CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PETER OBI'S ACCEPTANCE SPEECH AS LABOUR PARTY'S (LP) PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

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Abstract

The use of fallacious rhetoric in a bid to cajole gullible electorate is not unexpected as the 2023 presidential elections draw near. Consequently, this paper dubbed "A Critical Discourse Analysis of Peter Obi's Acceptance Speech as Labour Party's (LP) Presidential Candidate' examines the use of language in political discourse. Norman Fairclough's Relational-Dialectic Model which is rooted in Critical Discourse Analysis is the theoretical framework. It considers political discourse as three dimensional: texts (the objects of linguistic analysis), discursive practices (the production distribution and consumption of texts) and social practice (the power relations, ideologies as hegemonic struggles that discourses reproduce, challenge or restructure). This model is deployed to find out the formal features of Peter Gregory Obi's speech in relation to language, power and ideology. The methodology involves word usage analysis, mostly personal pronouns,

frequency of positive and negative words, the use of ideologies in the speech and Greek mythology. Based on these premises, certain excerpts from the text are first highlighted and then analyzed based in line with the viewpoints mentioned above. Having said this, findings in this paper reveal that the most dominant personal pronouns are "Our", "I" and "We" which separately accounted for 29%, 19% and 19% respectively, showing that the LP Presidential candidate is calling more for collective responsibility than individual responsibility. Similarly, there were both negative and positive adjectives in the speech. The former accounted for 56.3% while the latter accounted for 41.7%. The descriptive adjectives were used to give more information and detail to both the political state of things and the heightened nature of negative politicking in Nigeria. The dominance of negative adjectives show that things have really gone from bad to worse because of the worsening cases of unwanted but entrenched capitalism while the positive adjectives tell the reader to wake up and fight for their country like the Greeks using their voters card in the coming elections. On the whole, it is concluded that the speech is typical of most political speeches mostly in terms of tone and approach; however, it is assumed, in the context of this paper, that there is a possibility that this speech addressed issues rather than attacked individuals. This is the gap this paper tries to fill; and therefore, it makes a case for issue-based campaigns going into the forthcoming elections.
Keywords: Politics, Speech, Discourse Analysis, Language, Election.

Introduction

In Nigeria, the race for Aso Rock is becoming fiercer by the day. Political opponents are, thereby, dragging one another, playing the blame game, playing the achievement game or playing the "vote me and see game". They do all of these using the instrumentality of language. Language is, therefore, the means through politicians are able to sell their individual commodities with the intention to

win, maintain or antagonize power. Without language, this would be impossible:

> Politics, as we know it, would not only be indescribable without language, it would be impossible. Emerging nations could not declare independence, leaders instruct partisans, citizens protest war, or courts sentence criminals. Neither could we criticize, plead, promise, argue, exhort, demand, negotiate, bargain, compromise, counsel, brief, debrief, advise nor consent. To imagine politics without these actions would be to imagine no recognizable politics at all" (Farr, 1989, p. 48).

In linguistic terms, therefore, the use of language in the political space is often described as "political discourse". It is a type of language consisting of formal and reasoned views, and it is often suggestive of alternative courses of actions intended to solve a perceived or obvious societal problems (Leifeld, 2010). One of the core elements of political speech is persuasion or more preferably rhetoric. In Kirvalidze and Samnidze's (2016, pp.161-2) submission, however, political discourse can be seen from four different angles:

a. from the political point of view on the basis of which conclusions of politological nature are made;
b. from the linguistic viewpoint proper, when the researcher analyses the textual aspect of political discourse considering it as a verbal macro sign in its socio-cultural and political context;
c. from the psychological point of view the aim of which is to reveal and define those strategies that are employed by a politician covertly or overtly in his/her speech to gain political influence upon the addressee;
d. from the individual-hermeneutic viewpoint during which the speaker's personal attitudes towards the target political situation are revealed.

It is imperative to state here that this paper is mostly concerned with political discourse from the linguistic point of view. In this

instance, the textual analysis of a political text is the focus. This explains why the speech of the flag bearer of the Labour Party, Peter Obi, is the subject of linguistic inquiry in this regard.

