

IDEOLOGY AND POWER NEGOTIATION IN #ENDSARS AND #ENDBADGOVERNANCE PROTESTS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The flexibility of Nigerian socio-political environment makes it a fertile ground for interrogating the nexus between ideology, power, and protest texts as responses to bad governance system. Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, has a history of authoritarianism, corruption, and democratic fragility. The impetuses of protesters are usually fuelled by these vices that constantly stare us in the eye. The major thrust of this study is to analyse ideology and power negotiation of #EndSARS and #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria. The methodology for the study is drawn from social media protest texts generated during the #EndSARS (2020) and #EndBadGovernance (2024) movements in Nigeria. Precisely, 14 Protest Text were selected, and tagged as "PT" in the analysis. Critical Discourse Analysis is deployed as the theoretical framework for the study, particularly Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model and Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach. The findings of the study reveal how linguistic choices in digitally mediated texts function as instruments of resistance, ideological construction, and power contestation. Findings further reveal that protest texts deploy strategic polarisation, intertextual references, religious allusions, humour, and evaluative language to construct the state as oppressive and citizens as morally legitimate agents of change. The analysis further demonstrates that digital protest discourse operates as an arena of ideological struggle, where competing narratives of patriotism, legitimacy, justice, and governance are negotiated. The study concludes that social media protest texts are discursive instruments that reshape public consciousness and reconfigure power relations in contemporary Nigeria

Keywords: *Ideology, Power, Negotiation, Discourse, and Critical Discourse Analysis*

Introduction

Nigeria has a history of authoritarianism, corruption, and democratic fragility. From colonial impositions to military dictatorships and the turbulence of civilian rule, the state has often been perceived as a site of violence and negotiation. In this environment, citizens have historically relied on expressive forms like literature, music, performance, and protests to articulate discontent and challenge domination. As Toyin Falola observes, "Nigerian political culture is deeply embedded in struggles over voice, legitimacy, and justice" (367).

The #EndSARS protest, which emerged in 2020, marked one of the most significant digital-age movements in Nigeria's history. Originally sparked by outrage over the brutality of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), Omoyeni posits that "...the movement quickly morphed into a broader critique of state repression, governance failure, and socio-economic inequality" (24). The hashtag #EndSARS became a rallying point within Nigeria and across the diaspora, demonstrating the power of digital texts to crystallise collective anger into a coherent protest movement (Omoyeni 2024). The symbolic economy of hashtags, memes, and viral tweets reflected a wider negotiation of power between citizens and state institutions. Alongside #EndSARS, the more recent #EndBadGovernance protest has emerged as

an extension of frustrations with systemic misrule, corruption, and lack of accountability. Whereas #EndSARS focused on a specific institutional abuse, #EndBadGovernance encompasses broader structural grievances. Both movements exemplify the ways in which Nigerians use digital platforms not only to demand justice but to reframe the national conversation around governance. In these texts, ideology is not abstract but embodied in phrases, slogans, and hashtags that express deep-seated social realities.

This study, therefore, examines ideology and power negotiation in #EndSARS and #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria. Protest texts challenge hegemonic constructions of nationalism and patriotism. State actors often deploy patriotic rhetoric to demand obedience and silence dissent, equating criticism with disloyalty. Protesters, however, reframed patriotism as the courage to demand accountability and justice. In this reframing, love for country meant refusing to remain silent in the face of oppression. Such ideological negotiations expose the fluidity of concepts like nationhood, which are constantly contested and redefined through textual practices.

Conceptual Clarifications

#EndSARS and #EndBadGovernance Protests in Nigeria

The #EndSARS and #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria are interconnected waves of youth-led, digitally coordinated contention that crystallize long-standing grievances about state violence, impunity, and economic precarity into networked repertoires of action that travel across platforms, streets, courts, and transnational publics. Rooted in a decade of civic complaints against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), allegations of arbitrary arrest, torture, and extortion of mainly young Nigerians, especially those profiled as “Yahoo Boy”, “tech bros” or creative provided the moral shock that catalysed large-scale mobilization in October 2020 (Amnesty International, 2020).

