

BOOK REVIEW

TUNDE OPEIBI, *Discourse, Politics and the 1993 Presidential Election Campaign in Nigeria: A Re-invention of June 12 Legacy*. Ibadan: Straight-Gate, 2009. Xxiii + 394pp. paperback, ISBN 978-978-48661-8-7

Discourse, Politics and the 1993 Presidential Election Campaign – A Re-invention of June 12 Legacy, as stated in its preface, actually originated from a structured doctorate degree research topic approved for the author in 2004 at the Department of English, University of Lagos (see page xi). Interestingly enough, it is meant as a purely academic adventure, to explore the profound use of language during the 1993 presidential election campaigns. The book is, however, also set to fulfil the nexus between “town and gown” in its socio-historical concern about the Nigerian 1993 presidential election; but in doing this, it avoids the path of partisanship and maintains academic objectivity. The author himself explains this:

The work, therefore, remains primarily a research-based, academically-biased and scholarly-oriented work, and, secondarily, a socio-historical, as well as, a political narrative and research material on the unique election that will continue to be a reference point for what free and fair elections should be in Nigeria (xiii).

The maturity of the language of the botched 3rd Republic election campaigns pre-occupies the author. He has therefore not only documented this unique art and science of effective political campaign speeches but he has also moved further to expound the ingredients of the speeches to reveal their effectiveness in determining the voting pattern of the electorate during the election. And by this piece of work the author has shown that Nigerians are sensitive to the use of language as a means of identifying the true and sincere candidate to vote for.

The book is broken into 12 chapters. That number rings a bell. Perhaps the chapterisation is in solidarity with June 12, 1993, the day that the election that continues to be acknowledged as Nigeria’s most free and fair and believed to be won by M. K. O. Abiola but was annulled by the then military Head of State, General Babangida. Only the author can tell.

Chapter One of the book begins with a typical pedagogical principle of moving from the known to the unknown. The author, fully aware of the variety of audience that would likely be interested in reading the book, has justifiably applied this

principle. The purpose is to carry along every reader. He chooses to leave the realm of pure academic procedure to adopt a simple style that easily endears the book to a reader whose desire is simply to read, enjoy and learn from the speeches of the 1999 presidential election campaigns, especially those of M.K.O. Abiola. That is why he has adopted “a reader-friendly and engaging piece of narrative for the academia, politicians, public office holders, governments and the general public.” The diction is simple, and only where a word is contextually the most apt to use does the author use uncommon vocabulary.

Chapter One reappraises the recent trends in democratic governance across the globe and discloses the framework of the analysis of the speeches; that is both spoken and written texts of the speeches of the presidential candidates for that election. The framework is discourse analysis. It is an aspect of language study developed by a school of scholars to explain the social context and effect of language to achieve effective communication. Here, and at the risk of sounding simplistic, the book generalises the concept “discourse” as “language use”. The use of language is traced to Rhetoric, a discipline with roots in antiquity. It relates the concepts to politics. It examines the philosophy of party politics in democratic governance and how it operates and reviews the history of political party in Nigeria

and the place of discourse in the quest of the parties for power control in Nigeria.

In Chapter Two, the author makes a critical appraisal of the discourse as a persuasive element in politics. Tracing the history of discourse to rhetorics, he discloses certain features of persuasion as revealed in political discourse, citing copious examples from the 1993 presidential election campaign texts, made up of their speeches, advertisements and other means of media publicity. The chapter is also devoted to informing of the role of English as the language of discourse and politics in Nigeria; it also talks about the patterns of political campaign texts including adverts, press report, features, political address, reports on talk show, political debate, etc.

Having laid the above foundation, the author, in chapter three, entitled “Speaking right and speaking well: political speeches as persuasion,” goes further to demonstrate the effect of discourse by way of public presentations and its relevance in today’s politics. The author submits that discourse, in the sense of a persuasive element, goes beyond superficial interpretation of words, but also incorporates the analysis of texts as action-driven and goal-oriented. The chapter continues with excerpts drawn from the closing remarks of Chief M.K.O. Abiola and his opposition Alhaji Bashir Tofa before the election day, entitled “My covenant with my people” and

“Forward with hope”, respectively. The respective concepts are analysed to elicit the basic connecting elements that enhance discourse such as reference, substitution, conjunction, ellipsis, reiteration, etc. These are elements that enhance presentation to the electorate, and particularly so effectively exploited in M. K. O. Abiola’s speeches.