The Statement of the Problem

As election draws near, the war of rhetoric is the main battle ground. Politicians for decades continue to use political rhetoric to either convince or cajole gullible electorates to their side. In Oprinde's (2020) "exploring the manipulative rhetorical choices in Nigerian political speeches, and Polyakova's et al (2020) "Linguistic manipulation in English political discourse", this could not be further from the truth. It is, therefore, not unexpected for the electorates to be easily swayed by the deliberate rhetoric devices used by politicians in their speech. One of the consequences of this linguistic deceit is that the electorates may not be able to filter facts from fallacious rhetoric, hence, they cannot make an informed opinion about a given candidate. This could in the long run lead to the selection of unwanted candidates to man the political affairs of their country. This paper attempts to critically examine the rhetoric devices in the acceptance speech of the Labour Party's presidential flag bearer, Peter Obi. It is hoped that through this paper, the Nigerian electorate can learn how to judge a speech by its merit rather than to allow themselves to be deceived unnecessarily.

Objectives of the Paper

The objectives of this paper are given below:

1. To use Norman's theory to describe how language is used in Peter Obi's acceptance speech
2. To use the Norman's submission to interpret how language is used in Peter Obi's acceptance speech
3. To use Norman's proposition to explain how language is used in Peter Obi's acceptance speech

The Major Assumptions of the Paper

This paper is predicated under the following assumptions:

i. that the tone and style of political speech is different from the conventional use of language
ii. that rhetoric or persuasion will continue to remain the most noticeable characteristics of political speeches
iii. that in a bid to persuade the people politicians deliberately use certain kinds of pronouns notably personal pronouns
iv. that the use of these pronouns are not accidental but deliberate to achieve certain kinds of effects
v. that the choice of words matter, and politicians carefully craft their words to send a particular message across
vi. that they often use descriptive adjectives both to their credit and to discredit the opponent
vii. that politicians can use allusions (mostly historic ones) to send their message across to the populace

Description of Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is mostly advanced on the ideas of ideology, power, hierarchy and gender in the society. Correspondingly, Fairclough (1989) agrees that language is, therefore, pivotal to the exercise of power and ideology which are the focal points of CDA; hence, it is concerned with the relationship between language, ideology and power (Fairclough, 1992). Language in this proposition is seen as the mirror of the world (Silverstein, 1979). Similarly, Dijk (1993) suggests that social power abuse, dominance and inequality are all realities that are discussed in Critical Discourse Analysis. It is against this backdrop that Fairclough and Wodak (1997) maintain that CDA addresses social problems and shows that power relations are discursive. Besides, discourse constitutes society and culture, and it does ideological work where the link between text and society is mediated. Hence, Dijk (2006) remarks that Critical Discourse Analysis is mostly concerned about understanding pressing social issues through language as is the intention here.

When language is used in this regard in Critical Discourse Analysis, it is considered as addressing every day issues in the

society (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). This is because every day or almost every day people (politicians inclusive) say things or do things that have societal consequences. No wonder, McCarthy (1991) supports this view by saying that CDA is focused on social actions occurring within certain social and historical context. This paper examines how a political speech can have both a social and historical undertone. This instance of language use is why language does not occur in a vacuum. Halliday's (1978, p.36) submission that "language comes to life when functioning in some environment" suffices here.

He is also of the view that people do not experience language in isolation. If they did, they would not recognize it as language-but always in relation to a scenario, some background of persons or actions and events from which the things which are said derive their meaning. Besides, Ogunsiji and Olanrewanju (2010) affirm that Critical Discourse Analysis sees language as capable of performing some vital functions, creating a general understanding of a linguistic structure. This could mean that CDA is used to analyze the contextual usages of language; and by so doing, it can aid both the appreciation and comprehension of language in a given context. Also, Critical Discourse Analysis can only make a significant and specific input to critical social and political analyses if it is able to give an adequate account of the role of language (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000), its use, discourse or communicative event in the production of dominance and inequality as is the practice in this paper (Dijk, 2006; McGregor, 2010). It is the view of scholars like Martin (2004) and Luke (2002) that such an investigation should be more rigorous, paying rapt attention to the transformative uses of discourse.

