



Research Report

Caricature as political rhetoric against authoritarianism in Equatorial Guinea: A semiotic perspective

Grace Eugenie N. Essoh

University of Garoua, Cameroon. E-mail: grace.essoh@yahoo.fr

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Abstract - Like many other sub-Saharan African countries, Equatorial Guinea has, for many decades, been chafing under an authoritarian system of government. Partly characterized by rigged elections, farcical political pluralism, human rights violations and the like, this undemocratic system has fueled a mitigated social discourse in Equatorial Guinea. A number of local opposition leaders, pressure groups, adversarial journalists, cartoonists and social critics have, in various ways, sought to denounce the aforementioned authoritarianism, sometimes using an aggressive rhetoric that has often provoked the raft of the Malabo government. Although a good number of researchers have focused on the aforementioned oppositional and adversarial tendency, scholarly attention has mainly been confined to the political, sociological, historical, and anthropological dimensions of the phenomenon. The socio-linguistic dimension of this adversarial and oppositional tendency has remained glaringly understudied. To fill this gap, the present study examines how political cartooning has represented authoritarianism in Equatorial Guinea. Specifically, the study provides a semiotic analysis of selected editorial cartoons penned by dissident authors to criticize the authoritarian government of Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo. Findings reveal two things: first, Equatoguinean cartoons penned by anti-government authors deploy indexes, symbols, double entendre, captivating metaphors and anchors, to associate Obiang's presidency with such vices as corruption, political failure, xenophobia and political brutality among others. Second, any reader must consider various idiosyncrasies and principles of iconography to understand anti-Obiang political cartoons.

Keywords: Authoritarianism, Political cartooning, Semiotics, Adversarial journalism, Social discourse

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Introduction

Like other forms of popular cultures, editorial cartoons are a window into their society of origin. Political cartoons in particular function as a peephole into the political sphere of the country in which they are produced. They are genres of political discourse ([Dugalich 2018](#)) which usually reveal a variety of data that range from power relations and political freedoms to simple linguistic phenomena ([Ogbo & Nuhu 2016](#); [Eko 2007](#)). According to [Hammett \(2010\)](#), editorial/political cartoons are veritable indicators of the democratic health of a polity. “They are a barometer of press freedom, of government tolerance of free speech and critical thought, and of resistance to dominant power relations” (p.2). In tandem with this, editorial cartoons’ visually complex messages constitute a suitable corpus not only for scholars in political science and visual anthropology, but also for the political linguists, particularly the semioticians interested in examining the ways in which politics influences or fuels verbal and non-verbal use of language in the media and the political discourse. In line with this, the present study sought to examine the language of anti-government political cartoons in Equatorial Guinea, a country situated in the central region of Africa.

Like many other countries of the continent, Equatorial Guinea has, for many decades, been under an authoritarian system of government. Partly characterized by rigged elections, dictatorship, human rights violations, an unfree press and the like, this undemocratic system has fueled a mitigated social discourse in Equatorial Guinea. A number of local opposition leaders, adversarial journalists, cartoonists and social critics have, in various ways, sought to denounce the aforementioned authoritarianism, sometimes provoking the wrath of the Malabo government. Although a good number of scholars have focused on the aforementioned oppositional and adversarial tendency, scholarly attention has mainly been focused on the political, sociological, historical, and anthropological dimensions of the phenomenon ([Mathews & Sa 2024](#); [Rupiya 2020](#), [Mcsherry 2006](#)). The socio-linguistic dimension of this adversarial and oppositional tendency has remained glaringly understudied. Meanwhile, politico-linguistic perspectives on Teodoro Obiang Nguema’s governance in Equatorial Guinea may reveal valuable insight into democratization in the country. This follows the logic stipulating that political linguistics as an area of study helps understand the “speech activity oriented

[towards the] propagation of certain ideas, emotional impact on carriers of a certain language of a certain country and their motivation for political actions for the development of their public consent, adoption and justification of socio-political solutions” (Sani *et al.* 2012).

