Resilience Discourse: A Critical Study of Nigeria's Incumbent and Opposition Political Campaign Speeches

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Abstract: Considering the challenges associated with visibility and intraparty disputes which confronted different categories of political parties during Nigeria's 2019 electoral process, this paper examines the discursive means through which political actors expressed resilience in their struggle for power. Using a Critical Discourse Analysis approach, the paper investigates candidates'/parties' expression of their abilities to cope, regain control and reduce vulnerability during the campaigns. The All-Progressives Congress Party, People's Democratic Party and Allied Congress Party of Nigeria were selected for the study because they represented incumbency, main opposition and the third force parties respectively during the campaigns. Data comprising twenty-three election campaign speeches were purposively selected from some Nigeria's media websites. Findings show that political actors deployed strategies of argumentation, categorization and criminalisation among others to (re)gain control and to minimise vulnerability during the campaigns. In addition, the research reveals Nigerian political actors' predilection for character assassination of Others as a means of survival in the nation's political arena. The results have implications for Nigeria's power politics and, in addition, raise concerns for voters' education and sustenance of democracy in the country. **Key Words**:   Resilience, discourse, critical discourse analysis (CDA), campaign speeches.

Introduction

Politics, and indeed the instruments used for its transactions involve some form of struggle for power. Within the democratic system, competition among political actors is periodically directed at gaining the consent of the electorate during campaigns in order to win elections and gain control of power. Campaign discourses are sites of power struggles because political parties and candidates make use of them to initiate and counter oppositions' persuasive moves, in order to gain voters' support at the polls. Typical of every form of political discourse, campaign discourse has its code and could be manipulatively used to exploit the undiscerning electorate; particularly since it

is produced to maximize the political benefits of its producers which could be parties, candidates or supporters (Van Dijk, 1997; Chilton, 2011; Osunbiyi, 2001; Cummings and Wise, 2005).

Since Nigeria's return to a democratic system of government in 1999, campaigns in the country have manifested characteristics of intensity and competitiveness. Scholars of Nigeria's political campaigns (e.g., Ademilokun and Taiwo, 2013; Oamen, 2015) have also noted that the nation's electoral processes are usually challenged by pitfalls of the multiparty system: disproportionate regions, ethnic group sentiments, gender segregation and unequal access to funding. These factors are significant as they often stimulate keen competition among Nigerian politicians during campaigns. Sometimes political parties and candidates resort to unconventional practices to win elections. For instance, party candidates and their supporters sometimes resort to vote buying to woo voters during campaigns (Adeagbo and Omodunbi, 2019; Nkwede and Abah, 2019). During electoral campaigns, the incumbent's privileged position allows them to have direct access to the county's huge material resources, affording them an unfair advantage and a disproportionate amount of resources at their disposal (Ijediogor and Ezea, 2011). However, Brady and Johnston (2006), note that campaign events and activities are more competitive and meaningful when they reflect an equally matched race with equal resources available to the parties and candidates.

Nigeria's 2019 presidential election is an important milestone in the nation's democratic history, for a number of reasons. First, the two main presidential candidates representing the All-Progressives Congress (APC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP) respectively were from the Northern Fulani

ethnic group. This is crucial, because Nigerian politics is generally organised along regional and ethnic cleavages, especially relating to access to power and resources by the political elite (Suberu and Agbaje, 2004). The emergence of both candidates thus, signaled the possibility of a fragmented Northern electorate's support. Moreover, the Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN) was one of the parties that could be classified as a third force party during the campaigns. The party fielded a prominent female political figure - Dr Oby Ezekwesili - a former Minister of Education and the co-founder of the anticorruption watchdog – Transparency International, as its presidential flag bearer. The party's choice of a female presidential candidate is noteworthy given that Nigeria had not recorded more than 15% female representation in elective positions, including state governorships since 1999 (Ekpe, Alobo and Egbe 2014). When also viewed from the global context, the factor of low female representation in politics had significant implications for Nigeria's 2019 elections. According to Inter-Parliamentary Union, women constitute only 20% of Members of Parliament in upper and lower Houses world-wide and out of 179 serving heads of government only 22 are women (Romaniuk and Ehrlich, 2018).