On a general note, therefore, CDA is termed an interdisciplinary endeavour. This is because it helps one to gain a proper understanding of how language works in different social institutions (Wodak & Mayer, 2009). Nevertheless, the position of Rogers, Malamcharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui and Garro Joseph (2005) is paramount to this investigation to the effect that critical

theories are primarily concerned with issues of power and justice and the manners in which the economy, race, class, gender, religion, education, and sexual orientation construct, reproduce or transform societal systems.

Fairclough's Relational-Dialectic Model

Fairclough developed this model in 1989 as a dialectal theory of discourse. It is also a kind of transdisciplinary approach to social change. In this model, Fairclough considers language as a kind of social behaviour. Hence, it seeks to relate the theories of society with the theories of language. The model itself is built around three interrelated parts. Firstly, it sees discourse as a text whether spoken or written. Secondly, it sees discourse as an interaction between people. This second part involves the production and interpretation of a written text. The last part is that discourse is considered as a social action. To put it in another way, he proposes that discourse is three dimensional: texts (the objects of linguistic analysis), discursive practices (the production distribution and consumption of texts) and social practice (the power relations, ideologies and hegemonic struggles that discourses reproduce, challenge or restructure).

In like manner, the model proposes that there is power behind and in the use of discourse, and it is capable of changing the social order. As model, its focus is mainly on ideology, and does not necessarily pay attention to just persuasion or manipulation. It is appropriate where there is social struggle, power tussle and an imbalance social architecture between the rich and the power or between the "haves and the have nots". It is a model that calls for a radical change by questioning the status quo (Fairclough, 2012).

As model, it can be said to be a veritable tool for the analysis of the way communication occurs in the society. Base on the basic features of this model, it is considered appropriate for this investigation because Peter Obi's acceptance speech meets all three conditions: it is written; it is meant to send a message to the generality of the population, thereby, satisfying the second clause

and it is meant to induce social action which is its main focus. Most importantly, it calls for social reformation and transformation in favour of the downtrodden.

Methodology

Peter Obi's speech is going to be analyzed based on the following criteria: word usage analysis, mostly personal pronouns, frequency of positive and negative words, the use of ideologies in the speech and Greek mythology. For all of these, excerpts from the speech will be collected, highlighted and explained to prove each of this point. This would be a sort of critique of the major components of the speech, and most importantly why it is considered a political speech.

Data Presentation and Analysis

A. Word Usage Analysis

The entire speech is made up of six hundred and sixty-eight words in total (668). Furthermore, the frequency of personal pronouns as well as the use of positive and negative words is given in the tables below:

Table 1: Word Frequency particularly the use of personal pronouns

Personal Pronouns	Frequency
First Person	Our (14), I (9), We (9), Me (2),
Second Person	You (5), Your (1)
Third Person	They (1), Them (1), , Their (4),

Table 2: *Personal Pronouns*

Options		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	OUR	14	29.2	30.4	30.4
	I	9	18.8	19.6	50.0
	WE	9	18.8	19.6	69.6
	ME	2	4.2	4.3	73.9
	YOU	5	10.4	10.9	84.8
	YOUR	1	2.1	2.2	87.0
	THEY	1	2.1	2.2	89.1
	THEM	1	2.1	2.2	91.3
	THEIR	4	8.3	8.7	100.0
	Total	46	95.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	4.2		
Total		48	100.0		

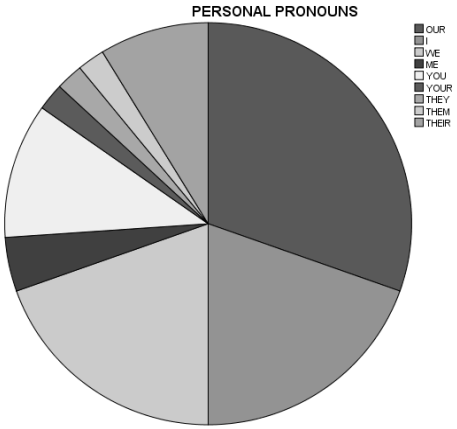

Figure 2: *Personal Pronouns on a Pie Chart*

It is imperative to examine the use of personal pronouns above because they help the reader to establish the degree of inclusivity or exclusivity. Fairclough (2001, p.106) opines that

there are relational values for pronouns: 'linguistically inclusive' we, which includes the speaker and audience, and the 'linguistically exclusive' we, which includes the speaker and others but not the audience. To this end, the use of "our" in the First Personal occurred about 14 times which represents about 30% of the level of Peter Obi's solidarity with the masses. Also, "We" occurred about 9 times, representing about 20% of the utterance made. Adding 30% plus 20% will give you about 50% of Peter Obi's stance with the masses on the issues at stake.