To fill the aforementioned gap, the present study examines how political cartooning has represented authoritarianism in Equatorial Guinea. Specifically, the study provides a semiotic and persuasive stylistic analysis of selected editorial cartoons penned to criticize the authoritarian government of Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo. In line with this central objective, the paper is divided into three main parts. First, the paper provides a background to the study which presents the socio-historical context to the study. This preliminary section briefly presents the genesis and structure of anti-authoritarianism in the Equatoguinean socio-political discourse. The second part of the paper provides a review of literature which establishes the scarcity of linguistic or semiotic studies on political cartoons in Equatorial Guinea. The third and fourth segments of the paper respectively present the methodology and results of the study; while the last part of the paper provides a conclusion and suggestions for further studies.

Background

Since its independence in 1968, Equatorial Guinea (a former Spanish colony) has been ruled by successive autocratic governments. The first of these governments was headed by Francisco Macias Nguema. From the country’s gaining of independence to 1979, the latter ruled the country with an iron fist. Described by many historians as one of the most brutal dictators in history, Macias Nguema usually exhibited eccentric and erratic behaviors, so much so that his contemporaries regarded him as an insane person (Rupiya 2020, Mcsherry 2006, Human Right Watch 2009a, b). He consolidated power by weaponizing an extreme cult of personality as well as a one-party state ruled by his United National Workers’ Party (PUNT). In 1972, Macias declared himself president for life. Unfortunately for him, he was overthrown in September 1979 through a bloody coup d’état led by his nephew, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo. The new ruler inherited not only power but also a complex image crisis. This crisis has persisted over the years. Up till date, his government has mostly been portrayed in negative lights on both national and international stages.

Actually, according to international observers such as [Human Right Watch \(2009, 2017, 2024\)](#), [Amnesty International 2018a](#), [Media Sustainability Index \(2018\)](#), [Transparency International \(2023\)](#) and [Small Media \(2025\)](#), Equatorial Guinea has, irrespective of the coming of Obiang Nguema to power, remained a hotspot of authoritarianism in Africa. Until 1990, the country was one of the most closed countries in the world. It did not so much attract the attention of international critics. Much of what the foreign media and international political observers said about the country revolved around its gloomy human rights records and poverty. The discovery of huge oil reserves off the country's coast as from 1995 enabled it to yearly amass billions of dollars in oil revenue and to spectacularly garner global attention. The discovery actually enabled the country become a magnet for foreign investment in the hydrocarbons sector. However, over close to three decades, these fortunes have not translated into massive economic benefits for the population and serious improvement in the field of human rights. Contrarily, the Malabo government has continued to set low standards of political and economic malfeasance ([Human Right Watch 2009, 2017](#); [Whitten-Woodring & Van Belle 2015](#)). The political and economic life of the country has over the years remained under the absolute control of president Teodoro Obiang Nguema, his family and few allies. In line with this, [Mathews and Sa \(2024, p.1\)](#) contend that since his entry to power, Obiang has “evolved in his style of governance. First ruling through a military junta, then a single-party regime, and finally competitive authoritarianism. Across these eras, he has relied on a cadre of supporting elites to occupy top spots in the state administration”.

Although the Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of the country is a par with Italy and Spain, the majority of the population (about 1.4 million inhabitants) has enjoyed just little of the oil revenue. This majority has not really been lifted from poverty. Meanwhile, large portions of the country's revenues have either been diverted into the pockets of the elite or squandered by the Obiang family in private and selfish projects. For instance, Teodorin Obiang, the president's son spent more than US\$42 million between 2004 and 2006 on luxury houses and cars in South Africa and California (USA). This amount represented close to a third of the total amount the government spent on social programs—including health, education, and housing—in 2005 ([Seabra & Sa 2025](#)). Similarly, the United States Department of Justice in 2017, accused the same, Teodorin Obiang, of using his position as minister of agriculture to amass US\$300 million – more than the combined health and education budget in some years ([Human Rights Watch, 2017](#)). In the midst of such squandering and misappropriation of public funds, critical

sectors such as education and health have years after years remained underfunded ([Mathews & Sa 2014](#); [Human Right Watch 2017](#)). No doubt, the country featured among the 10 most corrupt countries in Transparency International's 2023 global corruption ranking ([Transparency International 2023](#)).

