

POPULIST SPEECH AND ELECTIONEERING IN NIGERIA. ELEMENTS OF A NON-WESTERN APPROACH TO POPULISM IN THE 2019 NIGERIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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ABSTRACT This paper offers a new way of conceptualising the style and perceivable populist communicative performances from a non-Western perspective. It uses the dialectical-relational version of critical discourse analysis to examine political candidates' rhetorical tropes and performative acts to register the aspect of stance-taking, blame attribution, and populist communicative style in Nigeria. The findings suggest that specific styles and rhetoric are dependent on social and self-style identities that fit into unique socio-cultural spaces. The anti-establishment populist rhetoric of the antagonistic association between the establishment politicians and a fictive multitude, "the people", demonstrates the construction of "otherness" exploited to gain political support. The paper concludes that the exploitation of referent object "the people" as the mobilising currency, which is a universal populism ideal, did not result in electoral success in Nigeria. However, certain socio-political, historical or cultural, and post-colonial constructs affects populist outcomes especially in heterogeneous African societies.

KEYWORDS: Anti-elitism; Critical Discourse Analysis; Nigerian Presidential election; Non-Western Populism; Populism.

INTRODUCTION

There is no unanimous definition of populism. Nonetheless, several efforts have been made over the decades to resolve conceptual disputes that are prevalent in populism research. The problem with populism as a concept unlike the other '-ism' is the perception of it as an empty signifier or thin centered ideology alongside how dynamic it is and the varying deployment rhetoric and styles adopted across different states. The fluidity of populism as a concept also leaves it open to misuse, weaponisation, othering and a matter of linguistic choice.

Throughout the decades, various conceptualisations have emerged, with both the empty signifier and the ideational perspective of populism generating a significant body of scholarly work, which persists to this day (Canovan 1999; Wodak 2015; Mouffe 2018; Akkerman et al. 2014; Aslanidis 2016; Kim 2022; Pilet & Gherghina 2024). Amid these are dominant plethora of scholarly works typifying populism as evil, divisive, entitled, nationalistic, racist, nativist and fascist which go down the polemical trail rather than the agonistic (Mudde 2004; Mouffe 2018; Ginsburg & Aziz 2018; Foa & Mounk 2019; Shroufi & De Cleen 2022; Cammaerts 2024). The problematic angle is the definition and how it operates in several versions of representative democracy. In a bid to quell this vagueness,

Mansbridge and Macedo (2019: 60–66) opined that populism can only be comprehended by disclosing the core elements of such a phenomenon. According to Mansbridge and Macedo (2019: 60–66), the core elements of populism are: (1) the people, (2) in a morally charged (3) battle against (4) the elites. Similarly, Webber (2023: 852–856) also considered four core elements which characterises populism, namely: (a) the voice of the people, (b) anti-elitism, (c) binary, moralising, all or nothing appeals, (d) distrust of procedure and institutions.

These definitions present us with the broad scope of ‘the people’ as an empty signifier to which a speech actor or political elite has the power to construct, include or exclude who ‘the people’ are in power or during electioneering. Populism in action especially in political campaign mode-exploits a divisive communication style where certain rhetoric is deployed against the establishment, elites in power or incumbent political party as the reason for the left behind people or those whose interest are not represented (McKay et al. 2023; Wood et al. 2023; Forkert & Nahaboo 2024). The end goal of such communication is to exploit the divisive element and generate a rallying around effect during electioneering campaigns.

This paper however, leans towards a vivid definition before operationalising this in the context of political communication during electioneering. Thus, the definition from Mansbridge and Macedo (2019: 60) successfully closes the definitional gap concerning western populism.

In extension to African societies and the existence or non-existence of populism, with a narrow scope to the Nigerian Presidential elections in 2019. It must be noted that populism is endemic in representative democracies (Ginsburg & Aziz 2018; Garland 2019; Foa & Mounk 2019; Pintsch et al. 2022; Melber 2018; De Cleen & Stavrakakis 2017). In the African perspective, the imminent question is how representative is democracy or is it just a hybrid form of governance? Scheppele (2018: 545–550) offers an insight into the hybrid nature of many constitutional democracies in Africa- which are depicted as leaning towards autocratic il (legalism) or a Frankenstein mix of several defective forms of democracy. Nigeria despite its transition to democratic rule can be categorised as an autocratic illegalism structure which is maintained and sustained by the executive arm of governments’ state and institutional capture, institutional frailty and democratic elitism.

This papers intention is not to analyse the forms of democracy or the state of democracy in Africa-specifically in Nigeria. As such, the paper will hypothetically opine that most African societies have a form of representative democracy or hybrid form and that democracy in Nigeria is defective and can be characterised as in a state of autocratic il (legalism).

That said, scholarly work on African democratic consolidation is divisive and unsettled about the particular phase most African states are in the democratic transition phase, nor the quality of most African democracies. Thus, it is permissive to opine that some find themselves in consolidation, backsliding or defective strains of democracy with hybrid characteristics.

However, before adopting the ‘representative democracy in Nigeria’ tag in this paper. We need to understand that democracy is a foreign concept-one with historical negativity and power relation dynamism rooted in a western hegemonic plan dating back to the 1884 Berlin conference where spheres of influence and subjugation were designed. Scholars such as Nhemachena (2024), Falola (2021), Taiwo (1993) and Fasakin (2021) espouse the Nigerian democratic consolidation firstly as a colonial project. This is further buttressed by the fact that despite gaining political independence the artefacts/institutions of colonial design, colonial structures alongside hybrid structures and institutions which significantly impact the political configuration of representative democracy in many African states. The foregoing is a positive foundation on which the differentiation between Western and

non-Western populism can be built.

As such, the paper adopts De Vrees et al. (2018: 424–429) as an analytical framework for differentiating Western populism from non-Western populism—in reference to Nigeria, which extends beyond the basic characteristics of populism. The differentiating stance taken by this paper is that it adopted an approach where political actors are analysed *a priori*—based on semiotic, performative styles as against just fitting them into a sticky or rigid definition of populism. The basic characteristics of populism alluded to using the ‘people’ as a referent object or the use of dichotomy between classes— the ruler and ruled or rich and poor as a mobilising tool/anti-elitism or otherwise use of exclusion in politics (out-group). In this paper, the keyword—‘anti-elitism’ or anti-establishment is prioritised as a focal point of seeking out populist speech, style or rhetoric.

De Vrees et al. (2018: 426–432) opine that the rise of Western populism is a product of varying conditions such as exogenous events and external conditions like the longest economic recession, transnational migrant flows, economic insecurity, cultural backlash, political tribalism, unified nativist challenge against incumbents or political parties, the role of social media and exploitation of social media by populist figures, and the role of citizens.

