

# A Semiotic Analysis of Non-Verbal Signs in the Protest Images of the Y En a Marre Movement

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**Abstract**— This article focuses on a non-verbal communication expressed through images. This form of communication has been developed by the Y en a marre movement to fight against the political system of President Abdoulaye Wade. The actors (rappers) of this movement were denouncing the weaknesses of that system. It aims to analyze the cryptic messages of images in using the semiological approach of Roland Barthes. However, the analysis permitted us to note the problems related to the difficult living conditions of Senegalese citizens, to democracy, to corruption and to dictatorship. Thus, these results will enable to better understand the communicative dimension of images in the struggle of the Y en a marre movement.

**Keywords**— Y en a marre, semiotics, image, communication, Sign.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, we live in a world where image becomes a medium of expression and communication. It existed since the prehistoric period and continues to have a resounding success in invading the entire space that surrounds us. Inside of image, the importance is to understand the link between sign and what it represents. This link is inevitably based on arbitrary conventions.

Thus, the meaning of a sign depends on the experience that is made of it, that is to say that individuals may have a different understanding of a sign in case they have an experience different from it. In a situation of communication, the choice of image is important, it is done according to what one seeks to express or to communicate. The importance in the use of image is the focus on the point of interest of the message.

In any image, there is an essential element that attracts the viewer's eye. In this case, the subject of communication is understood and the process commits itself. In the process of communication, image is "*essentiellement communicative et destinée à une lecture publique*"<sup>1</sup> [1]

However, the individual is fascinated by images, what makes that it can not remain passive in front of it. It draws attention, the look of the latter and pushes him to questioning. This particular interest of image must be taken into account in communication.

In Senegal, the citizen movement called "*y en a marre*" appeared in Senegal in a context of a political "revolution" in 2011. A period during which Senegal had to have a second

<sup>1</sup> Essentially communicative and intended for public reading (my translation).

political alternation since its accession to independence. The various actors of this movement, to pack the living forces of the nation and to denounce the political system, were expressing themselves not only by verb, but also by images shown during the political demonstrations. This form of visual communication is an effective way for the rapper to deliver a message to the Senegalese people.

In this article, our goal is to make a semiological analysis in order to explain the messages conveyed by images in using Roland Barthes' approach about the two levels of significance; denotation and connotation.

However, before analyzing, it is important to give the various acceptances of the term image according to domains. According to *Le Robert*, a historical dictionary of the French language, image as a visual sign can be considered as "*une modification linguistique de la forme imagine, imagene ; c'est un emprunt au latin imaginem accusatif de imago "image" ce qui imite, ce qui ressemble et par extension tout ce qui est du domaine de la représentation*"<sup>2</sup> [2].

In the visual image, there is a representation of something like object, being alive and / or concept. In image, there could be a natural fact (shadow, reflection) or artificial (painting, photography). Its conception could also be a metaphor for the fact that there is a direct resemblance to its model. As for the philosopher Platon, he says: "*J'appelle images d'abord les ombres ensuite les reflets qu'on voit dans les eaux, ou à la surface des corps opaques, polis et brillants et toutes les représentations de ce genre*"<sup>3</sup> [3]. Indeed, in taking the example of a mirror, it is conceivable that image could be a second object in relation to the very object that it would represent.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several studies about the Senegalese citizen movement, called "*Y en a marre*". These various studies have mainly focused on oral discourse (Ndiaye [4], Diagne & Ndiaye [5], Ngom [6], Gueye [7]) or on the socio-political context (Sarr and Savané [8]). Ndiaye explained in his analysis that the rhetorical figures and the ungrammatical

<sup>2</sup> a linguistic modification of the form imagine, imagene; it is a borrowing from the Latin imaginem accusative of imago "image" which imitates, which resembles and by extension all that is of the domain of representation (my translation).

<sup>3</sup> First, I call images shadows then reflections that we see in waters or on the surface of the opaque, polished and brilliant bodies and all representations of this kind. (my translation).

structures present in the rappers’ discourse are discursive strategies with a persuasive aim. For him, rhetorical figures usually demonize or stigmatize the addressee of the message (the politician) while ungrammatical structures are just a way of communicating and of displaying a certain identity. As for Ngom, he made a semiotic study of two types of discourse in a comparative perspective. It is the discourse of *Buul Faale*<sup>4</sup> and *Y’en a marre* movements, in which he analyzes the lyrics and signs in order to better understand the interface through the change of discourses in Senegalese hip hop. Thus, he was able to note that these two Senegalese citizen movements share the same ideology, that is to say the same lifestyle and state of mind. However, we specified that the studies on this movement are both linguistic and socio-political; it is the case with Sarr and Savané. The analysis of these two journalists is mainly focused on the socio-political dimension of the movement. The latter consider that the actors of this movement act not only as sentinels of democracy, but also militate tirelessly for the welfare of their people.