Besides the aforementioned cases of corruption and bad governance, the Obiang government's urge to control power and economic resources at all cost has led to a systemic culture of fear in the country's government. This fear is characterized by constant brutal repressions of the opposition, the perpetual muzzling of the press and the conduct of military purges. This culture of fear also breeds political instability as it constantly fuels myths of political coups in the country. In effect, since the period of oil boom in the country, over 12 real and perceived coup attempts have been alleged by government. These coups – which are mainly suspected to be the designs of Obiang's rival – have most often provided government the pretext to exhibit greater aggressiveness or hostility towards dissent voices. In effect, perceived coup d'états usually lead to massive arbitrary arrest and detentions in the country. What even makes the situation worse is that, the Equatoguinean populace has little or no way to question this arbitrary modus operandi. It also has no latitude to effectively hold their government officials accountable for their actions. While reliable information on government management of economic resources is largely unavailable, there is no meaningful representation of the opposition in critical decision-making bodies such as the parliament. In 2008 for instance, Obiang and his allies won 99 out of the 100 seats in parliament in a legislative election marked by serious flaws. Similarly, Obiang won the most recent presidential elections of his country with 97% of the vote on a turnout of 98%. Thus, president Teodoro Obiang Nguema has over the years concentrated on consolidating his power, rather than developing vital sectors of his today oil-rich country. In line with this, [Rupiya \(2020\)](#) describes the political situation in Equatorial Guinea as “a case of arrested political transition under the tutelage of family rule that appears to have marginalized constitutional institutions while creating a parallel power consolidation leadership typology and culture” (p.98).

Equatoguinean government's gloomy human rights record has fueled virulent criticism from both local pressure groups and international observers. Vocal among these critics are entities such as *Radio Macuto* and *Diario Rombe* (two anti-government media outlets) and Juan Carlos Ondo Angue, the leader-in-exile of the Equatoguinean opposition, and president of the Movement of Republicans of Equatorial Guinea. To this

non-exhaustive list of anti-government critics, one should add Ramon Esono Ebale, a cartoonist and political activist whose cartoon-aided political criticism has constantly tested the nerves of the Obiang government. In effect, Ebale's intrepid and virulent activism has repeatedly earned him harassment, persecution, arbitrary arrests and detentions ([Amnesty International 2018a](#)).

Born in 1977, Ramon Ebale Esono (Also known as Jamon y Queso), has over the years proven to be a staunch opponent to the dictatorial regime of Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo. His fight for the respect of human rights in his country has yielded the publication of *La pesadilla de Obi* (2014) and *Viajes dibujados* (2018), among other politically committed comics. Still in line with his political activism, he has penned works such as "SubRosa: The language of resistance" (2013), "*Convergencias y divergencias: jefe, dele una oportunidad a su cerebro*" (2010), "*Democraturas*" (2010) and "*Un Opositor en la finca*" (2010). These works have respectively been exhibited in the University of South Florida (United States), the University of Alicante (Spain), the Spanish Cultural Centre of San Salvador and the Spanish Cultural Centres of Malabo and Bata [Equatorial Guinea] ([Parayre 2019](#)).

On his blog christened *Las Locuras de Jamón y Queso*, Ramon Esono regularly lambasts well known figures of the Equatoguinean political life as well as their controversial policies. President Teodoro Obiang Nguema appears to be the most recurrent character in the blog's contents. The blog's acerbic criticism against the Equatoguinean president in particular is more than evident, and even worrisome to the people in power. In 2017 for instance, the Malabo government jailed Ramon Ebale on the ground of such acerbic criticism against Obiang Nguema Mbasogo. Amnesty International (2018b) writes about this jail incident and reveals that "the [Equatoguinean] security agents warned Ramón that his cartoons depicting the president and him sharing them on the internet, could be considered defamatory" (p.2). Thus, editorial cartoons – notably Ramon Ebale's works – have, of recent, turned out to be excellent political weapons to fight dictatorship in Equatorial Guinea. These cartoons constitute a form of political discourse, and an interesting corpus for a semiotic analysis/study.