However, the conditions that facilitated populism in the 2019 Nigerian election are different from the Western-based perspective of populism as depicted in Table 2. Therefore, populism should be investigated based on economic, structural and institutional disparities rather than a single-story perspective.

The paper seeks to reveal the connotation of non-western populism. As such, the analysis of the paper is as follows— the next section, will focus on theoretical framework on which the entire analysis is grounded. This is followed by the methodology which explains why certain data was selected and how it is utilised. The analysis section follows which is followed by a conclusion, and lastly a summary of the findings of the paper.

THE DIALECTICAL RELATION OF CDA

The Dialectical Relation (DR) to critical discourse analysis (CDA) is used as an analytic framework to expose the connection between text and social practice as a form of discourse mediation. This approach paves the way for a three-dimensional analytic framework exploring linkages in discursive events—i.e., as a spoken language or written text, or as an instance of discursive practice that produces text alongside interpretation of text into a social practice or world view (Fairclough 2010). In other words, DR helps us account for the connection of social structures and systems that produce discursive events embedded in semiotic representations that are, in turn, controlled by discursive practice shaping the fluidity and contingency of populist political rhetoric.

The nature of the social practice mainly shapes text production and interpretation methods. During text production and interpretation, certain elements are informed by embedded social artefacts that reveal cues and shifts in style and register. According to Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999), the social process is denoted as an interaction between three forms of social reality: social structures, social practices and events. For example, social practices facilitate the interaction between social structures at the general and abstract levels. In particular, social practices are networked and flow in a loop of events, structures and practices. In other words, the dialectical relations approach to critical discourse analysis enables us to focus on three dialectical relations of structure, social practice and events in explaining the populist performative styles in the 2019 Nigerian Presidential elections.

On the one hand, structure- performative actions, strategy, and social practices are

intertwined in dialectical relations that necessitate genre, discourse, and style. It involves several interlocked variables, such as political parties, the party system, political culture, nation-state configuration or articulation of Nigeria, arms of government, form of government and political apathy, to mention a few. Social structuring of the interlocked variables produces an order of discourse and varying styles that forms diverse ways of creating meaning. As such, social practices constitute the network and summation of discourse practices of political parties. In other words, a political party is a unit representing a structure in a constellation of discourses. Therefore, the framework allows a focus on how the object of research is theoretically constructed (Fairclough 2010).

On the other hand, event- discourse originates from a social order that stems from a multi-modal representation or relation of discourses. The contextualisation of such events in multi-modal form provides a broad scope of analysis for research. In this sense, texts are to be comprehended as written texts and as conversations, interviews, visual images, or multimedia representations of a past or recurring event (Fairclough 2010). However, both structure and event can be operationalised as a product of social practice. This indicates that the structure of social practices, be it the agenda-setting of social actors or the strategies adopted in producing discourse contribute to shaping existing social practices, and reconfiguring these social practices. The latter focuses largely on shifts in structuring styles of discourse that constitute a social change and how social agents deploy specific strategies in language, text or visual text to create a working or reworking of relations between the electorates and the elected.

Thus, dialectical relation to critical discourse analysis explains populists' political practices and their contingency as a social and discursive practice. How the paper goes about collecting and analysing the data is presented in the next section.

DATA AND METHOD

This section explains the sampling process, method of data collection and analysis. Case study analysis is used in limiting the scope of the event, the Nigerian Presidential election of 2019. A Non-random purposive sampling of YouTube videos demonstrating the event was employed to select the presidential candidates' case studies whose speech samples are studied using the dialectical relations to critical discourse analysis.

In terms of data collection, the constitution of the research object (i.e., populism from a Nigerian perspective) points to the collection of specific event-related texts, visual texts, interviews or debates during or before the election. The unit of analysis (Non-Western Populism discourse) was selected through quota sampling, considering the social actors involved in the event and the object of research. As disclosed in Table 1, a delineation of which candidate gets selected is based on the concept of populism. As such, anti-establishment parties or politicians which fit the anti-elitism or anti-establishment style or rhetoric was prioritised.

As such, the big two establishment parties- People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC) are left out and the resultant impact is examining the observable styles, rhetoric of the selected presidential candidates.

PURPOSIVE SAMPLING

As presented in Table 1, purposive sampling as utilised in this paper necessitated the

Table 1 Purposive sampling of presidential candidates.

Politicians	Precedence	Ethno-geographic membership	Reason for sampling	Discursive rhetoric
Omoyele Sowore	Democracy Activist	Ondo: South-Western Nigeria	Investigative journalist/activist turned politician	Blame attribution, Anti-Elitism
Moghalu Kingsley	Technocrat	Lagos:South-Western Nigeria	Former public servant turned politician- non Elite status based on lack of political capital	Anti-establishment
Mailafia Obadiah	Technocrat	Kaduna:North-Western Nigeria	Former public servant turned politician-non Elite status based on lack of political capital	Blame attribution, Anti-establishment

Source: KingsleyMoghalu.com; aacparty.com; Toyinfalolanetwork.org

selection of political actors involved in the event (election) and the object of research (populism). The sampling took into consideration-the multi-party configuration of the election in the selection of the 3 presidential candidates (73 presidential candidates under the umbrella of 73 political parties in total as the population size). Populism in this context involves antagonising the establishment politicians (the 2 biggest parties in Nigeria-PDP and APC). Thus, the purposive sample of three politicians who demonstrated through their campaign speech-antagonistic, anti-elitist styles and rhetoric were selected.

An elite according to Higley (2008: 3) is a selected group of citizens, corporations, civil society or cabal, pivotal organisations that are able to influence the political outcomes regularly and substantially. Going by this definition and context—the three selected presidential candidates do not hold the political capital nor power to classify them as elites.

The data corpus extracted from YouTube videos discloses how linguistic registers, interactional behaviours and discursive strategies produced in a particular cultural context facilitate populist affective appeal to the people. The populist appeal is achieved through moral legitimisation alongside subverting and antagonising establishment politicians, thereby producing performances that captivate the public sphere. Therefore, an examination of the style used in the extracts demonstrates how the qualitative approach to discourse analysis is a fundamental premise of understanding a non-western based populist performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The discursive resources employed by the presidential candidates in written texts or conversations during the event are analysed in this section.

I. Omoyele Sowore: Style shifting and the African Action Congress (AAC) presidential campaign populist discourse

Omoyele Sowore is a human right activist and investigative journalist turned politician. His activist profile stems from active participation in 1989 protest aimed against the International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan. He is also the founder of Sahara reporters, with its headquarters in New York and funded partially by non-governmental associations through grants (Ford foundation 2015).