After reviewing all of the studies, it is evident that important they have been made on linguistic and sociopolitical aspects, to understand both the scope of the discourse and the social dimension of the movement. Nevertheless, it is necessary to analyze in this present study another unexplored aspect, that is to say the semantics of the message contained in images of protest and denunciation during the demonstrations of the actors of the movement.

### III. METHODOLOGY

In the framework of this study, we compiled a corpus of data consisting of 09 images. These images appeared during the pre-electoral period. They are obtained in a different way: some are slogans exhibited by the actors or sympathizers of the *Y en a marre* movement during political demonstrations, while others are extracted in video clips. The choice of images concerns those that convey a theme characterizing the Senegalese socio-political situation.

However, *Y en a marre* is a movement of citizenship which was created on 18 January 2011 by Senegalese citizens composed not only of rappers such as *Thiat* and *Kilifa* from (*Keur gui* group), *Fou Malade* from (*Battalion-Blindé* group), *Simon* from (*Bisbi* clan group), But also journalists such as *Cheikh Fadel Barro* (spokesperson) and *Aliou Sané*. This movement was created in a context where Senegal was facing the problems of youth unemployment, power cut, costly living and corruption. Because of these obstacles, the movement was claiming for a new political generation under the slogan of a NTS<sup>5</sup>.

### IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In France, Roland Barthes was the first linguist who actively participated in the development of semiological researches during the sixties. Roland Barthes was interested in “language” of culture in analyzing meaningful systems. Basing on the Saussurean perspective, he analyzed signs

within two main semiotic concepts such as the signified and the signifier. Indeed, this can be noticed in the following drawing:



Roland Barthes was strongly motivated by the theory of Ferdinand De Saussure on sign and its components. To create a meaning as the sign of fashion, the latter decided to identify the semiotic sign with the language system. Moreover, with this Saussurean perspective, the latter also writes on the preface of the *Journal of communications* (1964):

*Prospectivement, la sémiologie a [...] pour objet tout système de signes, quelle qu’en soit la substance, quelles qu’en soient les limites: les images, les gestes, les sons mélodiques, les objets, et les complexes de ces substances que l’on retrouve dans des rites, des protocoles ou des spectacles constituent sinon des “langages” du moins des systèmes de signification.*<sup>6</sup> [9]

With Roland Barthes, semiology appears as a science that aims to understand the way in which meaning is developing. This conception of semiology led him to analyze visual images such as consumption objects, modes, rituals, etc. where he tried to explain that the meanings of images do not naturally reflect what we see; to say that there is no universal understanding of images.

For Roland Barthes, the denotative meaning of image refers to the immediate visual impact and as for the connotative meaning of image; it refers to the cultural meaning. In other words, these semantic elements respectively specify the content of the image or the photograph and the interpretative intention of it. He conceives that there are two existent messages in photographic image: the first without a code which is denoted and the second with a code which is connoted.

### V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study presented in the sections below have permitted us to note that the political authority is the main addressee. These images are quite meaningful because they convey a set of messages that are often cryptic. Indeed, they denounce problems related to the difficult living

<sup>6</sup> Prospectively, the object of semiology is [...] any system of signs, whatever may be the substance, whatever may be the limits: images, gestures, melodic sounds, objects, and the complexes of these substances found in rituals, protocols or spectacles are, if not “language” at least systems of signification<sup>6</sup> (my translation).

conditions of Senegalese citizens, to democracy, to corruption and to dictatorship.



Picture N°1

In this image, we noted that it is a demonstration during which people dressed in white tee-shirts were parading with a banner on an asphalted road. There is also a fifteen-years-old boy holding bread in his right hand. This food occupies a prominent place in the Senegalese everyday life. However, bread is, for the most part, used for breakfast. Through this image, one can understand the connotation of the message that is nothing other than the denunciation of the high cost of living in Senegal; a country in which citizens are no longer in the position of procuring the foodstuffs of basic necessity.



Picture N°2

In this image, we can see demonstrators gathered at the mythical place called “Obelisque”. A place located in Colobane; a famous suburb in Dakar Capital. But the most striking element is the storm lamp, which symbolizes the past because with the advance of technology, electrification is finally accessible and that such a device is no longer used in modern times. Indeed, the image connotes the failure of the politics of energy; a situation that obliges the population to use storm lamps because of untimely power cuts.