Editorial cartoons as creolized text and political discourse: A review of literature

By definition, a political cartoon is an image containing a linguistic message. As a visual representation of a politician, a political event or an idea, this genre of cartoons typically

integrates such phenomena as actuality of facts, hyperbole, caricature and satire whose function is to address complicated issues. For the language and communication scholar, political cartoons are more than a “barometer of press freedom” (Hammett 2010), a “potent source of data to study social phenomena” (Sani *et al.* 2012) and a form of humor or satire. Indeed, for such scholars, political cartoons are a rhetorical text as well as a complex form of communication which should be classified in the field of political discourse (Chen *et al.* 2021, Gerety 2016). By definition, political discourse has inextricable links with the concept of political linguistic. In effect, the subject of political linguistics is defined as:

1. A set of discursive practices that identify participants in political discourse as such, or form a concrete topic of political communication;
2. Political communication; i.e., speech activity aimed at inducing citizens to political actions of various types (Dugalich 2018, p.160).

Political cartoons entail the discursive practices mentioned above. As political text, they are multifunctional and multidimensional in nature. Al Masri (2016) explores, in some ways, the multi-functionality of political cartoons. She observes that they “render a wide range of political, cultural and social events shaped by ideological viewpoints, [...] represent a rich source of social entertainment [...] and serve to release tension through their humorous and satirical remarks”. Al Masri (2016) adds that political cartoon also “enhance social criticism by provoking self-criticism and reflecting by means of a process of introspection ... [and] carry multilayered messages about people and events.

In the same line of argument, Dugalich (2018) emphasizes the complexity of cartoons as typical media texts. They refer to political cartoons as “creolized texts” on the ground that they (cartoons) most often integrate verbal, iconic and paralinguistic features. Dugalich’s (2018) contention is in line with Abraham’s view stating that political cartoon’s multifaceted nature stems from the fact that “they are intended to condense and reduce complex issues into a single, memorable image often pregnant with deeply embedded meanings” (cited in Okata *et al.* 2019, p.130).

The aforementioned complexity of cartoons has justified the application of various approaches to the analysis of political cartoons. These approaches range from quanto-qualitative to stylistic and semiotic approaches. Al Masri (2016) deployed a multimodal approach to context as well as Van Dijk’s theory of Critical Discourse analysis in her study devoted to the semiotic interpretation of 300 political cartoons

published in the Jordanian tabloid called *Haijaj*. The multimodal approach considered three contexts, namely the macro-context, the micro-context and the dynamic context. Her study reveals that the cartoons under study take into full consideration the verbal, visual, and socio-cultural modes to create visually stimulating images and socio-culturally relevant issues. [Makinde \(2024\)](#) deployed a similar multimodal approach to study how some Nigerian political cartoonists metaphorically represent the current political situation in their country. His study suggests that metaphors are key features of Nigerian political cartoons. These metaphors most often “rely on comic, exaggerated and simplistic depictions to convey their meaning effectively and to stir a strong emotional reaction” ([Makinde 2024](#), p.300).

On their own part, [Kondowe et al. \(2014\)](#) applied Paul Grice’s Conventional Implicature theory in their semiotic study of some ten political cartoons penned to criticize president Joyce Banda’s governance. The cartoons were published by Malawian newspaper *The First Point*. Grice’s theory aims to capture how language is used in communication to maximum effect while being efficient as possible. It states that conversational implicature is generated anytime the conversational maxims of Cooperative Principles (CP) are not observed in communication. Kondowe, Ngwira and Madula’s (2014) study revealed that, most often, Malawian political cartoons deploy aesthetical vagueness. Their authors actually provide vague information. Far from breeding confusion or conveying lack of authoritative knowledge, this technique of providing vague information aims paradoxically at indicating precision. The vagueness is strategic in that it helps the cartoonists present their works as open text and avoid being regarded as judgmental entities.

Contrary to the aforementioned scholars, [Sani et al. \(2012\)](#) deploy simple semiotics – that is an approach aimed at interpreting sign systems based on the connotation and denotation of images – to examine 50 Nigerian editorial cartoons’ ability to set political agenda. The study which considered cartoons published in the two tabloids of *Daily Trust* and *Vanguard* from 2007 to 2010 suggests that of Nigerian political cartoons set social agenda by mainly encapsulating current and sensitive issues that people are much concerned about. The review of the extant literature reveals that although the semiotic and persuasive stylistic perspectives are not novel in the study of political cartoons, no study has focused on the Equatoguinean experience. Most studies devoted to politics and democratization in Equatorial Guinea have mostly explored the historical,

sociological and economic dimensions (Whitten-Woodring & Van Belle 2014, Rupiya 2020, Seabra & Sa 2025).