The dynamics of Nigeria's socio-political milieu during the 2019 presidential campaigns are also important. From 2016, the ruling APC faced an intraparty crisis that somewhat threatened its existence. However, the incumbent president - Muhammadu Buhari had the enormous resources of his office, as well as the support of a significant number of state governors, local government chairpersons and councillors at his disposal for the electoral campaign. Similarly, PDP which before its defeat in 2015 had prided itself as 'the largest party in Africa' also faced the

challenge of decimation before and after the 2015 election. The party, therefore, depended on its efforts at consolidation and the image of its presidential flag bearer, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar – a former vice president of Nigeria – to challenge APC's hegemony in the 2019 elections.

Against this background, this study investigates the ways the parties and candidates discursively expressed resilience during the campaigns. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is relevant to this study because of its preoccupation with the relationship between discourse and power. CDA research is emancipatory and thus, investigates (re)production of social power abuse, manipulation, dominance and inequality as expressed in political and media discourse in order to understand, expose and ultimately resist social inequality (Weiss and Wodak, 2003).

Campaign Speech Discourse and Nigerian

Political Actors

Political campaign speeches refer to interactions which occur between political candidates/parties and their listeners during the electioneering process. Audience responses in this type of exchange are always limited and often expressed in form of applause, cheering or laughter (Choi, Bull and Reed, 2016). Political campaigns generally are usually produced with the aim of winning elections through persuasive discourse. In this wise, texts producers try to convince the electorate to vote for a particular candidate. Benoit, McHale, Hansen, Peir and McGuire (2003) affirm that campaigns could influence the outcome of an election, because they pose a major influence to voters' perceptions on various

issues bothering on the state of the nation, including the candidates themselves. While some candidates choose to campaign on policy (issue), others focus on image (character) construction of themselves and those of their opponents. Policy utterances concern central programmes that a political candidate has developed for her/his campaign, while character comments concern the candidates as individuals (Benoit and Airne, 2005).

Issues on policy could be discussed during campaigns using different types of political campaign strategies. For instance, Hughes (2003) identified two types of political discourse which politicians could opt for during campaigns. They are - attack political campaign discourse – which involves an aggressive, one-sided assault designed to draw attention to an opponent's weaknesses in character or issue positions; and comparative political campaign discourse – which identifies a competing candidate and, by drawing comparisons, implies inferiority and degrades prospective voters' perceptions of the targeted candidate. Comparative messages may use opposing candidates' records, experiences, or issue positions either to communicate negative information about them or to imply the sponsoring candidate's superiority. Opeibi (2006) identified three major categories of political campaign discourse. They are positive campaigns, which include only statements about the candidate with no explicit mention of the candidate's opponent; contrast campaigns, which contain both positive statements about the candidate and negative statements about the opponent; and negative or attack campaigns (sometimes called pure negative), which contain only negative statements about the opponent. Benoit, et al. (2003) note that the need to appear desirable before the electorate often makes a candidate choose among the options of self-

praise, attack of other candidates or campaign discourse designed to refute attacks. They further observe that campaign messages are usually designed to make each candidate different from others in a way that will attract voters. This observation is in line with Budge and Farlie's saliency theory (1983, cited in Dolezal, Ennser-Jedenastik, Muller and Winkler, 2014) which claims that during election campaigns, parties selectively emphasise issues that they deem electorally advantageous to them and downplay the ones that are unfavourable. As noted earlier, the Nigerian electoral field is tough and in order to win the support of the electorate at the polls, politicians usually choose between positive self-representation/self-acclaim strategies or negative representation/outright attack of the opponents. Ike-Nwafor (2015) in her critical investigation of eight political speeches produced by South Western Nigerian gubernatorial candidates between 2007 and 2014, noted that language is used by Nigerian politicians to create and sustain power. She explained that to achieve these, politicians exploit linguistic devices to control the minds of the audience through the use of biased mental models and social representations. Ikeanyibe, Ezeibe, Mbah and Nwangwu (2018) also assert that in order to win citizens' support during campaigns, Nigerian politicians manipulatively deploy hate speech particularly in the buildup to many general elections, thereby polarizing the electorate along religious and ethnic lines and ultimately denying the citizens access to relevant information that could aid in objective choices at the polls.