Picture N°3

In this image, there are young people gathered at the same place called called “Obelisque” during a demonstration. Some are standing and others are sitting. One of the demonstrators is holding a sign on which it is written “Change We Need”. A slogan inspired from the First Black President of USA, Barack Obama. The latter created “Yes We Can” during his election campaign in 2008. A slogan that the US President used to make his fellow citizens understood that it was quite possible

of being a black and became a President of the American nation. This was in a dynamics of realizing the wish of Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream”. Therefore, the connotation of the picture is that these young Senegalese citizens are claiming a change and decided to get rid of President Abdoulaye Wade’s political system. According to them, this is the only way that can permit to improve the Senegalese living conditions.



Picture N°4

In this image, we can see a placard brandished during a political demonstration. And on this placard, it is written “Non A LA PAPACRATIE” (*No to a power inherited from a dad*). This slogan inspired from the french word “democratie” (*democracy*) has an essential meaning in so far as “PAPA” (*DAD*) is a childish term designating the *father* and as for the term “cracy”, it comes from the Latin word *kratein* that means *command*. This neology “PAPACRATIE” is synonymous of “*monarchy*”. In this image, we can read the monarchical character of the power of President Abdoulaye Wade who wanted to put his son Karim in power through bills.



Picture N°5

In this image, there is a group of persons surrounding a dead person covered with a shroud, a pagne and a placard on which it is written “WADE ASSASSIN DE LA CONSTITUTION” (*WADE MURDERER OF THE CONSTITUTION*). Indeed, the word “ASSASSIN” (*MURDERER*) is generally used to talk about a murder. In this image, one can read mourning, death. However, President Abdoulaye Wade is accused of murdering the Senegalese constitution and the representation of death means that this old President is dying; a manner of inciting Senegalese citizens not to vote for him.



Picture N°6



In this image appear two men: a civilian and a policeman. One can also read writings such as “C’EST PAS DE MA FAUTE SI ON A COUSU AUTANT DE POCHE A MON UNIFORME...” (it’s not my fault if so many pockets have been sewn in my uniform). In this image, we noticed a difference of weight between the Agent and the Senegalese citizen. This can be explained by the fact that the one uses his assets to feed the other more than he feeds himself. This situation describes the corruptible character of the political system initiated by President Abdoulaye Wade. A system in which all citizens do not enjoy the same rights before a justice manipulated and torpedoed by the “financial power” (money).



Picture N°7

This is a fascinating image on which appears President WADE carrying in his back his son, Karim. One can also read on a board “GABON: Bongo-Bongo, DRC: Kabila Kabila, Togo: Gnassingbe-Gnassingbè” and the message of President Wade such as “JUST A SMALL RETAIL KARIM: THE OTHERS WAITED FOR THEIR DADS TO DIE ...” President Abdoulaye Wade adopts the posture of a teacher in his class, explaining to his student (son) the alternation of political governments in Africa with Presidents such as Bongo, Kabila and Gnassingbe. As for the fact of carrying one’s child in one’s back, it is a cultural expression showing that the event is happening in the African continent. This image is explaining the will of President Abdoulaye Wade that consists of installing his son Karim in power through a constitutional coup to initiate a vice-presidency in Senegal.



Picture N°8

In this image, there is a red banner with white writings hanging on two trees. On this banner, it is written “A.L.E.R.T.E WADE = KHADAFI” (A.T.T.E.N.T.I.O.N WADE= KHADAFI). The word A.L.E.R.T.E announces the danger, the mathematical sign “=” is considered here as an element comparison between President WADE and KADHAFI, President of Libya. The latter was a former Libyan Army General who came to power through a coup d’état and who established a dictatorial regime until his overthrow on October 21, 2011. So the image connotes that

the political system of WADE is somehow similar to the one of Muammar KADHAFI.



Picture N°9

This caricature is a muscular person in the build of a boxer whose equipment symbolizes the Senegalese National Flag with the colors such as “green, yellow and red”. We can also see writings such as “Afriqinfo” (Africanews) “Senegal” on the belt and “Sall” on left glove. Therefore, the caricature is the representation of President Macky Sall and the message extracted from this is that the latter is regarded as a dictator who is terrorizing his nation in general and particularly the opponents of his political system, as it is the case with the imprisonment of Karim Wade, the son of former President Abdoulaye Wade and many other politicians.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In addition to the verbal communication (musical production), the rapper of the *Y en a marre* movement also uses a non-verbal communication (image) to address his public. These images are conceived as a means of expression allowing the rapper to make a campaign of awareness on the drifts of the political system. They have been analyzed from a semiological view to understand the linguistic sign. So, these images are slogans that convey a set of messages describing the social and political situation of Senegal. However, in this process of communication, it would also be interesting to analyze the verbal and non-verbal communication of the rapper in a comparative view in order to know the most understandable form for the citizen.

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