Materials and Methods

Research Design

This paper is based on the descriptive research design. By definition, descriptive research works seek to accurately describe a phenomenon, a situation or a population, As Aggarwal and Ranganathan (2019) put it, such studies are “designed to describe the distribution of one or more variables, without regard to any causal or other hypothesis” (p.34). In line with this, the present study sought to describe characteristics of Equatoguinean editorial political cartoon’s representation of Obian Nguema Mbasogo’s authoritarian rule.

Method of Data Collection

The paper is based on the textual analysis of five editorial cartoons mainly penned by Equatoguinean political activist, Ramon Esono Ebale. Published in a variety of local and foreign newspapers¹, the five selected cartoons were generated during specific political events in Equatorial Guinea, notably, the 2006 discovery of oil reserves and oil boom in Equatorial Guinea, the 2008 perceived coup d’état, the 2005 Teodorin Nguema corruption scandal, the Baltazar scandal and the like. The cartoons were purposively selected, in line with the central goal of the papers which is to illustrate ways in which political cartoons convey criticism against the Malabo regime. Thus, the study considered the cartoons on the basis of their relevance and ability to convey “anti-Ngemism” (anti-government propaganda/activism) in Equatorial Guinea. Although Ramon Esono Ebale –the cartoon under study – constantly criticizes diverse aspects of Equatoguinean politics as well as various political figures in the country, attention was exclusively given to cartoons that focus on Obian Nguema Mbasogo’s authoritarian rule. This choice was made in keeping with the focus of the paper.

Method of Data Analysis

The textual analysis of the five selected cartoons was guided by semiotics. By definition, semiotics is the systematic study of signs and symbols. A sign is anything that conveys intentional and unintentional meaning. Generally, it is culturally or situationally

¹ Some of these newspapers include *Diario 16*, *Asodegue*, and *Las Locuras de Jamon y queso* among others.

determined. It is also made up of two components namely the signifier and the signified. The former is the physical form of the sign while the latter is the concept or meaning for which the signifier stands. In semiotics, three types of signs exist: icons, symbols and indexes. Icons closely resemble the things for which they stand (their referents), while indexes are associated with the referent (notably smoke used to mean fire). Symbols on their part are related to their referents only by convention, for instance, the use of a dove to mean peace.

The semiotic analysis of the five cartoons mainly considered Roland Barthes' theories as explained in his publication titled "Rhetoric's of the Image" (translated by [Stephen Heath 1987](#)). Barthes' theories seek to explain the function of text with images in some advertising copies. They are therefore relevant in the study of cartoons which similarly integrate text and images. According to Barthes, an image contains three messages: linguistic (the verbal text contents), denotation (the surface or direct meaning of the image) and the connotation (the image's cultural or deeper meaning). These messages are subtly interrelated. In effect, there exist two possible relations between the linguistic message and the iconic one (the image) namely anchorage and relay. The anchorage is a verbal text that explains what any viewer can see in the image. It conveys the preferred reading, particularly when the visual message is polysemous. On the other hand, the relay explains connections or progression. It re-enforces the surface meaning conveyed by the image of the cartoon.

Results and Analysis

As earlier pointed out, much of Ramon Ebale Essono's cartoons revolve around President Teodoro Obiang Nguema's dictatorship, and resistance to waves of democratization in his country. The cartoons also dwell so much on the effect of the aforementioned dictatorship on the Equatoguinean populace. In effect, the cartoonist and political activist mainly uses gloomy visual metaphors as well as parodies and satire to lambast the Equatoguinean president's political arrogance, and sense of demagoguery as well as his adherence to low standards of political and economic malfeasance. In the cartoon shown in [Plate 1](#) for instance, Ebanle Essono depicts Obiang Nguema's political arrogance. He particularly stresses Obiang Nguema's reluctance to yield to the "democratizing" political pressure coming from the international community.