Similarly, the use of "I" represents about 20% while the use of "Me" represents about 4%, together they both amount to approximately 24%. This further shows that Peter Obi believes in the cooperation and the collaboration of members of the Nigerian public in the actualization of his dream and political ambition for Nigeria than he believes in himself. In terms of the weight of the responsibility also, collective responsibility is greater, and this explains why the use of "You" accounted for 11%. Therefore, Peter Obi calls for the greater burden of nation building to be shared by all collectively rather than just an individual or a group of persons. Therefore, these pronouns show solidarity and equality. While the aforementioned pronouns are all used in the positive sense, "Them", "Their" and "They" are used in the negative sense. This also explains why only 13% attention is given to them who are invariably members of the ruling party and the opposition party. Nevertheless, the negative antecedents of their "regime" are visible in the speech. Consider these instances:

1. …farmers, teachers and students, lecturers, artisans, workers, pensioners and over a hundred million poor Nigerians who are not sure where their next meal will come from.
2. …our dear country, which stands wounded by many years of cumulative leadership failure.
3. Painfully, our current dysfunctional system rewards unearned income and conspicuous consumption; allows university lecturers to remain on strike for months; keeps

our youths at home; and owes pensioners, who gave their patriotic sweat and their youthful energy to serve this country.

4. …they owe most workers, lecturers and retirees. Yes, our country stands hijacked by forces of retrogression. We are almost zero in all indices of development etc.

B. **Frequency of Positive and Negative Words**

Table 3: Positive Word Frequency and Negative Word Frequency

Positive Word Frequency (20)	**Negative Word Frequency (27)**
Hopeful	Painfully
Rebirth	Dysfunctional
Patriotic	Unearned
Emancipation	Corruption
Commitment	Strike
Patriotism	Owes
Understanding	Despicable
Enthroning	Mess
National security	Abandoned
Human security	Hijacked
Food security	Retrogression
Nationalism	Zero
Rise	Ruins
Victory	Laughing stock
Respected	Degraded
Viable	Bad leadership
Patrimony	Adversarial
Faith	Battle
Defense	Insurmountable
Liberation	Die
	Discontent
	Cry
	Unemployment
	Poverty
	Struggle
	Wounded
	Failure

Table 4: *Word Frequency*

Options		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	POSITIVE WORDS	20	41.7	42.6	42.6
	NEGATIVE WORDS	27	56.3	57.4	100.0
	Total	47	97.9	100.0	
Missing	System	1	2.1		
Total		48	100.0		

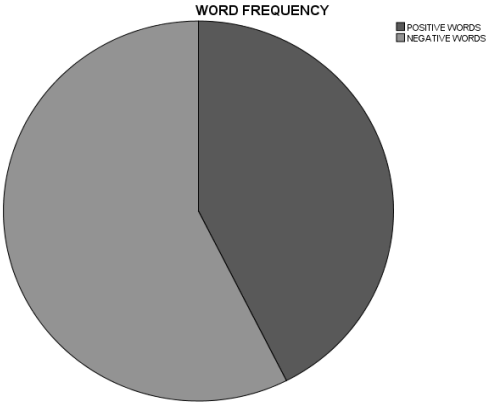

Figure 1: *Word Frequency*

The use of positive and negative words has their own effects too. For instance, most of the positive words were used by Peter Obi to call for change or transformation. They are healing or therapeutic words. Consider the following examples:

1. ***Emancipation***
2. ***Victory***
3. ***Liberation***
4. ***Defense***
5. ***Faith and***
6. ***Hope***

These words call on the citizens to take a stand against their oppressors. The slavery-like-situation of the common Nigerians and the need to fight back are brought back to their consciousness by words such as freedom or liberation, emancipation, victory and defense. Thus, these words no doubt denote that Nigerians are in bondage from the current political dispensation. They are also angered by words such the ones below which are descriptive of the current political landscape in Nigeria:

7. ***Dysfunctional***
8. ***Corruption***
9. ***Bad leadership***
10. ***Insecurity***
11. ***Unemployment***
12. ***Poverty***

C. The Use of Descriptive Adjectives, Lexis and Phrase

Peter Obi uses descriptive adjectives to paint a better picture of something or somebody. Basically, these adjectives help the reader to visualize, describe, define, or explain information about people, places, things, situations, or actions. The focus of the descriptive adjectives in this speech is to help the reader visualize the current political maneuverings of the Nigerian state. The use of descriptive adjectives in the speech is highlighted below:

5. "Our current dysfunctional system rewards unearned income and conspicuous consumption", "our country stands hijacked by forces of retrogression.
6. "We are almost zero in all indices of development"
7. "We have become a laughing stock among other nations…"
8. "Our battle cry shall remain: get your PVC and become part of this great liberation!'
9. "Our governance mission will be twin-tracked"
10. "A meaningful future for our youths and making this country a respected and viable member of a 21st century world that places high value on production over consumption".
11. "History beckons. Nigerians remain hopeful for a national rebirth…"

12. Over a hundred million poor Nigerians…
13. Therefore, what you are doing today is a patriotic duty towards seeking the desired political emancipation of our dear country, which stands wounded by many years of cumulative leadership failure.
14. that will certainly require the cooperation of critical stakeholders in our country, especially the youth, whose future has been thoroughly degraded.

The use of descriptive adjective in the excerpts above can be clearly seen in "dysfunctional system", "unearned income", "conspicuous corruption", "zero in all indices of development", "laughing stock", "governance mission", "meaningful future", "and respectable and viable member", "national rebirth", "over a hundred million poor Nigerians", "patriotic duty", "political emancipation", "cumulative leadership failure" and "critical stakeholders". In each of the words listed above an adjective comes before a noun:

Table 5: *Descriptive adjectives*

Adjective	**Noun**
conspicuous	corruption
zero	indices
unearned	Income
laughing	stock
governance	mission
meaningful	future
respectable	Member
viable	member
national	rebirth
over a hundred million poor…	Nigerians
patriotic	duty
political	emancipation
cumulative leadership	failure
critical	stakeholders

D. Ideologies in the Speech

One of the ideologies captured in Obi's speech is capitalism. It is both an economic and political system in which the business and commerce of a country are controlled by a handful of people. These people take a huge chunk of the collective wealth of the Nigerian people; by so doing, they enrich themselves at the detriment of a larger percentage of the population. Peter Obi captures the concept of capitalism in excerpt 15 and its antecedent evils in excerpts 16 and 17 below:

15. …those elected to take care of them – have abandoned the national currency and are living in opulence and like kings, spend dollars to buy delegates as well as houses all over the world. Meanwhile, they owe most workers, lecturers and retirees. Yes, our country stands hijacked by forces of retrogression.
16. History beckons. Nigerians remain hopeful for a national rebirth, which implies returning Nigeria to Nigerians – farmers, teachers and students, lecturers, artisans, workers, pensioners and over a hundred million poor Nigerians who are not sure where their next meal will come from.
17. Painfully, our current dysfunctional system rewards unearned income and conspicuous consumption; allows university lecturers to remain on strike for months; keeps our youths at home; and owes pensioners, who gave their patriotic sweat and their youthful energy to serve this country.

E. Use of Greek Mythology

The use of Greek mythology is common in modern day writings and specifically in this case, speech writing. They are often fascinating stories about a god or goddess, a deity, a hero or heroine in classical times. It is not unexpected to draw from these stories or make reference to them to make a point especially if they bare some kind of verisimilitude to present day happenings. In the words of Arp (2013, p125):

> The simplest and most direct way to approach mythology is to look at its subject matter. In the broadest terms myths are traditional stories about gods, kings and heroes. Myths relate the creation of the world and sometimes its future destruction as well. They tell how gods created men. They depict the relationships between various gods and men. They provide a moral code by which to live. And myths treat the lives of heroes who represent the ideals of a society. In short, myths largely deal with the significant aspects of human and superhuman existence

Because of the applicability of myths to present day political life, Obi makes the following statement:

18. However, permit me a little indulgence here, to relate what we are embarking on to the ancient battle of Thermopylae, where the Greek forces, conscious of fighting for the life of Greece, held on against great odds in the defence of their country.
19. In the battle to retake Nigerian, the odds are great and seemingly insurmountable, but with our commitment, patriotism and understanding that we are doing, what we are supposed to do for our country, lest she shall die, we shall move on discontent with what is and focused on enthroning what ought to be. In doing this, our battle cry shall remain: get your PVC and become part of this great liberation.