The escalation point came with viral videos and live streams that turned individual testimonies into collective evidence, producing a digitally mediated “event” frame that transformed diffuse anger into coordinated action, while the Yoruba slogan “Sòrò Sókè” (“speak up”) and the hashtag #EndSARS condensed a broad diagnostic and prognostic narrative: end police brutality, secure accountability, and reform governance (Afolabi, 2025). Organizationally, a fluid coalition of volunteer technologists, creatives, lawyers, medics, and logisticians assembled around ad hoc hubs; the Feminist Coalition served as a highly visible financial and humanitarian node, centralizing donations (local and diaspora), funding legal aid, ambulances, and victims’ support with audited transparency that helped sustain legitimacy during the campaign’s peak (Feminist Coalition, 2021).

On the streets, sit-ins and occupation-style assemblies especially at Lekki Toll Gate interacted with “platform repertoires” such as Twitter (now X) storms, livestreams, and infographics creating a feedback loop that scaled participation, curated evidence of abuses, and amplified a youth civic identity opposed to gerontocratic politics (Time, 2020, 2021). Government response mixed symbolic concessions, announcing SARS’ dissolution and mooted police reforms with containment and repression; curfews were imposed and security forces deployed, culminating in lethal force in Lagos on 20 October 2020, which rights monitors characterized as the killing of peaceful protesters and which subsequently became the fulcrum for investigations and judicial panels of inquiry across states (Amnesty International, 2020; Lagos State Judicial Panel, 2021; ACLED, 2021).

Discourse

Discourse analysis is the study of language; and is often perceived as a sub-field of linguistics, which is the scientific study of language. Different kinds of linguist's study different aspects of language. For instance, phonologists study the sounds of languages and how people use them. Lexicographers study words, their meanings and their histories. Grammarians study how words are put together to form sentences and spoken utterances while discourse analysts study the ways sentences and utterances go together to make texts and interactions and how those texts and interactions fit into our social world. But discourse analysis is not just the study of language, but a way of looking at language that focuses on how people use it in real life to do things like joke and argue and persuade, and to show that they are certain kinds of people or belong to certain groups.

While other linguists concentrate on determining the formal properties of a language, the discourse analyst is committed to an investigation of what that language is used for. The use of language in a social situation is a major concern of linguists in contemporary times. This is a departure from the earlier practice that concentrated so much on the forms of language and neglected the functions that the language performs in the social context, where it is used. The major thrust of this study is to analyse ideology and power negotiation of #EndSARS and #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (which henceforth will be referred to as CDA in this work) is a very important field of study in language as well as in social sciences such as sociology, psychology, political science and conflict studies. It is equally of significance to subjects such as history and mass communication. This makes CDA a multi-disciplinary subject. For the purpose of this study, however, CDA is viewed mainly from the pragma-sociolinguistic point of view, which seeks to analyse language use in communication and its impact on society in general.

"CDA", according to Moss, "refers to an exploration of how social and political inequalities manifest in language and conversations. In addition, CDA examines how facets of conversations and language – the structures, strategies and tactics – persuade these inequalities" (1). One of the pioneers of CDA, Teun Van Dijk, defines CDA as "...a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (1). This shows that CDA is not an analytical study of the language text alone but also of the socio-political implications of the discourse. It is the goal of CDA to unravel all matters arising from public discourse as they affect the wider society, and also challenge societal inequality as depicted in power relations in the society. It is for this reason that Van Dijk submits that "...critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality" (1).

Consenting to this point, Fjortoft observes that "CDA started out as a reaction to the descriptive nature of scientific observation in language research, and the approach challenged the need of language analysis in isolation from its social context" (2). This submission confirms that CDA goes beyond a mere analysis of language and its surface features, but involves other extra-linguistic factors. That is what makes CDA a multi-disciplinary research.