His activism also can be traced back to his organised protest against military rule for

the reinstatement of democratic rule -June 12, 1993 (Sowore 2023). Among the selected presidential candidates, he is the only one that never held a position in public office before the presidential election of 2019.

Pels (2003) identifies the following four elements of political communication style, that is varying speaking, acting, appearing, displaying, and representing, which can be applied to illustrate political communication style in the Nigerian context.

Firstly, populist communication and performative style are dependent on semiotic analysis of events and structures. Therefore, styles are implemented and executed by using discursive and interactional gestures and signs or visual semiotic resources. Secondly, style connotes contextualised ways of speaking, behaving and interrogating socio-historical or political wrongs. The anti-establishment way of conducting politics involves criticism, the blame game, emphasis on class struggle, symbolic buffoonery and the securitisation of certain issues through speech act. This gives populist parties an identity that fosters closeness to the people's suffering and misgivings of the government. Thirdly, style is dynamic and not limited to one trope or sequence of rhetoric. The use of unpolished or blunt talk and bravado speech is dominant in populist communication style. An incessant attack on the elite or establishment politicians is a criterion that must be fulfilled in the populist communication style. Lastly, the significance of style in the political landscape materialises, based on contest against hegemony on the one hand and affective appeal on the other hand. Therefore, populist parties' attack on self-reinforcing institutions simply contests against the elite or establishment politicians.

The discursive resources employed by the presidential candidate of the AAC (Omoyele Sowore) are examined in terms of blame attribution. The AAC was established in 2019, mainly as a platform for launching Sowore's presidential bid. However, through its "Go fund me" campaign, the party raised \$166,032 for the presidential election despite its limited structural and financial capacity (GoFundMe.com 2018). In other words, it laid a foundation for using crowdfunding to offset the viable lack of structures and political capital. In essence, the contribution of Nigerians in diaspora and resident Nigerians symbolised and informed Sowore's support base and slogan, "*Take it back.*" In other words, the analysis of the party or its candidate arises from the need to liberate the "people" from establishment politicians' oppression and/or social misdeeds.

Sowore spearheaded a campaign against the establishment by using fierce criticism and vulgar and intimidating language against government policies and the political establishment of the two major parties ruling Nigeria since the transition to democracy in 1999. The use of lexical and tactical switches of register, which varies in the local dialect (Yoruba), Pidgin English and English, provides a varying lexicon for diverse audiences. In addition, the use of colloquial to formal slang or slogans brings to life a unique performed identity of the AAC candidate and has socio-cultural significance in the context of an underdeveloped and corruption-stricken Nigeria.

There is some debate about whether populism exists in the African context (Cheeseman & Larmer 2015; Adeakin & Zikier 2017; Chengeta 2018). However, based on existing research, it is possible to deduce the specific characteristics of populism in new Nigerian political parties. Apart from the clear use of "the people" as a referent object that needs to be securitised, Engesser et al. (2016) opine that populist parties emphasise the sovereignty of the people, which becomes a "catch-all" concept to rally round "the people" or the electorate. Moreover, by using "the people" as a referent object, populist parties emphasise direct political representation without intermediaries.

Another prominent feature of the populist style evident in the 2019 Nigerian presidential election is the vehement attack on the incumbent and establishment politicians. Anti-elitism

is at the core of populist rhetoric, tropes and symbolic buffoonery. It is a stagecraft performative action to construct an “us and them” antagonistic relationship. Put simply, the poor masses against the tired, old and well-fed or privileged thieves. Mudde (2004) confirms the differentiating style of populist leaders by their emphasis on exclusion or “othering.” The differentiating style portrays establishment politicians as the enemy of the people to stigmatise and exclude the ruling elites in the mind of the people. It is portrayed them as dangerous to the people and an enemy of their progress or national unity.

The definition of style substantiates populist actions. Fairclough (2006: 89) opines that style can be seen as identities or specific in relation to the semiotic aspect. Krees (2010: 28) also emphasises the notion that style is the effect of a series of choices outlining the design of actions, repertoires, and distinctive from other evident styles. In this sense, such style differs from the conventional way of conducting politics or accepted norms or the establishment politician style.

The previous definition situates the AAC as a party that articulated a distinctive *sui generis* and socio-political style of populism. In their public, official performances on the mainstream and social media, the AAC never withdrew its attack on from establishment politicians’ antagonistic and confrontational opposition. As will be demonstrated below, the conflict between “the people” and the establishment was the highlight of the political discourse. The AAC incessantly and typically resorted to interactional bad manners, blaming and name-calling. In fact, they arguably performed the most disruptive bad manners among the new parties in 2019. The performative, interactional bad manners of Sowore are exemplified in the following example from the AAC campaign in the Ekiti State:

Original Yoruba: “Awọn to sofunwa pe Nigeria ole dara ni igba aye wọn, oma dara leyin aye wọn ...” (“For those who say Nigeria cannot be better during their lifetime, it will be better after they are gone ...”) (Kilarigbo Line 2019).

Thus, blaming and interactional bad manners are at the core of the populist style. Sowore’s wish of death to the political establishment characterises a bad interactional manner. In essence, populism delineates who should be blamed for societal ills or crises while excluding the masses’ poor choices during elections. Nonetheless, the extant literature on populism is typified by a lack of comprehensive attention to nuanced, insulting words and blame construction in performances. Therefore, the next section explores the linguistic choices of AAC candidate, Sowore, to assess the negative, interactional value during the presidential campaign.

The concept of register or language variation is perceived as a varying scale of formality from formal to informal conversation or sub-registers such as debates, face-to-face conversation, planned speeches, and interviews (Biber 1988). In this way, register is interconnected to linguistic variation, as diverse language styles are utilised for different purposes, in different contexts, for a different audience and involving different meanings (Thornborrow 2001; Stockwell 2002). In relation to the AAC, lexical choices, blame game, stagecraft and anti-elitism are attained by using insulting words and blunt and demeaning terms. As evinced in register shifts to informal slangs or semiotics, Sowore’s criticism is often aimed at the Nigerian government and the policies and economic decisions.

To illustrate this style-shifting function as a discursive resource in AAC talk, selection of extracts from three mediated stagecraft performances of Sowore are analysed below.

Overall, in Sowore’s discourse- morality, class struggle and inequality blend with everyday Nigerian political life. However, the AAC presidential candidate utilised the political and social reality or order in varying forms to suggest a difference in

conversational and informal registers, which momentarily shifts the style and is unique to the pervading discourse principally delivered, both in standard and informal language.