In Chapter Four, the author moves away from speeches as means of persuasion and relates how illustrations and pictures function as powerful discourse strategies in political campaigns. An illustration is geared towards capturing the mind of the electorate by bringing them to begin to see the candidates as capable of providing solutions to their numerous problems. This is what the author refers to as graphology as communicative strategy. Abiola’s prominent word was HOPE while that of Tofa was CHALLENGE.

Chapter Five is an extension of Chapter Four. Whereas Chapter Four seems restricted to graphic presentation of words to capture the mind of the electorate, Chapter Five portrays photographic illustrations of the challenges faced by people in the society, with the aim to achieve the same purpose. For instance, the pictures are structured in such a way that above them the contextual problems are shown, and just below them the picture of M.K.O. Abiola as the solution to the problem is placed. By the consistent matching of the

problem with the solution he endears himself to the electorate as identifying with their problems and thereby presenting himself as the right person to provide the solutions. By contrast, in Tofa’s pictorial adverts, the problem is highlighted above and the solution provider’s name only is shown below the problems. Further, the adverts of Abiola always carry his picture and when the other members of his team emerge their pictures are included as well. Tofa did a similar thing.

The author, in chapters six and seven, discusses the use of figurative expressions as discourse elements for persuasion. The chapters are entitled “Wooing the mind to win the mandates” and “Wooing to win”, respectively. While in Chapter Six he dwells on the metaphors expressed in the campaign texts, in Chapter Seven he demonstrates the other associated figurative expressions, apart from simile, and goes on to include elements of sound that the candidates used to play on the emotions of the electorate. In Chapter Six, the author identifies five metaphors, namely: metaphors of journey, metaphors of food, metaphors of religion, metaphors of sport and war, and metaphors of time. These were employed to appeal to the imagination of voters so that the pictures of the intensions of the candidate may be known. In Chapter Seven, other metaphorical expressions including metonymy and synecdoche, personification, simile,

proverbs, idioms, allusions and parallelisms are used to further appeal to the electorate's imagination. But puns and alliteration were employed to create rhythms which further registered the image presented by the figurative expressions.

Chapter Eight, entitled "Touching the heart to touch the ballots" highlights other persuasive features of discourse. Here, the case of ethical argument strategy, bordering on acceptable values, and followed by logical argument strategy for appealing to reasoning and sound judgement, are portrayed. Another strategy is the pathetic argument strategy. These are strategies geared toward persuading the electorate. To support these strategies, the candidates add some strategic listing of words that represent the problems prevalent among the people and the solutions to them. To bring the matters home, sometimes, the candidates switch codes from English to a Nigerian language. It is a strategy for identifying with the people and thereby swaying them to their sides.

In concluding the analysis of discourse and politics of the 1993 Presidential election campaigns in Nigeria, the author, in Chapter Ten, draws from previous chapters to summarise the role of discourse in politics and concludes that it has proved to be very effective where appropriately and skilfully employed. He observes that Chief

M.K.O. Abiola earned the victory through his rich expressions that swayed the electorate to his side and therefore recommends his style and more for today's politicians.

The author, in chapters eleven and twelve, entitled "Postscript I" and "Postscript II", informs of his observation of the continuation of the legacy left by the President-elect of Nigeria, M.K.O Abiola, which was rekindled in the election campaigns of 1999 and 2007 that saw into power the present governor of Lagos State, Mr Babatunde Raji Fashola and his predecessor, Bola Ahmed Tinubu. The author highlights the campaign strategies of Fashola and draws similarities between them and M.K.O. Abiola's, and points out some improvements in the former's due to the benefit of technological advancement. By this, he demonstrates that M.K.O. Abiola has left a worthy legacy for Nigerian politicians. Chapter Twelve is a brief commentary (a tribute, so to say) on the life, travails and time of M.K.O. Abiola.

In conclusion, Dr Opeibi has skilfully produced a work that matches two worlds – the world of academics and the world of politics – for the purpose of contributing to the development of democracy and good governance in Nigeria. Apart from occasional slips to academic writing style which actually was the origin of the book, I am of the opinion that the author has achieved success in converting a purely academic

research into a book that truly satisfies the aspiration of bringing “town and gown” together. This rare fit is commendable. On this note, I

recommend the book to students of language, scholars, professional and aspiring politicians, and indeed the general reading public.

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