One of the core tenets of CDA is the idea that power is discursively enacted and reproduced through language. Teun A. van Dijk (1993) explains that discourse not

only reflects but also structures social power relations, particularly in how elites' control and disseminate knowledge. This epistemic control is often seen in media, political speeches, and public communication, where language becomes a tool for sustaining dominance. As van Dijk asserts:

Critical Discourse Analysis studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality. (van Dijk, 1993:352)

This assertion highlights the emancipatory dimension of CDA as a methodological practice that goes beyond description to critique, laying bare how language mediates access to symbolic and material resources.

Fairclough's (1992, 1995) contributions provide an operational framework that allows researchers to study texts at multiple levels: linguistic form, discursive practice, and social practice. His three-dimensional model underscores the interconnection between micro-level textual features, meso-level processes of text production and consumption, and macro-level socio-political structures. This layered approach has been influential because it enables a comprehensive account of how power and ideology permeate language use. Similarly, Wodak's Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) integrates diachronic perspectives by examining how historical contexts shape and are shaped by discourse, thereby underscoring that language practices are not static but evolve with socio-political shifts (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Together, these approaches demonstrate the richness of CDA as both theory and method.

Ideology: Ideology, in the context of this study, refers to the system of beliefs, values, assumptions, and representations embedded within protest texts that shape interpretations of governance, authority, justice, citizenship, and resistance. This aligns with Teun Van Dijk' and Ruth Wodak's position when they posit that "ideology is the implicit and explicit meaning structures encoded in social media protest discourse, particularly those that construct the state as oppressive, corrupt, reformable, illegitimate, or hegemonic". It is identified through discursive strategies such as presupposition, nomination, predication, and inter-textual references.

Power: In this study, *power* refers to the discursively constructed capacity of individuals, groups, or institutions to influence, dominate, resist, or shape social realities through language. Drawing from Fairclough's (1995, 2015) conception of power in discourse, power is used here as the linguistic and rhetorical strategies through which social actors (Protesters) enact dominance, resistance, marginalisation, or counter-hegemony in social media protest texts. It is examined through lexical choices, modality, agency assignment, pronoun use, and evaluative language within selected protest excerpts.

Negotiation: Negotiation refers to the dynamic process through which competing meanings, identities, and power relations are constructed, challenged, reinforced, or transformed in discourse. In this study, negotiation is used in this paper as the interactional and rhetorical mechanisms through which protest actors and state-aligned voices contest or redefine authority, legitimacy, responsibility, and national identity within social media texts.

Social Media Protest Texts: Social media protest texts refer to digitally mediated written expressions (tweets, posts, captions, hashtags, comments, and short narrative statements) produced and circulated during the #EndSARS and #EndBadGovernance movements. These texts serve as discursive artefacts through which protest ideologies and power relations are articulated and contested. For the purpose of this study, only textual (verbal) data were analysed, excluding images and audio-visual materials unless accompanied by written captions.

#EndSARS : #EndSARS refers to the 2020 nationwide Nigerian protest movement against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigeria Police Force, which later evolved into a broader call for police reform and systemic governance accountability. In this research, #EndSARS serves as one corpus of protest discourse used to examine linguistic constructions of power and ideological resistance.

#EndBadGovernance : #EndBadGovernance refers to the 2024 Nigerian protest movement addressing economic hardship, inflation, insecurity, and perceived governance failures. Within this study, it constitutes the second corpus of protest discourse used for comparative discursive analysis to identify continuity and shifts in power and ideology negotiation strategies.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an eclectic method in its theoretical framework. They are: Norman Fairclough's three –dimensional model and Ruth Wodak's Discourse – historical approach.

Norman Fairclough Three-dimensional model

Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model is a cornerstone of CDA because it offers a systematic way to link micro-level textual features to meso-level discursive practices and macro-level social structures. At its core, the model insists that any serious analysis of discourse must move across three integrated moments: Description of the formal properties of texts (vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, rhetorical devices); Interpretation of the processes of text production, distribution and consumption (how texts are reproduced, who produces them, which genres and intertextual relations are invoked); and Explanation of the relationships between these discursive practices and broader sociocultural and ideological processes (how discourse relates to power, hegemony, social identities and institutional structures).