Some scholars (Ezeibe, 2016; Okafor and Alabi, 2017) have also observed that the media is a major channel through which ideological political discourse is disseminated during election campaigns in Nigeria. Similar to Ike-Nwafor's critical approach to political campaign speeches in Nigeria, the current study also critically examines campaign speeches produced during the country's general elections campaigns.

Resilience and Discourse

The original use of the term 'resilience' to describe the ability of a thing to revive after being suppressed has been expanded to include the notion of transformation, persistence, ability to manage risks and vulnerability management among others (McGreavy, 2015). According to Bourbeau (2015) the notion of resilience has been applied in the field of urban planning, development economics, international security, and politics to investigate humans' ability to adapt to adversity or to bounce back. In psychology, resilience refers to the capacity of an individual to adapt positively after a traumatic experience. In criminology, resilience is described as positive adaptation in the face of significant adversity; while geographers have employed the concept of resilience to describe the ways in which an ecosystem can cope with a change of state, return to a previous state or maintain its function in the face of disturbances. Researchers engaged in human environment-related studies have identified four domains of resilience in human systems: technical, organizational, social and economic. The technical domain refers to the physical attributes of the designed world, the organizational attributes considers the governing institutions that enact policies, the social aspect considers the vulnerabilities and adaptive strengths of individuals and

populations affected by any disturbance, while the economic domain focuses on the capacity of local or regional economies to prepare and respond to disturbance (Laboy and Fannon, 2016).

Resilience in politics demonstrates the social aspect of Laboy and Fannon's categories listed above because it largely reflects individuals' or groups' ability to adapt or manage vulnerability. Indeed, Michelsen and De Orellana (2019) note that in relation to politics, resilience could mean political actors' access to the means, conditions and norms necessary for resistance or a personal struggle to retain one's ideas in the face of what is perceived as dominant political belief. Politics often demonstrate some form of struggle for power. The process of negotiating and bargaining to retain or wrest power involves different kinds of linguistic actions or discourse. In other words, the culturally transmitted characteristics of language and semiotics in general, help to serve the need of politics and also enable political actors to cope with circumstances that would require resilience in the practice of politics. Beard (2000) identified the use of metaphor, metonymy, transitivity, analogy, pronominal as some of the linguistic resources that are used by political actors to express ideological values in political discourse. In this paper, the discursive means deployed by Nigerian political actors which demonstrate their ability to bounce back and manage vulnerabilities during the 2019 general elections campaigns are examined. This is done against the peculiar socio-cultural and political contexts of the country during this period. As highlighted above, the specific objectives of this study are to:

(i) critically examine how resilience is constructed in Nigeria's political campaign speeches;

(ii) analyse the discursive strategies employed by Nigerian political actors to represent Self and Others in campaign speeches, and

(iii) relate the speeches to the socio-political realities of their constructions

Critical Discourse Analysis and Political Discourse

Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth, CDA) refers to the critical approach to language study by scholars who view the larger discursive unit of text to be the basic unit of communication. CDA is one of the social constructionist approaches to discourse analysis, which posits that discourse does not neutrally reflect the world, social identities and relations but rather plays an active role in creating and changing them (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). Its fundamental interest according to Wodak (2001) is to analyse opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifest in language. In other words, CDA research focuses on the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance. Dominance in discourse refers to the use of language in enacting social inequality by the elite or groups and institutions. Fairclough's (2001) Member Resources (MR) and Van Dijk's (2004) socio-cognitive approach to critical discourse analysis are considered useful for investigating and unveiling the hidden ideological shaping of power relations in campaign discourse. According to Van Dijk, control of power is linked to a group's effective and manipulative use of discourse to influence the minds of people. A group's power is therefore closely tied to how much

it can control the shared beliefs and knowledge of its members and others in specific social representations. These shared beliefs which are located in social memory or MR could be drawn upon by political actors during campaigns to influence voters' perception of personality and issues within Nigeria's socio-cultural domain.