The assessment of value and blame apportioning is semantically built in the following items:

In Extract 1, the colloquial item “transportation for slaves, and it’s something to behold” signify a class struggle, a master-slave relationship between the Nigerian elite and the Nigerian people. This is the core message of the AAC with the party slogan, “*Take it back*”, which signifies the need to take power from the elites. This also visualises the Marxist theme of class struggle, where the worker depends on the *bourgeoisie* to pay wages for their survival. The proletariat, according to Marx, has no say in their future or present situation. In a similar vein, the use of “slave” signifies the Nigerian people as a proletariat without a say in their present or future situation.

The other colloquial item in Extract 1—“*it’s a sight to behold*”—issues a condemning stance that aligns with anti-elitism or establishment politicians, who, according to Sowore, are to blame for the present deplorable situation in Nigeria. Sowore characterised the deplorable condition of the railway as “you can’t even transport pigs in this train”, signifying the deplorable state of the railway transport system in Nigeria and the use of derogatory tropes meant to be to evince the government’s dehumanisation of Nigerians. Blame apportioning features in the phrase “this is the Nigeria they created”, which summarises the Nigerian nation-state as a failure. The underlying impact is leadership failure, elite greed, self-aggrandisement and a need to restructure the country by the youths and not gerontocratic politicians.

Extract 2 opens with a line that expresses disgust for past and present Nigerian leaders. An anti-establishment stance is clearly reiterated here: Nigeria is not working “... for the people of Nigeria.” The implication is that Nigeria is only working for a few people, who continue to enjoy at the expense of the majority. Populist style stagecraft is evident here, securitising “the people” and the need to rescue them from the rule of the few. The “not working” phrase symbolises a dysfunctional government or a long history of dysfunctional governance.

There are two other signifiers in Extract 2, namely: the shifts noticed in the deregulation and privatisation explanation and the argument between the moderator and Sowore. In this instance, Sowore claims that privatisation was meant to enrich the rich and their cohorts, thereby implying that any sale of industrial plants fell into the hands of the Cabal, which, in essence, means that payoffs were solely restricted to a certain class or affiliations of people with influence and proximity to the political class. In Nigerian parlance, this is typified as the sharing of the national cake. Consequently, the Fourth Republic leaders, particularly the PDP, are blamed for the lack of a constant electricity supply in Nigeria. A change in discourse is noticed, and forthwith, a restructuring of social practice is witnessed in colloquial and informal linguistic tropes as the audience demonstrates its acceptance of this discourse with great enthusiasm.

Extract 3 highlights colloquial and derogatory words directed at past and present Nigerian leaders. The terms “thief, bad person and useless man” characterise all the public figures and insult them as lacking morality, aptitude to lead a nation, and leadership qualities. The subtle mentioning of Nigerian history and the entrenchment of failed past leaders into history raise issues, such as hegemony, historical memories and memorisation, which signal the materialistic culture of Nigerians. Sowore indirectly questions why leaders, who have done little or nothing compared to global figures, should be entrenched in Nigerian history. His deliberate use of oppressors turning to role models signifies a total discontent with past and present leaders. His analogy is crowned with a definite statement, implying that those

past and present figures could not save the Nigerian deplorable situation. Therefore, they are not expected to be the “saviours” in any election.

The previous lexical resources have a cumulative force as part of a perceptible public expression of a crisis-stricken Nigeria, which a part of the audience comprehends and identifies with. Nigeria’s current, crisis-stricken path is a summation of socio-political failings extending to historical lapses fostered by a culture of repeating the same values, ideas, and political alliances, expecting different results. Attributes of political misconduct, inequality, aggrandisement, corruption, nepotism and ethnicity depict the social order and reality. Therefore, colloquial and derogatory words act as an interpretive framework through which political responsibility is assigned. From another perspective, it also acts as an evaluative framework through which politicians or elites are assessed based on a threshold constructed by populist actors. This emphasises the need to criticise, use derogatory words and embark on stagecraft aimed at defaming the elites and situating them as evil and the source of all problems.

Furthermore, elements from different registers of the Nigerian crisis—composed of formal/informal/vernacular styles—combine as resources for informing stance and blaming members of the political establishment that maintain a form of hegemony and oppression of the country. Sowore demonstrates derogatory words meant to wake the electorates from their slumber to the audience in Yoruba in the Ekiti State. The establishment is framed as the enemy of progress, invoking a curse of death on establishment politicians. While this may be regarded as a performative or stagecraft act, it is an effective rallying tool aimed at the masses.

These elements invest the AAC with mediated performances with the connotation of a populist party using the core strategies of populist movements noticeable across Europe and America. The performative style of the AAC, which is engaging and protagonist-oriented, exemplifies the importance of language and style. In this case, shifts in styles from a contextual perspective emerge as a response to the societal order and societal wrong. As depicted by the AAC, the *status quo* of the Nigerian elitist hegemony and oppression informs the need to adopt the populist linguistic style and stagecraft performance. These strategies represent the distinct ways in which populist actors communicate with and address their audiences. They highlight the questioning of elite morality, humanity and emotional apathy. In this sense, the anti-establishment’s failure to meet the populist demands creates an eternal enemy, which, according to populist actors, must be eliminated, destroyed or excluded from the multitude.

Style shifting is evinced in AAC discourse about the Nigerian crisis or situation, for which establishment politicians are to blame. The crisis or the deplorable situation and the act of blaming establish the AAC as a populist party in the African perspective. This fact lends a similar scope to mainstream populism, as witnessed and practised in global terms. The AAC’s attacks on present and past establishment politicians in Nigeria invoke a populist style of exclusion and a single saviour complex narrative.

II. Mailafia Obadiah African Democratic Congress ADC stern talk: “Paradigm shift” and “next level to hell”

Mailafia Obadiah is a technocrat turned politician and, unlike some other presidential candidates, such as Sowore, he is not an outsider to public office. Trained as an economist, Obadiah is known for criticising government policies, particularly the ineptitude of international trade agreements and West African trade agreements (Policy Centre for the New South 2019).

He is well educated, with a PhD in Economic Development/International relations from the University of Oxford (Princeton University. *Innovations for Successful Societies* 2009). He is a former official of the African Development Bank Group (ADB) and the Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). The Nigerian media gave him considerable airtime in the presidential debates and morning shows.

Although Obadiah's profile as a civil servant during his tenure at the CBN cannot be deemed as having occupied a political office, the monetary and policy reforms during his tenure speak highly of his capability, particularly the extension of his service to the regional financial bodies in Africa and global financial institutions. However, despite his reputation, his party failed to win any seat in the Nigerian National Assembly and the House of Representatives. Therefore, ignoring the ADC candidate idiosyncrasy and style adopted during the presidential campaign will be erroneous.