The cartoon published on May 27, 2017 in *Diario 16* shows a complex pipeline equipped with various pumps through which flow abundant oil and money. This pipeline is punctuated with the flags of various Western countries as well as the logos of some influential global organizations (notably the UN). Some of the Western countries represented in the pipeline include the USA, France and Spain (Equatorial Guinea's former colonial master). The pipeline additionally contains some inscriptions calling for democracy and the respect of freedoms. Besides this complex network of pipes, Teodoro Obiang Nguema is seen brandishing a large banner. The banner bears the Spanish inscription "DICTADURA" meaning "DICTATORSHIP" in English. While brandishing the banner, the president defiantly makes a Spanish pronouncement meaning "With my money I can beat all principles".



Plate 1: A Cartoon Published in *Diario 16*

The cartoon depicts not only Obiang Nguema's misuse of the public funds derived from oil boom in Equatorial Guinea but also his resistance to all democratic principles, currents and undercurrents on both the domestic and the international stages. The pipeline is clearly an index of the lucrative oil and gas industry in Equatorial Guinea. The Western countries' flags in the pipeline symbolize foreign oil firms' and governments' efforts towards influencing or controlling the lucrative oil industry in Equatorial Guinea. On their own part, the inscriptions are indexical of international standards/principles for

democracy and good governance. Thus, the inscriptions are indexical to the international community's political pressure on the Malabo government. This pressure aims at pushing the Equatoguinean to observe democratic cultures not only in their management of the national oil industry but also the governance of the country as a whole.



Plate 2: A Cartoon on Foreign Firms' Exploitation of oil in Equatorial Guinea

Obiang Nguema's defiance and arrogance in the cartoon are a symbol of autocratic governance in Equatorial Guinea. By this depiction of arrogance, Ramon Essono Ebale lambasts a leader – and by extension a government – that has successfully, but pathetically challenged major Western efforts towards democratization in Equatorial Guinea. More so, Ebale highlights the paradox of the oil boom in his country. He satirically deplors the fact that the oil boom that was supposed to bring development to his country, is instead fueling despotism and misery for the populace. Obiang Nguema and his allies are using such oil boom to challenge international currents that could bring democracy and good governance to Equatorial Guinea.

While Plate 1 shows the positive influence of foreign entities on democratization in Equatorial Guinea, [Plate 2](#) focuses on a contrary tendency. This plate depicts a questionable situation where foreign oil firms shamefully collaborate with the Malabo government to squander and misuse the resources of Equatorial Guinea. The cartoon presented in [Plate 2](#) shows the Equatoguinean president seated on a flamboyant royal chair partly made of oil gallons. On the downer part of this chair are written the names of prominent oil firms operating in Equatorial Guinea, namely Exxon Mobil and Total among

others. Seated on the flamboyant chair, Obiang Nguema exhibits a smiling face as well as a proud and expectant spirit. Published on 21 April 2006 in *Asodegue*, the cartoon was used to spice-up an editorial article calling for the boycott of foreign petroleum products in Equatorial Guinea. The cartoon hinges on a variety of signs to convey its “anti-Nguemism” message.

The flamboyant royal chair in the cartoon is a symbol of the subtle but shameful Western support of autocratic governance in Equatorial Guinea. The chair also symbolizes neo-colonialism. The cartoonist here uses a paradox to criticize the Equatoguinean government’s relations with influential western multinationals. He tends to nuance and suggests that while foreign pressure has sometimes been favorable to democratization in sub-Saharan Africa, not all foreign entities are working for the liberation of Equatorial Guinea. Some neo-colonialist oil firms are paradoxically supporting Obiang Nguema’s dictatorship, thereby worsening the socio-economic conditions of Equatoguineans. Thus, the cartoon indirectly foregrounds a paradox international observer such as [Transparency International \(2023\)](#) have in various reports denounced. The cartoon is also reminiscent of the regular calls made by such international observers as [Transparency International \(2023\)](#) and [Human Right Watch \(2017, 2018\)](#) for greater transparency in foreign firms’ presence and economic exploitation of natural resources in Equatorial Guinea.