Most CDA research show a preoccupation with the 'top-down' relations of dominance rather than 'bottom-top' relations of resistance and challenge. Although proponents of CDA sometimes delimit political discourse to the text and talk of professional politicians or political institutions, yet some scholars (Van Dijk, 2005; Chiluwa, 2012) have also observed the need for analysing the ideologies of dominated groups for a broader understanding of power relations in society. This study adopts a dual perspective to the analysis of dominance and its resistance as expressed in Nigeria's 2019 incumbent/opposition campaign speeches. This is expected to provide a wider view on discursive expressions of the struggle for power in the country's political context. In the analysis of political ideologies expressed in the Nigerian campaign speeches, this study shares the view of scholars such as Paul Chilton (Chilton, 2004); John Richardson (Richardson, 2007) and Teun van Dijk (van Dijk, 2009) that language in politics could be used as a medium to (re)produce inequalities of power and legitimise imbalanced social relations. Thus, the CDA applied here is expected to aid in unveiling dominance and unequal power relations which sometimes underlie incumbent/opposition campaign speech discourse.

Methods

In sourcing the data for the study, 50 samples were drawn from campaign speeches made by party candidates at rallies, party members at town hall meetings and supporters during media interviews. These were published between November 18, 2018 and February 23, 2019. This period spans the inception of the general election campaigns to 24 hours before the presidential election. 23 samples (9 from ACPN, 7 each from PDP and APC respectively which made up a corpus of 16,769 words) were purposively selected for the study. The purposive sampling strategy adopted helped to limit data to only those which reflected Nigeria's political actors' discursive demonstration of resilience during the campaigns. The data were limited to those of the candidates of the All Progressive Congress (APC), People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN). These parties were selected because they were considered to represent incumbency, major opposition and the Third Force. The parties were also considered to provide male and female gender representation of political actors during the 2019 general election campaigns. The data were downloaded from 11 (eleven) Nigerian media websites. They include: *Premium Times*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *Sahara Reporters*, *THISDAY*, *PULSE NIGERIA*, *The Cable*, *Punch*, *Daily Trust*, *Vanguard*, *OAKTV and Channels Television*. The data therefore consisted of written texts and audio-visual recordings. Verbatim transcription of the data drawn from *OAKTV and Channels Television* were carried out. The transcription was however limited only to the verbal information of the recordings. A qualitative analysis which includes description, interpretation and explanation of the discursive components of the samples is carried out. For ease of analysis, the samples were labelled AP, PD and AC to represent APC, PDP and ACPN

respectively. Each sample in this collection is subsequently labelled 1, 2, 3.

Findings and Discussion

Resilience through Argumentation

Samples gathered for the study featured high levels of 'claim plus support' argumentation (Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson and Jacobs (1997: 208). In this form, the arguer skillfully presents her/his evidence to prove their claim in order to project a positive self to the audience. To enact this persuasive move during the campaigns, some of the political actors deployed force of logic and statistics in their speeches to justify their claims of reliability. For example, in AP1 below, President Muhammadu Buhari affirmed his success as a leader through the scheme of argument from precedence. Arguments in political discourse are sometimes structured in this form to strengthen the validity of a claim. Thus, political actors support their claims by evidence and reasoning in order to appear more convincing to the hearers/readers (Posch, 2018; Amossy, 2018). This strategic move is best appreciated when viewed against the intense criticism of Buhari's first tenure. He was judged in some quarters to be somewhat sluggish in delivering on his promises of economic recovery and restoration of security (BBC, February 27, 2019). Thus, in AP1 (a national broadcast strategically aired a few days before the election), he enacted the typical incumbent discourse in which the leader concedes to a bad situation while at the same time mitigating the harsh import of its admission (Beard, 2000). The sample below demonstrates this observation.

AP1

When you elected me in 2015, it was essentially in consequence of my promise of change. Our government spent the last three years and nine months trying to faithfully keep this promise in spite of very serious revenue shortages caused mainly by a sharp drop in the international oil prices and the unexpected rise in the vandalisation of oil installations which mercifully have now been curtailed. We nevertheless pressed on in our quest to diversify the economy, create jobs, reduce commodity prices and generally improve the standard of living among our people. The damage that insecurity and corruption have done overtime to our collective livelihood is incalculable. However, it is pleasing to note that our frontal attack on these twin evils is gaining momentum and bringing about visible progress.