Fairclough's move is epistemological and methodological: discourse is simultaneously a socially constitutive practice and an object for empirical description, and the 3D model provides the scaffolding to connect sentence-level detail with historical-institutional forces (Fairclough, 1992, 1995, 2001). This integrative ambition to avoid treating texts as isolated strings of words while also avoiding amorphous grand theory is what gives the model enduring analytic purchase.

The first dimension which is description requires fine-grained linguistic attention. Fairclough urges analysts to attend to lexical choices (which words are selected and which are avoided), grammatical structures (active versus passive constructions that allocate agency), modality (degrees of certainty or obligation), transitivity (how actors and processes are represented), nominalisation (processes rendered as things), metaphor and modality, cohesion and presupposition, and intertextual markers that connect a given text to other texts. A careful description establishes the inventory of semiotic resources available in a protest text: which metaphors are used to frame state actors, how victims are lexicalised, what kinds of evidential claims are made, and whether authority is invoked via statistics, witness

testimony, or institutional quotes. Importantly, Fairclough's description is not merely stylistic cataloguing; it is designed to yield observable, replicable claims about how a text is constructed and how it positions social actors and events (Fairclough, 1995).

The role of the media is central in CDA. No medium carries the intrigues of power, politics and societal relations within the society like the news media, and these are things that CDA seeks to analyse and bring to fore. CDA is also concerned with societal ideologies as they occur in topical issues of a given society and there is no better place to find such occurrences but in the news media. The media therefore offers a fertile ground for CDA practice; this is while Norman Fairclough's three – dimensional model and Ruth Wodak's Discourse –historical approach have been adopted for the analysis of the protest texts in this study. These features of critical discourse analysis theory are applied in the analysis of the protest texts.

Methodology

This study investigates power and ideology negotiation in social media protest texts focusing on the #EndSARS and #EndBadGovernance movements in Nigeria. The methodological framework is informed by the need to critically examine language, discourse strategies, and ideological patterns embedded in digital activism. The study draws its data primarily from authentic social media posts, hashtags, threads, and digital commentaries associated with the #EndSARS and #EndBadGovernance protests. Given that social media activism is a participatory and dialogic space, the corpus includes multimodal elements such as tweets, Facebook posts, Instagram captions, and user comments that shaped public discourses during the protests. These sources were selected because they represent spontaneous, unfiltered, and politically significant communicative practices by citizens in their negotiation of power and ideological positions. In addition to these, secondary sources were consulted to provide contextual depth and academic grounding for the analysis.

Data were collected using a purposive sampling technique, ensuring that only relevant protest texts were selected. Precisely, 14 Protest Text were selected, and tagged as "PT" in the analysis. The process involved systematically retrieving posts through hashtag searches (#EndSARS, #EndBadGovernance, #EndPoliceBrutality, and related hashtags) between August 2024 -10th August 2024 on #EndBadGovernance and 8th October, 2020 -20th October, 2020 on #EndSARS Protest respectively. Online archives and screenshots of deleted or censored posts were also used to ensure comprehensiveness.

Data presentation took the form of thematic categorisation, where texts were grouped into clusters representing major protest themes such as police brutality, government accountability, economic hardship, corruption, and youth empowerment. Representative excerpts of social media texts were presented verbatim and interpreted using CDA tools. The qualitative interpretation was foregrounded, with emphasis on how the texts reflected, challenged, or restructured dominant ideologies in Nigeria.

This study is significant because it locates the analysis of protest discourse within linguistics rather than sociology or political science, thereby addressing an important academic gap. While protest movements such as #EndSARS and #EndBadGovernance have received attention from historians, journalists, and political analysts, little has been done to explain how power and ideology are negotiated through language in these contexts.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section constitutes the analytical core of the study, where the theoretical frameworks of Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis and Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach are methodically applied to the selected social media protest texts of the #EndSARS and #EndBadGovernance movements in Nigeria. This is purposefully done to examine how power and ideology are negotiated, resisted and reconstructed within the digital discourse of Nigerian civic activism.