The data selected for this paper is a combination of debates and morning shows presented in preparation for the 2019 presidential elections. It showcases a case of populist performative style as "saviour of the people from establishment politicians." The utilisation of populist rhetoric and the exclusive blame game is seen as a qualifying trait of populist mediated communication. As seen in his stagecraft speeches intended for a specific audience and exclusion of certain policies, Obadiah takes an anti-establishment stance (Moffit 2016). The topics being discussed range from political issues in Nigeria to the purported war against corruption/executive pardon for looters and external borrowing. However, this turned out to be a stage for discrediting the establishment politicians and their failed policies or politics.

What is notable in Extracts 4 and 5 is the promotion of self by Obadiah, in which he portrays himself as a different player in politics. In this way, he takes an anti-establishment and anti-gerontocratic stance. In Extract 4, RA tries to interrogate the uniqueness of Obadiah's presidential bid due to the similarity in discourses and plans among the other presidential candidates. Obadiah succeeds in using his technocratic/public service experience to validate his candidacy. The themes that Obadiah emphasises are infrastructural deficiencies, maladministration of public funds, corruption, paradigm change forcing anti-establishment politicians out of the contest and a New Nigerian project. From this point, Obadiah clearly expresses his discontent with Nigerian politics and the rules of the game. He non-verbally expresses this through his gesticulation, lexicon and semiotic tropes. His discontent with the incumbent re-election bid and reformulation of the slogan "next level" to "next level to hell" discloses his overall discontent with the political establishment and their ways of conducting politics. His paradigm shift takes the discourse further by suggesting a discard of the politicians of the old establishment and ushering in a new era of youthful politicians.

The other notable point, related to the first, is what Obadiah accomplishes through the use of slogans and lexicons such as "paradigm shift", "ethical revolution" and a "New Nigerian." He demonstrates the need for a new way of conducting politics, alternative leaders and plans, nation-building and institution building to deal with the rampant scourge of corruption and consequential ways of dealing with economic looters (See Extract 5). Although minimally invoked compared to Sowore's interactional bad manners and blame apportioning, Obadiah's anti-establishment stance still captivates the populist rhetoric of highlighting a common enemy to the nation's progress the people.

The conceptualisation of the New Nigeria and the ethical revolution implies that Obadiah draws a thin centred stance between the old Nigeria, which establishment politicians' control, and a new Nigeria, centred on youthful governance and a new blueprint or new ideas. Furthermore, his emphasis on the lack of real alternatives for Nigerian electorates

in reference to the main political parties (APC and PDP) suggests a political-based hegemony, despite the reality of the multi-party system in Nigerian politics, with both parties dominating the political institutions.

In summary, if populism is not programmatic in scope and execution, its varying styles of communication shown by the initial analysis suggest that populist actors emphasise the anti-establishment tropes, forge a common enemy oppressing the people, or emphasise a perceived way of conducting politics discursively and performatively.

III. Prof. Moghalu Young Progressives Party(YPP): Leading and not ruling; We need to fix Nigeria

Professor Kingsley Moghalu is a former deputy governor of the central bank of Nigeria (CBN). A role he occupied from 2009 to 2014. He was also appointed to the global Advisory Council of the London based Official Monetary and Financial Institutions Forum (OMFIF). This coupled with his previous role in international organisations such as the United Nations and his former university- at the prestigious Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University in Boston, Massachusetts where he was awarded a Professor of practice in International Business and Public Policy which sums up his dexterity and innovation. (Institute for Governance and Economic Transformation 2025). His participation in politics was borne out of a need to transform governance and leadership in Nigeria (Institute for Governance and Economic Transformation 2025).

A common referent object in power is “the people”, which resonates with democratic systems. Without the common currency of the people, democratic systems cannot function. In other words, in economic or political reductionist, populist terms, “the people” remain a crucial aspect of the polity.

However, populist parties or actors borrowing from populist rhetoric, the appeal to the people and highlighting the social wrong, which establishment politicians consolidate, take a higher focus for stagecraft (Herkman 2016; Moffit 2016; Boshoff 2019). Analyses of political style indicate that the acclaimed representation of the “multitude” is a performative stance that accumulates social wrongs, inequalities, hegemony and failed public policies and echoes the calculated acts and stagecraft of communication in the public sphere by those utilising a populist strategy.

While the analysis up to this point is geared towards the direction of populist resources, style as a means of sensitising “the people” in the Nigerian context, specific linguistic and interactional manners suggest similarities to the broad western perspective of the operationalisation and conceptualisation of populism.

In the following section, Prof. Moghalu’s debate and interview with Adamu Garba II, both on live television, will be analysed further to disclose diverse discourses, such as nation-building, internal party configuration and politics, party membership, leadership/ rulership and the best way to participate in politics leading to presidential elections.

1. Prof. Moghalu on political participation and party structure in Nigeria

With a similar academic background and slightly privileged background to the ADC candidate, Mailafia Obadiah, Prof. Moghalu also served the CBN between 2009 and 2014 with a series of reforms to the banking sectors being implemented during his term and his work for the United Nations. To illustrate the uniqueness of the populist style utilised in his debate about political participation and the need to break the racehorse contest for the office of the president, Prof. Moghalu opines that the faulty foundation of exclusive representation offered through the delegate system in which handpicking of the system of government is

left to a few is the bane of Nigerian democratisation.

An example is provided from the debate that features a formal talk between two citizens discussing politics on live television.

The first thing to note in Extract 6 is the extensive dedication of airtime to a particular speaker—Adamu Garba II—who is overruled by interruptions from the moderator or Pro. Moghalu at times. While this is not unusual in Nigerian television (interruption and more airtime to a speaker), the civil way in which Moghalu responds to Adam Garba while maintaining an establishment stance that criticises the political structure of the dominant parties and its impact on the office of the Presidency being limited to establishment politicians. Line 1 exposes the dominant Nigerian political parties' lack of internal political structures. A discourse dominates most of the interview, with Adamu Garba maintaining his position of working within the established political parties, as evinced in Lines 3–7.

In comparison to other candidates mentioned in this paper, Moghalu's style is not completely antagonistic. It is rather one of shrewd diplomacy and expressing criticism where it belongs. In Lines 2–6, he criticises the delegate system for nominating presidential candidates in the dominant parties. At the same time, his counterpart argues that the political system itself is not the problem: instead, Adamu Garba argues that the process is faulty and encourages political patronage. In Lines 4–7, instances of solving the social wrongdoings remain a heated discourse, although both parties have reached some agreement. AG cites the continuity of the pre-independence and post-colonial structures in terms of political parties that metamorphosed into the present era. Hence, Moghalu's reference to South African political parties and re-democratisation leading to the ascendancy of other political parties suggests that opening up competition beyond the establishment of political parties in Nigeria is pivotal to his ideal alternative democratic structure and institution building visions.