Plate 3: A Cartoon published in reaction to the arbitrary arrest and detention of Ramon Essono

In [Plate 3](#), Ramon Essono Ebale deploys parody to continuously criticize Obiang Nguema's eccentric policies and arrogance. The cartoon presented in this plate shows a scene where the president makes his speech amidst widespread criticism against his dictatorship. The cartoon actually depicts Obiang Nguema talking to an imaginary Equatoguinean public. All around him, there appear to be some repeated Spanish inscriptions reading "DICTADOR" meaning dictator in English. Irrespective of the inscriptions, Obiang makes a boastful Spanish pronouncement which could be translated thus:

Come on, ladies and gentlemen, let us be serious! Do you think it is by calling me dictator that things will in any way be better in this country?

I possess all the wealth desired by the international community. So, stop thinking you can intimidate me with all those insults of yours that associate me with dictatorship? Gosh!

Be original for once! At this point in time, I will organize 5 African Union summits, plus the ones my donkey of a son has already organized.

O God ... What a clueless people!

The repeated inscriptions are indexical, and even reminiscent of widespread anti-Nguema criticism in Equatorial Guinea. The fact that the inscriptions cover virtually all the image's background points to widespread denunciation of autocratic governance in Equatorial Guinea. Indeed, it suggests the idea that the Equatoguinean socio-political sphere is filled with criticism against the Obiang Nguema's regime. This repetitive way of using the gloomy inscription is therefore indexical of the unpopularity of the Obiang Nguema government. While these inscriptions convey criticism against dictatorship, Obiang Nguema's speech in the cartoon represents a humorous imitation of the Equatoguinean president's real life speech habits. Actually, the linguistic message of the cartoon is a parody aimed at satirizing the arrogance and carelessness of Obiang Nguema. Ramon Ebale Essono actually uses such parody to suggest the Equatoguinean government's adamancy to the people cries and its tendency to adopt irrelevant policies that intrinsically divert public attention to unproductive projects. Thus, the parody is indexical to authoritarianism.

A similar parody is used in the cartoon presented in [Plate 4](#) where, the Equatoguinean president is seen making an official address to the public. In the background of the image, garbage and dilapidated constructions are seen. In his presidential speech rendered in Spanish language, Obiang Nguema says the following:

They say all over the world that I am a rich president. And why should things be different? Is it even true that I am an authoritarian ruler governing a rich country? Are my family and friends not natives of this rich country? Am I really imposing laws and giving senseless orders to people in this rich country of ours? Do the international community hate me because I come from a rich country? Come on, it's but normal for me to be rich!.. haven't I given my life for this country? Don't you think that it is normal for you, fellow Equatoguineans, to be rich without much efforts? Don't be fooled by these ill-intentioned people who criticize our country! Their goal is to spoil the good ambiance, harmony, peace, and prosperity of this country!



Plate 4: A Cartoon on Obiang Nguema's political arrogance

The dilapidated buildings and garbage appearing at the background of Obiang Nguema's image is symbolic of the Equatoguinean regime's political failures, while Obiang Nguema's address in the cartoon is indexical of the Malabo government's indifference in the face of its political failures. Like in the previous cartoon (the one in Plate 3) the speech depicts a government that paradoxically brags over failure and does not hesitate to evoke conspiracy theories whenever its weaknesses are exposed by critics.

In Plate 5, Ramon Essono Ebale uses the imagery of enlightenment to foreground another serious paradox characterizing the Equatoguinean political and governing class.

This paradox is the fact that, instead of being the light of the populace, the governing elite in Equatorial Guinea are vectors of obscurity. This elite even seem to be ill equipped to eventually yield the awaited fruits and catalyze effective development in the country. The cartoon shown in this plate depicts a bunch of humanoids dressed in business suits. These humanoids have heads shaped like lamps. These lamps are off, visibly due to the fact that they are not duly connected to working sources of energy. The humanoids also have plugs and dishes apparently meant to feed them with electric energy.