The discourse of economic collapse, political ineptitude and social inequality forms one of the most dominant ideological undercurrents within the #EndSARS and #EndBadGovernance protest texts. At its core, this discourse reveals how Nigerians utilise social media as a platform of counter-hegemonic communication, challenging political narratives that attempt to normalise hardship and justify systemic failure. According to Fairclough, CDA seeks to "make visible the interconnectedness of things" (36) particularly how texts reproduce or resist the socio-economic power structures that govern social life. The selected texts exemplify this dialectic by juxtaposing official justifications for governance shortcomings with citizen-led contestations that expose elite irresponsibility and moral decay.

To interrogate political ineptitude in the EndSars and EndBadGovernance Protest texts, it is important to begin with the Chief of Defence Staff's statement in PT1 where he says:

"The Federal Government has been in office for one year, and it is not possible for them to solve every financial, economic, and security situation within one year"

(Elite Footy Report, August 3, 2024).

This pronouncement made by the Chief of Defence Staff demonstrates the discursive strategy of mitigation (Wodak, 2001) wherein the Army Chief foregrounds the temporal limitation, "within one year" and uses the modal "not possible." Through this pronouncement, the Chief of Defence Staff invokes institutional rationalisation to deflect accountability. Fairclough (2001) identifies such linguistic manoeuvres as elements of ideological obfuscation, where the textual form serves to conceal asymmetries of power by naturalising inefficiency. The utterance positions the government as a victim of circumstance rather than an active participant in the nation's crises. Wodak's DHA helps to contextualise this within Nigeria's historical pattern of elite self-exoneration, where state actors and elites habitually deflect culpability for economic mismanagement by appealing to inherited or systemic constraints. In ideological terms, this statement attempts to reproduce public tolerance for state inadequacy, thereby stabilising the existing power hierarchy.

The President is also guilty of this political ineptitude during peak of the protest as it is made evident in the tweet text of Sochima wherein he laments that in PT2:

Thank you Mr President for the speech. However, I and other Patriotic Nigerians categorically state that you never took the bull by its horn as you were merely beating around the bush. You only succeeded in ordering the security agencies against peaceful Nigerians.

(Sochima, August 4, 2024).

A probable ideology in this text is that of resistance. A glaring resistance against state power and a citizen's show of putting off with the highest power in the country. The

tweet is directly addressed to the President whose address after the event, according to Sochima, does not correlate with the factual happenings that had triggered the EndBadGovernance protest. The polite opening of “[t]hank you Mr President” masks an underlying tone of ironic politeness that quickly dissolves into critique. The idiomatic expression “beating around the bush” and the evaluative adverb “categorically” underscores Sochima’s demand for decisive governance and moral accountability. Fairclough (1992) describes such linguistic strategies as recontextualisations of dominance, where subordinate voices appropriate public discourse to challenge elite narratives. Here, power is negotiated through the reversal of politeness norms, a citizen addresses authority but subverts the ritual of deference to assert moral superiority. The inclusion of the hashtag #EndBadGovernance links this act to a collective discourse of national frustration, transforming individual grievance into a shared ideological movement.

Similarly, PT3 decries the dilapidating state of the nation that has led to both protests as the poster decries on WhatsApp that:

“It is concerning how we have reached this dire state as a country. We must demand accountability and strive for better leadership for the future of Nigeria”

(WhatsApp, 9 Sep, 2024)

This lamentation mobilises moral and affective discourse to construct a collective ethical stance. The pronoun “we” creates an inclusive subjectivity, invoking national solidarity against an implied “they” which are the corrupt political elite. According to Wodak (2015), nomination and predication strategies in protest discourse often construct “us” as morally upright citizens and “them” as inept or exploitative rulers. The modal “must” functions as an imperative of resistance, linguistically transforming moral outrage into civic obligation. Fairclough’s (2003) model of CDA would interpret this as a textual realisation of social agency, where linguistic choices instantiate an emergent counter-hegemonic identity among Nigeria’s digital citizenry. This moral imperative resonates with Nigeria’s socio-historical context of youth-led activism that seeks to dismantle entrenched structures of gerontocratic leadership. Without naming any particular person from whom the accountability should be demanded, the speaker implicates the leaders at helm of the nation’s affairs.