The ancient battle of Thermopyla, a Greek mythology, talks about how Spartan soldiers, though outnumbered by the Barbarians and the Persian King, fought hard to secure their mother land. Correspondingly, Peter Obi tells the youths to "fight" using their PVCs to salvage their country from the hands of the corrupt politicians who are bent on bringing the nation to its knees. This speech can therefore be said to have a revolutionary and war-like tone.

Conclusion

Peter Obi, in his acceptance speech, calls on the need to change the current wave of change in the Nigerian political architecture. This speech, which has both a revolutionary and war-like tone, is mostly targeted at the poor masses, the youths and all those who might have been shortchanged by the system, spurring them to rise up and vote out the current political leadership through a democratic process. On a general note, the speech has the element of rhetoric, warmth, empathy and authority.

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Appendix

"I thank Nigerians; especially members of the Labour Party who have gathered here since yesterday to partake in the primaries to choose the person that will fly the Labour flag in the forthcoming National election to choose the President of Nigeria.

History beckons. Nigerians remain hopeful for a national rebirth, which implies returning Nigeria to Nigerians – farmers, teachers and students, lecturers, artisans, workers, pensioners and over a hundred million poor Nigerians who are not sure where their next meal will come from.

Therefore, what you are doing today is a patriotic duty towards seeking the desired political emancipation of our dear country, which stands wounded by many years of cumulative leadership failure.

Painfully, our current dysfunctional system rewards unearned income and conspicuous consumption; allows university lecturers to remain on strike for months; keeps our youths at home; and owes pensioners, who gave their patriotic sweat and their youthful energy to serve this country.

The despicable contrast is that those responsible for the mess – those elected to take care of them – have abandoned the national currency and are living in opulence and like kings, spend dollars to buy delegates as well as houses all over the world. Meanwhile, they owe most workers, lecturers and retirees. Yes, our country stands hijacked by forces of retrogression. We are almost zero in all indices of development.

As a result, our future, especially those of the youth and generations unborn, is in ruins. We have become a laughing stock among other nations, including African countries where we were once revered. As a party that represents the workers and masses of this great nation, we are people organised and working for our economic rebirth.

As I am nominated today, I humbly proclaim that the journey towards the emancipation of the country has begun. I note with humility that the journey is going to be a collective one that will

certainly require the cooperation of critical stakeholders in our country, especially the youth, whose future has been thoroughly degraded.

I therefore thank all of you and call for your sustained support towards returning Nigeria to Nigerians from forces of bad leadership and retrogression. Such a noble task brooks no conscientious objectors. I hardly use war metaphors for political analysis due to my belief that politics is not adversarial and not war.

However, permit me a little indulgence here, to relate what we are embarking on to the ancient battle of Thermopylae, where the Greek forces, conscious of fighting for the life of Greece, held on against great odds in the defence of their country.

In the battle to retake Nigerian, the odds are great and seemingly insurmountable, but with our commitment, patriotism and understanding that we are doing, what we are supposed to do for our country, lest she shall die, we shall move on discontent with what is and focused on enthroning what ought to be. In doing this, our battle cry shall remain: get your PVC and become part of this great liberation!

Our governance mission will be twin-tracked. Secure Nigeria in every ramification: national security, human security, food security and tackling insecurity created by unemployment. We will also seek to unite our nation by pulling our people out of poverty, and creating a new sense of nationalism and patriotism.

Nigeria shall rise again: and her people will be proud to claim ownership of her patrimony. Doing so is in our collective national interest. As I earnestly thank Nigerians for their faith in me. In the days ahead I will publish our governance manifesto, which will spell out our top governance priorities. I assure you that no region; state, local government or communities will be left behind.

I also assure you all that the struggle continues and that victory is certainly in sight towards the guarantee of a meaningful future for our youths and making this country a respected and viable member of a 21st century world that places high value on production over consumption. God bless you all and God bless Nigeria."