The frequency of the word "So" in Extract 6 also highlights it as a discourse marker in speaking and as a reporting verb. Turn-taking and interruptive moderation at one end and uncontrolled air time to AG symbolise dominance by the APC representative against the YPP representative. PM is incessantly interrupted by the moderator, while AG can speak with minimum interruption and more time. This dominant sequence illustrates the moderator's visible framing at the beginning in uniquely classifying the guests on live television as one with a "party structure and another without." This sets the stage for the discourse in political terms and explains why AG, despite his incomprehensible articulation in certain lines, keeps consolidating on his position to work within the establishment parties and emphasises the superiority and noticeable differences in the new parties.

In Lines 8–9, PM justifies his position for widening political inclusion and participation as necessary to break the mono-mentality of electorates believing that they have no other alternatives except for the establishment of political parties. His non-verbal articulation—mainly through his gestures and intensified tone when supporting the view of widening political participation—points to an anti-establishment stance. In Lines 8–9, he blames the poverty of the Nigerian masses on the failed administration of both dominant parties during the last 20 years. He refers to both parties as not offering anything worth voting for by the electorates. Therefore, the development of the attitudinal/political apathy of some portions of the electorate, who account for voter apathy according to the moderator and Moghalu. Using the people as a referent object, Moghalu believes that the people deserve a change, something new. On a climax, he objectively criticises the establishment by claiming that their ideas and policies have not contributed to the wealth of Nigerians. Instead, poverty and re-election of establishment politicians is a hopeless and poverty-laden path.

2. Moghalu on leadership: bluntness about the political establishment

In an interview on Channels Television about his presidential candidacy, after coming out of his sabbatical, the moderator and Moghalu display a form of informal and formal interaction. This stems from the fluctuation of the discourse from personal history to related political questions. The interview gradually develops and intensifies with the framing or suggestion of politics ruling in Nigeria. Moghalu does not restrict his frankness about the poverty of leadership in Nigeria. He talks about the lack of leaders in Nigeria and distinguishes between leaders and rulers. In his words:

“Ruling is arrogance-looks down on those that are led. Leading is togetherness, mobilising, inspiring, motivating. Moving the society from this point to the next point in progress.” (See Extract 7, Line 1)

The introduction of the frame phrase “ruling Nigeria” lays the foundation for a political discourse about politics, leadership, citizenship, patriotism and the virtue of selflessness. The latter is what PM tries to delineate with his socio-historical view of leadership issues and corruption in Nigeria. In Lines 3–4, he explains the civic impact of a selfless leader—a leader meant to serve and not to rule. In didactic terms, the morality of the discourse is aimed at creating awareness of something lacking and equally possible to attain in Nigerian society. Therefore, in Extract 7, PM’s repositioning of the moderator’s frame of the discourse shifts to a civic awareness campaign and moral instruction—one aimed at pointing out the deficiencies of the political system, social order and social wrong and the need for social cohesion. The latter is stressed in Line 3, where the moderator tries to frame the discourse in terms of multiculturalism or ethnicity. Moghalu reacts to this by resounding his motive of facilitating a united Nigeria against the few elites and establishment politicians. His analogy about how rampant poverty is in Nigeria is evinced in Line 3. He clearly delivers an indirect criticism of democratic governance. This criticism is echoed in the instance of 150 million citizens wallowing in poverty in Nigeria and a reprimandable stance in the form of the suggestion of the situation as: “absolutely scandalous” aimed at establishment politicians.

The last example is taken from the presidential debate 2019, in which several party representatives discuss party manifestoes and political issues in Nigeria (TVC News Nigeria 2019).

It is a formal debate in which both participants and the audience must obey specific rules, like taking turns, compliance to time allocation, and no clapping from the audience. Excerpts from this debate related to Prof. Moghalu’s revelation of his party manifesto is revealed below:

“In 2015, it was anything but, Jonathan, let 2019 not be anything but Buhari. 2019 should be about the fundamental shift away from the recycled old, incompetent and visionless political class that has held us down for far too long. It is time for us to elect a competent (stressed by voice level and facial gesture) leader (TVC News Nigeria 2019).”

“That means a leader who has vision and capacity, character, and experience and knowledge of nation-building, by which I mean using the authority of the state to create a national identity, working through the institutions of statecraft (TVC News Nigeria 2019).”

“It is time to have a leader who understands how to manage the economy. The YPP proposes to Nigerians a fundamental social contract that has never been in place in this country before. That social contract would create a trust between the people and the government of Nigeria that has been broken for the last 60 years. Without it, we cannot move forward. We constitutionally restructure the Federal Republic of Nigeria so that we can move forward. Not backwards (TVC News Nigeria 2019).”

In Extract 8, Moghalu addresses the Nigerian situation within two minutes, with no

interruption from the audience or moderator. This is a formal style of debate, in which opinions are expressed, and turns are strictly regulated within the given timeframe and political beliefs. Moghalu expresses Nigerians' lack of basic social amenities and, at the same time, rhetorically utilises the religious variable by asking if "Nigerians are children of lesser gods"? In this way, Moghalu shifts the style of the discourse from pointing out the underdeveloped state of Nigeria to the failure of leadership. He does this by citing the examples of Asian countries that were once economically underdeveloped but that are now referred to as "developed economies".

Similar to Extracts 6 and 7, 8, his discourse is aimed at challenging leadership, the norms and the privileged status of establishment politicians and the self-reinforcing institutions making them relevant in Nigerian politics. There is obviously an irony of public officials or financial technocrats, who have been in the game for a long time claiming to be outside the establishment or appearing to be the man of the people. Despite maintaining the status of an outsider to politics, Moghalu is part of the privileged few who have worked in public capacities. However, the pitch of his voice while suggesting leadership as a bane of Nigerian politics sums up his speech act. The moral, social capital and saviour complex shown by party representatives utilising populist performances and styles objectively differentiates them from establishment politicians in the public sphere.

NON-WESTERN POPULISM OR ITS EXISTENCE IN THE 2019 NIGERIAN ELECTION

Based on the previous submissions, this section provides a representation of non-Western approach to populism in the 2019 Nigerian election based on the data analysis and extracts.