PT4 extends the agitation to the economy of Nigeria, deconstructing the involvement of Abubakar Atiku and Peter Obi who were allegedly linked to the protest. On his X timeline, Ayekooto laments that:

I knew there was an agenda when 2 defeated Presidential Candidate backed the protest. Whereas there is genuine hunger and there is genuine unacceptable level of unemployment. Although there is obviously genuine frustrations in the land, the real people behind this protest are not motivated by hunger. They are just being politically opportunistic. Because they know that in 12 months, there is no magical relief that you can do to an economy that has already collapsed. When you conceptualize a policy, before the benefit will manifest is not going to be a matter of 12 months

(DeoneAyekooto, August 04, 2024).

In this instance, Ayekooto engages in discursive reframing, aligning with state rhetoric that portrays protests as politically motivated rather than socially justified. Wodak

(2009) notes that argumentation strategies often rely on *topoi*, a conventional argumentative scheme that justify conclusions. The *topos* of “political manipulation” here serves to undermine the authenticity of the protesters’ demands, suggesting that dissent is orchestrated by failed politicians. This strategy aligns with Fairclough’s (2010) notion of interdiscursivity, where ruling powers borrow populist frames to re-inscribe dominance. Thus, even as protest discourse strives to challenge hegemony, counter-discourses like this reproduce the ideological status quo by re-legitimising elite control of narrative interpretation.

In contrast, PT5 which is like a rejoinder by The Guardian Nigerian quotes one of the protesters saying that:

“Those in power are stealing because they know nothing can be done to them,” protester laments as he explains why he has joined the ongoing nationwide protests.”

(Guardian Nigeria, August 3, 2024)

The central argument of this rejoinder from one of the on-field protesters is an exposure of impunity as a social logic. The causal conjunction “because” linguistically encodes structural inequality, a system where elite actors operate beyond legal restraint. Fairclough (1995) would interpret this as a manifestation of discourse as social practice, in which linguistic expressions both describe and sustain power asymmetries. The protester’s reference to “those in power” generalises corruption as a systemic attribute rather than isolated misconduct. This resonates with Wodak’s (2001) emphasis on historical continuity, as Nigeria’s postcolonial trajectory has been characterised by the normalisation of elite impunity. The utterance, therefore, does not merely describe corruption; it performs ideological work by asserting a collective moral indictment against the governing class.

PTs 6, 7, and 8 expand this moral and ideology through explicit references to structural decay and collective suffering. PT 6 which is officially posted by the official handle of Take it back Movement, a movement heavily linked to Omoyele Sowore writes that:

The #EndBadGovernanceInNigeria protests, fuelled by the nation's worst economic crisis in a generation, continue to spread across Nigeria. Demonstrators, decrying record inflation and rising food prices, are demanding an end to bad governance and economic hardship.

(@ TIBMovement, August 3, 2024)

TIB’s post combines factual description with evaluative emphasis, invoking the *topos* of crisis (Wodak, 2001) to justify continued resistance. The lexical choice “fuelled” metaphorically frames the protest as an engine of transformation, sustained by public discontent. Fairclough (2003) would classify this as discursive legitimation through necessity, a narrative that constructs protest as the only rational response to prolonged economic collapse as typical of Sowore. Similarly, PT7, an X post by Red decries the pathetic state of hunger that has befallen Nigeria and her citizens. Red laments that:

Nigerians have taken to the streets against the decadent ruling elite and the crushing poverty they are enduring. Protesters chanted “we are hungry” while one protester held a placard that said “One day, the poor will have nothing to eat but the rich oppressors.” State forces launched teargas, live bullets, and hot water at protesters. A curfew was implemented in the northern

states of Kano and Yobe. Amnesty International reported that 13 protesters were killed and 300 were arrested. The protests come on the heels of uprisings in Kenya and Uganda, who have protested similar issues. In Nigeria, food inflation is at 40% and according to the UN, 32 million people across Nigeria are starving. Nigerians cannot afford fuel despite the country being one of the largest oil exporting countries in the world. 10 days of protests have been organized under the slogan “End Bad Governance in Nigeria.” The organizers have stressed that these issues cut across ethnic, tribal, and religious lines, stating, “we are not slaves

(Redstreamnet August 2, 2024).