(*Daily Trust*, February 14, 2019)

The incumbent's lexical choices such as: 'shortages', 'unexpected', 'vandalisation', 'curtailed' are strategically deployed to mitigate the shortcomings of Buhari's first tenure. In addition, metaphor of journey: 'we pressed on in our quest' and metaphor of war: 'it is pleasing to note that our frontal attack on these twin evils is gaining momentum' were also deployed to ideologically signal hope of imminent solution to Nigeria's socio-economic problems if reelected. In addition, the pronominals 'we' and 'our' were deployed by the incumbent to enhance resilience. In this case, the discourse situates him as being on the side of the masses; thus mitigating the potentiality of receiving criticism from these masses. On the other hand, the pronouns could have been deployed in the typical

incumbent's move to draw attention to his achievements and capabilities (Cummings and Wise, 2005).

AP2 below also demonstrates the incumbent's use of proofs in form of statistical evidence to validate his image as a capable leader. In addition, material processes such as 'grew', 'accelerate', 'attack', 'create', 'increase', 'deliver' are also foregrounded in the extract to convey the image of a tough and physically fit leader.

AP2

> In 2018, the economy grew by 1.93%, the first quarter growth being 2.38% up from 1.81% in the third quarter. Remarkably the strong economic performance was driven by the non-oil sector which grew at 2% at the full year. Indeed, non-oil growth rose to 2.7% in the first quarter of 2018 up from 2.32% in the third quarter. These results further underscore our commitment to diversify the economy away from false dependence on oil.

(*Daily Trust*, February 14, 2019)

On the other hand, the oppositions adopted the *argumentum ad populum* or pathetic fallacy argumentative strategy. For example, in AC1 Ezekwesili attempted to exploit the shared background knowledge of Nigerian electorate's disenchantment with dominant political parties in the country (Akinyemi, 2019) to present herself as the desirable candidate. The extract below demonstrates the way in which she employed the typical pronominals 'we' and 'they' to express solidarity with the masses and implicitly present the dominant political actors as outsiders.

AC1

> **Our own politics is not politics for politicians**. It is politics for the Nigerian people. It is the Nigerian people that will be at the centre of governance for us. And that is why rather than have the flag off for the campaign in the traditional way politicians do where **they just talk to the people**, we wanted the people to talk to us.

(*OAKTV*, January 9, 2019)

Similarly, Atiku Abubaker – presidential candidate of the PDP deployed the *argumentum ad populum* strategy in PD1, PDP2 and PD3 invoked below as a way of enacting exclusive identity with the electorate.

PD1

> My great grandparents are from Wurno, Sokoto state. I can prove myself by speaking Fulfulde to you now. I am Atiku Abubakar, your brother, a Fulani man. I present to you myself. I'm seeking

to be Nigerian president, please vote for me.

(*Premium Times*, December 3, 2018)

PD2

Most of you standing here, I came to Lagos before you. So, me, I am a Lagosian. Let me assure you, let me assure the people of Lagos and let me also assure the people of the south west, I am not like APC, when I say I am going to do something, I am going to do it.

(*Channels TV*, February 12, 2019)

PD3

My fellow brothers and sisters of Kogi state, you know anytime I visit Kogi state I always develop mixed feelings. First of all, there is a feeling that I am at home in Kogi state. Over the years of my political career, right from the beginning I have interacted with very prominent citizens or sons of Kogi state.

(*OAKTV* January 7, 2019)

In addition, PD1, PD2 and PD3 demonstrate Nigerian politicians' strategic construction of persuasive messages during campaigns. The imperative: 'please vote for me' is

preceeded by a foregrounding of ethnic discourse: 'I am Atiku Abubakar, your brother, a Fulani man' which is aimed at establishing ethnic kinship with the audience. This agrees with scholars' (Auwalum and Yusuf, 2013; Nwanegbo, Odigbo and Ochanja, 2014) position that ethnic descent is often exploited by political actors to gain access to power and or to ensure that others are delegitimized from accessing power.

Atiku's use of the first person singular pronominal 'I' in PD2 is also strategic and best understood against the background of citizens' past dissatisfaction with his party, which culminated in the unprecedented defeat of former President Goodluck Jonathan in 2015 (Ombuigbilu, 2015). The pronominal 'I' therefore seeks to draw audience's attention away from the party to his personal commitment to his campaign promises. In his effort at damage control, Atiku also employed material processes ('complete', 'correct' 'reverse', 'restructure') in form of repair discourse and assurance to the audience that what he offered was a reliable leadership. On the other hand, against the background of limited political experience and visibility, Ezekwesili in AC2 attempted to mitigate her vulnerability. She attempted to achieve this by undermining the notion of political pedigree: 'I am not running so that I will answer a title'. In addition, she also projected ordinary citizens (she inclusive) rather than politicians as the relevant powerful actors that could facilitate change of social values and political order.