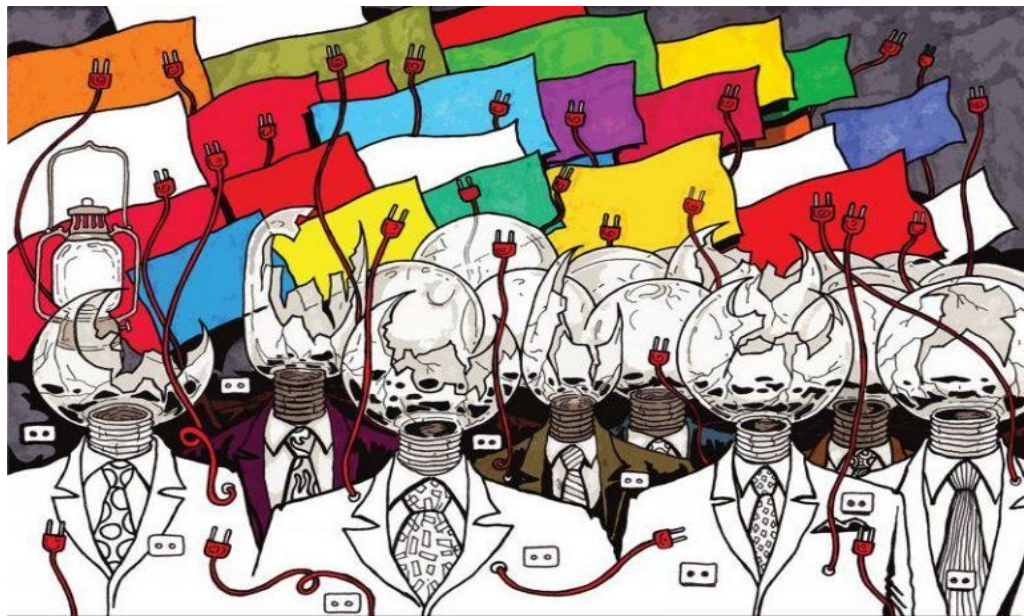


Plate 5: Cartoon Titled “Trazando Estados”

The humanoids present in the cartoon are a symbol of the perverted elite class in Equatorial Guinea. The fact that their heads produce no light and are off is symbolic of the malfunctioning of the elite/political class in Equatorial Guinea. Similarly, the fact that the humanoids are unplugged is symbolic of the fact that the political elites are severed from relevant sources of good inspiration. Their being severed makes them irrelevant and clueless as well as impediments to the socio-political development of Equatorial Guinea. Through this cartoon, Ramon Ebale Essono deplores the absence of democratic values (symbolized by light in the cartoon) in the policies of the Equatoguinean government and stresses the need for a socio-political revival in his country. He suggests that the chances of the country to effectively rise and shine depend on its ability to embrace positive values, notably democracy.

Conclusion

This paper sought to show how editorial cartoons propagate anti-government propaganda and contribute to democratization in Equatorial Guinea. The paper particularly examined how signs and symbols are deployed by these cartoons to denounce political failures and low standards of political malfeasance in Equatorial Guinea. Using five cartoons penned by Ramon Essono Ebale, the paper argued that political cartooning seeks to criticize undemocratic political cultures that range from corruption and moral decadence to neocolonial influence.

The five cartoons considered for this study in particular, revolve around President Teodoro Obiang Nguema's dictatorship and resistance to waves of democratization in his country. The cartoons also dwell so much on the effect of the aforementioned dictatorship on the Equatoguinean populace. In effect, the cartoons mainly deploy gloomy visual metaphors, paradoxes as well as parodies and satire to lambast the Equatoguinean president's political arrogance, sense of demagoguery and adherence to low standards of political and economic malfeasance. Most of the cartoons depict Obiang Nguema's political arrogance particularly stressing the head of state's reluctance to yield to the "democratizing" political pressure coming from the international community.

This paper provided a semiotic perspective on political cartooning in Equatorial Guinea and the ability of this genre of cartooning to criticize "Nguemism", and contribute to the socio-political discourse as well as the democratization movement in Equatorial Guinea. Attention in the study was exclusively given to Equatorial Guinean cartoonists. Subsequent study could focus on pro-government cartoon's critique of politics in Equatorial Guinea. Also, important issues for further studies could be stylistic and persuasive analyses of foreign cartoons' depiction of politics in Equatorial Guinea. Furthermore, subsequent studies could focus on both domestic and international audiences' reception of political cartoons around Equatoguinean politics.

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