Red in this instance deploys intensifiers like “decadent,” and “crushing” to dramatise inequality, enacting what van Dijk (1998) calls the ideological square: accentuating “our” victimhood while emphasising “their” moral failure.

Vector in PT8 resolves the alternating rift between the state and the protesters as he seems to clarify the situation stating that:

The point of the protest is, as usual, a call for attention to the state of the welfare of the people... homes are going through aggression influenced by the struggles of the society. Families are losing bond because of “hustle / greener pastures “. If the impoverishment doesn’t stop, society will breed more beastliness. #EndBadGovernanceInNigeria for the future.

(VectorThaViper, August 1, 2024).

Vector’s stance adopts a rationalising tone, constructing the protest as a legitimate democratic instrument and not a rebellion. This re-articulation of civic responsibility demonstrates what Fairclough (2015) terms the re-contextualisation of resistance, where ordinary discourse (a “call for attention”) becomes a mechanism of ideological redefinition.

Moral and existential responses of Nigerian citizens to the deteriorating economy, as well as their ethical resolve to challenge systemic deprivation also feature in the data under analysis. This reveals how digital and physical protest spaces merge into moral resistance zones. As Norman Fairclough contends, discourse is a “site of struggle” (32) where dominant ideologies are both reinforced and resisted. Within this frame, the selected protest texts not only document material hardship but also reimagine the moral economy of resistance.

In PT9, Parallel Facts quote the statement of Sikiru Marufat, a woman who brought an empty pot to the protest ground. In her statement, the woman says that:

“I Came with Empty Pot Because I Surrendered to Hunger”

(ParallelFacts August 5, 2024).

Murufat’s symbolic gesture of carrying an empty pot function as a performative protest act, transforming personal deprivation into collective testimony. The empty pot becomes a visual metaphor for national hunger and governmental failure. The act resonates with Fairclough’s view that discourse enacts social reality: “the power of language lies in its ability to make and remake the world” (55). The protester’s language subverts the hegemonic silence around economic collapse, revealing how citizens resist through symbolic moral acts. Similarly, this text directly answers the

first research question on how ideological positions are constructed in social media discourse. Here, hunger and resistance are discursively linked as moral arguments against state neglect.

In PT10, MsBaryatKabrik declares the intent of the protest stating in clear terms that:

This protest was about reassuring the poor men/women all across Nigeria that the power is in their hands. Hunger is the real determinant of why people are out on the streets. The imams, pastors, political rulers, chiefs, PR boys have to JIRA!!!! The power is with the people now. It is a learning curve for most people in the North

(MKabrik, August 2, 2024).

Mkabrik's assertion reflects the emergence of moral collectivism rooted in empowerment discourse. Her rhetoric of reassurance constructs an ideological counter-narrative to elite domination, underscoring Freire's (1970) conception of conscientization, where the oppressed reclaim self-agency through dialogue and collective awareness. Through such discursive acts, the tweet embodies what van Dijk (1998) terms the "cognitive dimension of resistance," as citizens reconstruct their social beliefs around self-determination. The utterance therefore serves as a moral awakening, re-inscribing dignity within the precarious condition of poverty.