AC2

This is not a movement of politicians; this is a movement of the citizens. I am not running so that I will answer a title, I will mobilise the

Nigerian people for us to do things differently.

Categorisation of Self and Others

In investigating categorization in some of the samples, it is observed that politicians' representation of self/in-group and others/out-group follows the positive/negative legitimizing values strategy (Caldas-Coulthard, 2003). This is enacted mainly through the use of labels and pronominals. Table 1 below presents some examples of politial actors'ideological use of words for categorising self and others at different stages of the campaign.

Table 1: Examples of Positive/Negative Labels of the In-Groups and the Out-Groups

PARTIES	IN-GROUPS	OUT-GROUPS
APC	'Our economic fundamentals are strong' (*Daily Post*, February 9, 2019) 'Fair' 'just' (*Daily Post*, November 19, 2018) 'Radical commitment', 'good governance' (*Channels TV*, February 14, 2019) 'Progressive course', 'unshaken', 'impressive achievements' (*Vanguard*, December 27, 2018)	'Tainted past with; opportunistic few' (*Punch*, November 18, 2018) 'Thieves', 'sustainers of rigging' (*Sahara Reporters*, January 17, 2019) 'Desperate', 'guilty' (*Vanguard*, December 20, 2018) 'Discredited', 'anti-people' (*Vanguard*, December 27, 2018) 'prodigal party' (*PUNCH*, November 15, 2018)
PDP	'the best democracy', 'only solution to challenges' (*Premium Times*, December 6, 2018)	'lies', ''failed', 'headquarters of poverty' (Nigeria) (*Premium Times*, December 6, 2018), 'A gathering of vultures', 'tyrannic (sic) leaders', 'dictator' (*THISDAY*, February 1, 2019) 'soap-box mentality', 'highly partisan', 'easily excitable' (*Vanguard*, February 14, 2019) 'tepid' (*PUNCH*, December 19, 2018) 'Liars', 'cheats' (*Premium Times*, December 3, 2018)
ACPN	'movement of citizens', 'a new dawn' (*Premium Times*, January 15, 2019) 'disruptive campaign', 'character' 'competence', 'capacity', 'good governance' (*PUNCH*, December 27, 2018) 'Poor parent pikin' (Pidgin meaning born into a poor family' (*OAKTV*,	'looters' (*Premium Times*, January 15, 2019), 'The world capital of poverty', 'backwardness and underdevelopment' (*Nigerian Tribune*, January 14, 2019), 'frivolous' (*TODAY*, January 16, 2019)

	January 9, 2019) 'rescue', 'All-inclusive government' (*Tribune*, January 14, 2019)	

The labels listed in Table 1 reflect typical Nigerian politicians' moves to manage vulnerability during campaigns by assigning positive legitimizing values to self/in-group while ascribing negative attributes to the opponents. In some of the instances, the labels could be aptly described as invectives deployed to criminalise the opponents as questionable characters, unreliable and threats to the country's democracy and citizens. From the Table it is observed that APC had eight (50%) positive labels to describe the in-group and eight (50%) negative labels ascribed to the main opposition party (PDP). PDP had two (14.3%) positive labels for the in-group and 12 (85.7%) negative labels ascribed to the incumbent president and APC. ACPN had nine (69.2%) positive labels ascribed to Ezekwesili and her party while four (30.8%) negative labels were employed to describe the dominant parties and their candidates. The labels employed by the ACPN candidate indicated her attempt to depict APC and PDP as 'the old order' that needed to be discarded by the citizens for the nation to move forward. Indeed, from the inception of her campaigns, Ezekwesili had declared metaphorically that PDP and APC were 'Siamese twins of failure and destruction' and her political mission was to defeat them at the polls and rescue Nigeria from the path of destruction (The *Cable*, November 18, 2018). The figures also show her discursive moves to foreground herself as the desirable alternative to the main candidates. On the other hand, most of the samples gathered for APC and PDP demonstrated both groups' preoccupation with each other rather than with the third force parties. Indeed, their

campaign utterances were largely directed at delegitimizing each other. The figures for PDP particularly show that the party deployed more of attack campaign in an attempt to bounce back to relevance during the electioneering process. The fragments presented below demonstrate this observation.