The 2019 Nigerian election as a point of analysis paves the way for considering the structural differences and post-colonial heritage of African countries, which separates them from a comparison to Western countries. The phenomenon under discussion- populism, is endemic in western democracies with underlying indigenous and exogenous factors (see Table 2). To some extent based on the findings of the research- populism does exist in African countries, despite the hybrid nature of representative democracy in most African countries. Noteworthy is the premise that populism in non-Western countries-particularly Nigeria, is overwhelmingly situated within indigenous rather than exogenous conditions. As disclosed in extracts 1 and 2 as well as Table 2, the underlying economic, social and structural milieu differences play a crucial role in deciphering the existence of populism in the Nigerian context.

This extends beyond political actors using lexical and tactical registers to address certain structural underdevelopment and disparities. In other words, a colonial past fostered by weak institutions and non-existing/old infrastructures brings to fore the premise on which extract 1 and 2 communicative performances is established. At the same time, it might be argued that the use of dichotomy, class and inequality are common tropes of populism and its actors. In this case, the Nigerian political actors exploiting populism intend to strike out the inequalities, challenge the status quo or elitism and educate the electorates about the diversity of options in a multi-party democracy. For instance, when the railway infrastructure was mentioned in extract 1 as dehumanising. It not only represented the need for the poor to rise against the rich or a form of class struggle. Instead, it disclosed the interactional value of exchanging certain information in a performative style with the electorates.

Furthermore, political actors from minority political parties invoking the anti-elitist hegemony plot as evinced in extract 3 is something shared by Western/non-Western

Table 2 Summary of disparities between Western and Non-Western populism.

Western populism	Non-Western populism-Nigerian perspective
Hugely used as a tool for mobilisation and creation of out-group or others.	Maintains a Marxist assemblage of a class struggle between the poor and the rich. Poor citizens suffering under the tyranny of the rich.
Anti-establishment or anti-elite campaigns are mostly waged against the other parties or institutions.	Anti-establishment here is purely a class struggle-where the rich and poor, the have and have nots are pitched against each other in campaign speech.
Impact of transnational migrant flow- dislikes of unintegrated migrants or refugee policies are highly debated and central discourses	Cultural backlash is substituted for ethno-religious politics. Immigration crises is non-existent here – specifically in Nigeria.
Most issues span within a decade are emphasised in campaigns and speeches. This is also dependent on exogenous influx of contemporary issues.	Largely indigenous and issues emphasised or used as populist tropes are evergreen issues which are neglected by the elite or establishment
Performative styles are dependent on the present issues faced by the polity e.g. border control, transnational migrant flow, trade liberation and control.	Speech act of political actors are typically centred on long standing existing issues or backlogs of issues from one generation to another-which remain unresolved.
Political tribalism is consistent. Coalitions and compromises are made based on ideology or party manifestoes.	Political tribalism is substituted by coalition or reward for the coalition in political terms- such as appointment in cabinets or award of contracts.
Exploited mostly with unsubstantial facts or fake news to create a performative act for the audience.	This is exploited among other myriads of issues to raise awareness or question the status quo by non-Western political actors.

Source: Authors compilation based on extant literatures like: Taiwo 1993; Mudde 2004; Chabal 2009; Cheeseman & Larmer 2015; Ginsburg & Aziz 2018; Mouffe 2018; Foa & Mounk 2019; Falola 2021; Toyin falola network 2021; Shroufi & De Cleen 2022; Cammaerts 2024.

populism. However, a twist is noticed in anti-elite discourse aimed at bad governance, leadership, and administration which differentiates between the African/Western context. The differentiating factor is the indigenous milieu- a different social world.

The campaign of former American president Donald Trump during the 2016 presidential elections exemplifies that the focus was not solely on a perceived deficit in leadership. Rather, it represented a cohesive nativist strategy aimed at opposing the political establishment and rival parties (Sides et al. 2017; Donovan & Bowler 2018; Austermuehl 2020). Thus, each political context generates distinct anti-elitist narratives that influence the framework of populism.

From this perspective, populism from the Nigerian context is depicted in extracts 1–3, one in which basic amenities is lacking, mismanagement of infrastructures or existence of old public infrastructures, low GDP per capital or household income, inflation rate, high unemployment, brain drain, corruption, to mention but a few. However, such context is either missing, non-existent or if in existence in the Western context- in a mild form. Thus, when populism is invoked in the African parlance-it is due to an underlying indigenous unresolved issue that spans over the past decades or an evergreen malaise rather than an issue that erupted within a decade. In a nutshell, in the African context- most often, anti-elitist communication used in campaigns are not a result of recent exogenous or contemporary issues, instead of long-term issues that are strategically embedded in speech acts.

In other words, the use of anti-elitism at its core demonstrates the construction of otherness. Othering and its deployment is important- as it might be a beneficial tool for minority parties to garner electoral support. However, in the Nigerian context- it is

employed as scapegoating or blame apportioning for the woes of the present-day polity. Howbeit, the elites in the African context are not just a production of the past decade, instead, the elites have been recycled over the past 2–3 decades with a hegemonic twist to it- which introduces a hybrid version of gerontocracy nepotism and family dictatorship. At the basic level of analysis here, leadership and governance issues are rarely new themes in African politics. Thus, understanding how the anti-elitist hegemonic plot unravels in a political system is critical to understanding the underlying conditions and varying strains of populism.

In addition, non-Western populism as evinced in the 2019 election, was fuelled by a hybrid form of political tribalism and opportunism. This was noticed in inter-party alliances and the coalition of minority parties with establishment parties such as the People Democratic Party (PDP)- or other smaller parties establishing a coalition with other parties. A unique twist here is a 39 party alliance -the Coalition of United Political Party (CUPP) that formed a coalition with an establishment party-PDP (Okeregbe & Ajibiola, 2018). The goal of this coalition was to strengthen the political hold and chances of the PDP against the incumbent's party- the APC. What is of significance here is that- the anti-elitist parties formed a coalition in a bid to help another establishment party in its bid to boost the chances of the PDP winning the election. This compromise speaks much in terms of the disparity in political configuration, political system and political tribalism when it comes to African elections or politics. In contrast to Western political parties, it is rare to experience such a situation where right-wing populist parties form a coalition with liberals or left or conservative parties to increase their chances of winning the election. Thus, this brings to the fore another disparity in non-Western populism in which performative strains of populism or loyalty to their speech and strategies are substituted with the zeal to win or expected rewards from such electoral success.