Elochukwu Ohagi in PT11 further intensifies the ideological critique by connecting historical continuity and moral outrage. He states that:

Most of you in Nigeria are not well educated. You guys lack the rudiments of sound learning. Did anyone teach you about cause and effect? Have you asked why protest in the first place? The people responsible for this protest remain the government that decided to swim in corruption. These politicians have looted more, destroying the futures of many young people. You want protesters not to loot, forgetting that these protesters are hungry and vulnerable. You guys are just funny. I don't support looting, but it is inevitable. That's because some people are not morally strong like others. I will keep saying it and won't stop. If the people are angry as they ought to be. You would have seen more than looting from the people. The day politicians started looting, swimming in corruption and rigging elections was the day #EndBadGovernanceProtest started. That was the day looting started. But because they did not teach you well, you think the protest started on August 1st. One day the protest you see will go more brutal. Elochukwu Ohagi, Philosopher, Teacher and Activist.

(ElochukwuOhagi, August 5, 2024).

Ohagi's utterance bridges the distance between past corruption and present suffering, echoing Wodak's (2001) Discourse-Historical Approach that situates current injustices in their socio-historical roots. The declarative tone employed by Ohagi asserts that the protest's legitimacy is moral rather than political; it predates the physical demonstrations and exists as a continuous moral consciousness. Thus, it responds to

the second research question of how language encodes ideology by exposing systemic corruption as an enduring social structure sustained through silence and complicity.

Nefertiti in PT12 extends the ideological motive of resistance to demonstrate Foucault's (1979) concept of counter-power, the dispersed resistance that arises wherever power seeks to repress. Nefertiti writes that:

People are trooping to the Eagles Square Abuja. Wike provoked this kind of massive crowd. Large number of crowds are marching to Kugbo, Asokoro. Despite the gunshots & the teargas, the people are saying No Retreat! No Surrender! #EndBadGovernanceProtest #EndBadGovernanceInNigeria.

(Nefertiti, August 1, 2024).

Nefertiti demonstrates the citizens' linguistic resilience which transforms the street into a ground moral confrontation, where suffering becomes resistance and fear morphs into courage. This text empirically validates the theoretical assumption that resistance discourse often emerges from material scarcity but gains moral force through collective will.

Similarly, in PT13, Ude's phrase encapsulates moral judgment as a discursive weapon He states clearly that:

They think talking down, threatening and bullying the people serves Tinubu's image. They all need to go!"

(JacksonUde, August 01, 2024).

Ude's evaluative language frames state actors not only as politically inept but morally bankrupt in their attempt to elevate Tinubu. Fairclough (1992) describes this kind of evaluative discourse as "moral economy talks," where linguistic judgment becomes a social critique (p. 88). By explicitly calling for the removal of oppressive aides, the speaker performs what van Dijk (2008) calls "discursive counter-elite formation," where public speech delegitimises political authority through moral condemnation.

PT14 by Hashim closes the spectrum of precarity and resistance:

This is what the protests are about. Millions of Nigerians, young and old are starving because they cannot afford food, because Tinubu's admin have rejected putting forth pro-poor policies in a country with the highest poverty rate in the entire world.

(FakhuHashim, August 1, 2024).

Hashim's declarative statement blends factual reporting with moral indictment, invoking collective suffering as an ethical argument for change. The statement reveals the depth of structural inequality that underpins Nigeria's current crisis, illustrating the intersection between discourse, power, and ideology. As Gramsci (1971) posits, moral resistance often precedes political change because it erodes the consent that sustains hegemony (p. 210). The text thus aligns with the third research question, demonstrating how social media language reflects a reawakening of civic morality in the face of state failure.

Conclusion

This study investigated ideology and power negotiations in #EndSARS and #EndBadGovernance social media protest texts in Nigeria, with the aim of revealing how language is used to construct meaning, assert resistance, and negotiate power

within the socio-political arena. Anchored in Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Wodak's (2001) Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), the study analysed the complex ways in which these protest texts reflect power and ideology to demystify societal inequities, mobilise public sentiment, and engage with state authority. Specifically, the research examined the linguistic strategies, ideological positions, power relations, and discursive manipulations embedded within social media texts produced during these two major protest movements in Nigeria. The analysis addressed protest texts in relation to their linguistic characteristics, the ideologies they communicate, the enactment of power relations, and the ways in which discursive strategies create avenues for both manipulation and resistance.

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