>AP3
>Atiku should tell Nigerians why a discredited person like him be elected as president instead of raising puerile allegations on a daily basis. President Muhammadu Buhari and the APC, not his programmes for the country appear to be his main campaign issues.

>(*Vanguard*, December 27, 2018)

>PD4
>One of the best policies for Nigeria is restructuring and we will do it when we get to government. Don't believe APC lies again. Within six months, we will reposition Nigeria. Don't sell your vote and don't sell your PVC. Buhari must go.

>(*Premium Times*, December 6, 2018)

The above examples therefore support the observation that the dominant parties did not view the third force parties as viable

contenders. Indeed, it could be argued that the third force parties fragmented their supporters and presented a structurally weak front against long standing dominant parties in Nigeria because they presented many candidates for the 2019 presidential election (Sanni, 2019). In addition, against the background of the nation's political terrain which seems to favour supporters' mobilization on the basis of personality politics (Liebowitz and Ibrahim, 2013), it could be argued that the significant preoccupation of the incumbent party/candidate with the dominant opposition party which had a former vice president as its candidate suggests that this had an agenda setting effect. In other words, the APC and PDP political actors' voices resonated more strongly and somewhat weakened Ezekwesili's attempt to assert her capability during the campaigns.

Resilience through Issue Ownership

As earlier observed, one of the strategies political actors adopt during campaigns is usually to selectively foreground certain issues where they are perceived as competent by the electorate. One of the ways Nigerian politicians enacted resilience during the campaigns was to discursively demonstrate the quantity or number of supporters/audiences that they were able to showcase during the rallies. This is germane because it serves as a cue to determine politicians' control of information and its consequent effect on the electorate's perception and choices at the polls. It is noteworthy that it has been observed that voters seem to gravitate towards candidates that appear more viable and likely to win based on their party activities and media coverage during campaigns (Brady and Johnston. 2006). PD5 below is an assertion made by Uche Secondus, the PDP National

Chairman, stating that the party had bounced back with regards to electoral support, based on the massive audience that turned out for the PDP presidential rally in Kano. Similarly, AP3 is an assertion of the guaranteed success of Muhammadu Buhari in the 2019 elections based on the number of participants that turned out for his presidential campaign in Plateau State. The claims: 'Kano has fallen. Kano is now 100 per cent PDP' (PD5) and 'This was a mammoth crowd that loves Mr President' (AP3) made by PDP and APC political actors respectively demonstrate this observation.

> PD5
>
> Those of you watching on television and on Android telephones, you can see that Kano has fallen. Kano is now 100 per cent PDP; nobody can come to Kano and rig you out.
>
> (*PUNCH*, February 11, 2019)
> AP3
>
> So, for Saturday's rally we tried to manage the crowd, we did all we could but the crowd was too much and you saw it yourselves, this was not a hired crowd. This was a mammoth crowd that loves Mr. President, natural love for Mr. President. We did our best to manage the crowd but it was overwhelming.
>
> (*PM NEWS*, January 20, 2019)

PD5 and AP3 are structured in form of comparative political campaigns as the speakers tacitly hinted at the idea that the opposing group was guilty of hiring people to attend their rallies in order to appear viable: 'you can see… Kano is 100 per cent PDP'; 'this was not a rented crowd'. In addition, the lexical choice of 'crowd' and 'Mr President' emphasize the power and influence of the incumbent on the citizens. In other words, by denoting Buhari's followers/supporters simply as a 'crowd' the speaker present the notion of the president as a powerful candidate who a quite significant number of citizens have turned out to listen to. This indirectly constructs a one-against-many power dynamic perception of the candidate-voters' relationship. In addition, the audience's actions are positively framed as 'natural love' which further creates the impression that voters' support of the APC presidential candidate is guaranteed. On the other hand, the metaphor of war: 'Kano has fallen' deployed in PD5 frames PDP as having regained its political force/relevance and thus is capable of winning the states where it lost in the 2015 elections.

