints and prompt reformative advocacy. In interpreting the selected digital police memes, this paper engages the theoretical underpinnings of Gunther Kress' (2010) social-semiotic theory of multimodality. Through its theoretical apparatus, functional loads such as contemptible open extortion, symbolic blind allusions, duty deviance, wrong motif towards checkpoints, detrimental frustration, checkpoints' main duty negligence and lawlessness were established as what the selected police digital memes critically reveal as regards the NPF and checkpoints in Nigeria. Precisely, the functional loads characterise the prevalence of corrupt practices within the force, wilful demonstration of ignorance in the face of systemic policing issues, ill-commitment of some Nigeria police to duties, wrong motif towards checkpoints and their potential misuse. With these findings, this current endeavour maintains that the satirical philosophy embedded within most Nigeria policemen's abuse of power digital memes draws attention towards reformation and reorientation of members of the Nigeria Police Force. Thus, with respects to extant studies on police discourse, this investigation, therefore, contributes to a nuanced understanding of how digital communication tools can serve as catalysts for reformative advocacy, particularly within the context of law enforcement reforms. Since this investigation has concentrated on the abuse of power at checkpoints by some Nigeria policemen,

further studies can examine Nigerian police digital memes on other activities associated with the officers of the NPF either at checkpoints or other areas of operation.

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