On the contrary, Ezekwesili – whose new party had the challenge of visibility during the 2019 campaign – adopted a different discursive strategy to assert her viability. She mitigated the absence of the typical Nigerian crowd at her campaigns by discursively framing her party's style of voter mobilisation as a departure from the traditional Nigerian approach to campaigns. Her choice of words: 'the people', 'women' and ladies' deployed in AC3 are therefore deployed to strategically position Ezekwesili as a people-oriented leader. In addition, her aim is to 'hear' and 'speak' to these people. A comparative frame is thus invoked here by the speaker to differentiate her candidacy and leadership style from the traditional mode of campaigns and politics in Nigeria. This is reflected when her description of the

electorate as 'women and ladies' is compared with the use of 'crowd' in AP3 which presents a homogenized audience and distant candidate/citizens relationship,

AC3

> I am here in Onitsha because I am doing what we call the Walk of Women. It is not the kind of traditional campaign that people are used to seeing because it is a campaign that is about the people, so I go to the people. You could see the ladies who were working with me and the idea is that we meet people one-on-one. We hear from them and we speak to them

(*PUNCH*,

December 27, 2018)

Also, when viewed from the perspective of a Nigerian political space that is still largely patriarchal in nature and where the visibility of women remains challenged (Ette, 2017), Ezekwesili's discourse in AC3 demonstrates female gender reaction against political domination of women. The definite article in the noun phrase: 'The walk of women' foregrounds women's attempts at challenging the asymmetrical relationship of male/female roles in Nigeria's politics based on the tacit notion that the female gender is weak and powerless and unable to survive in the country's competitive political sphere. Indeed, in order to assert her political capability and strength, Ezekwesili at the onset of her campaigns had employed the masculine generic term 'man' to describe her personality and thereby assert her resilience: 'I am the best man for the job' (*The Cable*, November 19, 2018). Her strategic wording of gender as a form of resistance of masculine dominance of the

political space is best appreciated when viewed against the entrenched 'man as president' cultural image which within the global and Nigerian contexts is reinforced via naturalized masculine address system such as 'Mr. President' used in AP3 (Romaniuk and Ehrlich, 2018).

However, viewed against the dominant parties' campaign discourse, it could be argued that PDP and APC portrayed a more formidable force than ACPN and thus corroborates the view that the third force parties did not have viable structures and finances necessary to contend against the dominant parties in the 2019 elections (Okon-Ekong and Maduekwe, 2019). This was corroborated by Ezekwesili who admitted that finding the third way in Nigeria's politics is 'hard'. She eventually withdrew from the presidential race at the peak of the campaigns. In her media address she acknowledged her feminine vulnerability thus:

> To my wonderful husband, you know people think I am strong, but they've never known who the strong person is.

This way, it appears that resilience for Obiageli Ezekwesili, gave way to not only feminine vulnerability but also to the very strong patriarchal political factors that control the Nigerian politics. One could also posit that the APC campaigns which displayed Buhari's access to power and resources may likely be more persuasive in the context of Nigeria where a large number of the population still have limited knowledge of how political discourse works and are also beset by socio-economic challenges (Aluko, 2009; Oamen, 2015; Babayo, 2019).

Conclusion

This paper adopted a critical discourse analytical approach to the study of resilience in selected Nigerian election campaign speeches. The study aimed at unveiling political actors' discursive demonstration of their abilities to (re)gain control and minimise vulnerability during the campaigns via naturalized campaign discourse. The paper was able to establish that the campaign speeches were produced to represent the in-groups positively as viable and reliable and the opponents as undesirable and threats to the country's democracy. The paper also revealed that discursive strategies of argumentation, categorisation and display of supporters' numerical strength among others were ideologically deployed by politicians to demonstrate their strength and to minimize their vulnerability. Taking into cognisance the influence of political discourse on electorate's perception on issues, this paper notes that Nigerian campaign speeches seem to favour the dominant parties and the incumbent, in particular. Indeed, against the background of developed democracies, Nigerian election campaign discourse still exemplifies the characteristics of incumbent dominance and unequal power relations.

This invariably has implications for the country's democratic growth.

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