The disparities between Western and non-Western Populism, specifically, the non-Western populism in Nigeria is characterised by a hybrid Marxist assemblage in which class struggle and hegemonic relations between 'the ruled and ruler' or 'the haves and have not' is converted into a political tool for speech acts or performative styles. This hybrid form of non-Western populism or its predominance is noticeable in extract 1, 2, 3, and 8, table 2 in which performative and oratory act dependent on class relations are disclosed. The class relations here symbolise a disconnect between the poor masses and the rich or elite. The alienation of the poor and the virtual eradication of the middle class from the Marxist equation emphasises the socio-economic situation of Nigeria- in which basic amenities are non-functional or limited, inflation, insecurity for the poor masses have heightened, among other lingering issues. Thus, when a populist stance is employed by a new party in the multi-party structure of Nigeria political system. Such a party employs populist rhetoric and tropes to distinguish itself from the establishment, thereby announcing itself as the saviour or remedy to the socio-economic or political woes.

In a nutshell, populism from a non-Western perspective as it relates to Nigeria has the following elements: (1) structural, economic and institutional disparities (2) non-elites taking an anti-elitist stance with their linguistic registers, rhetoric and styles (3) Hybrid electoral opportunism: formation of unnatural alliances —for instance the coalition of minority parties with establishment parties to reap the spoils of election victory, (4) establishment of new parties in a multi-party system, (5) utilisation of moral cues, tropes utilised by populist and (6) fictional existence of the people.

CONCLUSION

Utilising dialectical relation in critical discourse analysis (CDA), this paper disclosed the non-western context-based discourse approach to populist style and performances in the Nigerian context. This directly responds to the mediated populist in western literature lacking an African-based discourse or analysis of mediated political performance in systemic terms (electoral success).

As evinced by the three Nigerian presidential candidates, a variation in register shifts, interactional bad manners and mobilising strategies are particularly notable in the AAC candidate. The other candidates used a similar but a different set of anti-establishment rhetoric and stagecraft performances that depict the socio-cultural and political context, enabling their stance-taking and performative style. Through their strategical deployment, populist politicians come forward as the saviours, an honest and authentic deal despite some adopting uncivil or interactional bad manners in live television debates.

Moreover, the use of the referent object “the people” in general terms is a mobilising currency used by populists everywhere. This mobilising is done by claiming a moral ground that addresses the societal ills and proffers a solution to them. In doing that and performing an anti-establishment stance through blame apportioning or creating a long-standing enemy, who has facilitated the country’s downfall, populist politicians gain followership. However, whether this type of followership transcends to electoral success in the Nigerian context is yet to be seen. Therefore, future research into the systemic outcome and mediated populist performances and their gains are highly significant in Africa.

It is also a settled case that western or non-western populist styles and performances vary, based on the socio-political, historical and cultural context, among other variables. Of course, in the Nigerian context, the socio-political situation offers a unique example of new parties utilising populist rhetoric to offset the imbalance in political structure, followership, political capital and financial strength. Therefore, as it becomes clear to understand the political and economic world constructed as a social practice during an election. It is also crucial to comprehend the structural and behavioural variations, style shifts and performances during or before an election. The context of such performances, idiosyncratic elements and the sheer element of privilege or the social class of candidates explain the dynamics of mediated performance.

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APPENDIX

Extract 1: Worst rail transportation system meant for “slaves”. You can’t even transport pigs on this train.

S: Sowore, A: Audience

S We just purchased a ticket; as soon as we are done with the tickets, we get on the trail. It is something to behold!

S Nigeria has no railway transportation; that is the best way to describe it.

(Lines omitted)

S (Lines omitted)

I know no presidential candidate or aspirant will ever enter a public train because they don’t plan to change our public transportation.

S And we have come to you people of Nigeria you can change your miserable condition; you don’t have to be voting for the same people who created the Nigeria of this particular misery for you (indicating with hands raised towards the train).

A Loud chants and focus on the presidential aspirant

S (Lines omitted) I will never allow Nigerians to be transported on a train without air conditioning.

I will never put this sort of train on our rail line. We will shut down this type of transportation system that is only meant for slaves and replace it with decent transportation for Nigerians. That is why I came here.

Probably, the worst of the worst train transportation, the windows are blown apart, there is no toilet, you can't even transport pigs in this. This is the Nigeria they created, and this is it ... A hopeless country, and we hope to change it next year, and I hope you understand ...

Extract 2: Nigeria is not working for the people of Nigeria: it is working for only a few people

Kadaria Ahmed: Moderator (M); Audience (A); AAC: Sowore (S); and Rufai (R)

M Why should Nigerians vote for you as president?

S (...) Nigeria has been around for 58 years. Led by men with little or no ideas on how to move a nation from one destination to another. As a result, what you have as a nation today started as a business. Nigeria is not working "for the people of Nigeria." It is working for only a few people that continue to enjoy at the expense of the majority.

S Democratic rule became a monocratic rule, where morons subjugated the Nigerian people ... we are here to mend Nigeria, which misgovernance, corrupt and wicked leaders have broken.

M How is your plan different from the present privatisation of power (electricity)?

S I want to correct the impression that power was privatised. Power was not privatised. They wanted to deregulate and privatise the power sector. "They did the privatisation and not the deregulation." They built their own power generating stations so that we could have power. They did not have one—we sold what belonged to Nigerians at the market price to the same people. Who then turned around and got subventions from our government, and that was how the PDP spent \$16 billion generating darkness in this country.

A Clapping in response to S response.

S This government has continued the same when you say you are privatising, deregulating and giving. All these public facilities to your friends, you have no power generation.

Extract 3: The slogan: Thieves, bad person, useless man

S: Sowore

S (...) If we teach history in our curriculum, somebody would have told our children that Obasanjo is a bad person. Someone would have taught our children that Babangida is a thief. Somebody would have taught our children and brothers that Atiku was a customs officer who made it by stealing (noticeable hand gestures emphasising the sincerity of the speech). Somebody would have told our children that Buhari is a useless man. We did not need Donald Trump to tell us that Buhari is lifeless.

S Here, we are still romanticising our past and future. Let me tell you, those who destroyed the past cannot guarantee you any future.

S We fought to drive Babangida out of office, the same we did to Abacha. But, unfortunately, the details of the protest are not entrenched in Nigerian history. Instead, what are entrenched, are criminals.

S We have moved from International Thieves Thieves (ITT) to Global Robbers ... We live in a country of contractors without builders. The country you see today is the country of their dreams. It is a dream of the Babangida, Atiku, Obasanjo, Buhari of this world. [...] Those

that are your oppressors are your role models.

Extract 4: The Morning Show on ARISE News Channel (Nigeria)

Hosts: Ojy Okpe (OO); Laila Johnson-Salami (LJS); and Reuben Abati (RA)

Participant (presidential candidate of the ADC): Mailafia Obadiah (MO)

RA: As a technocrat, when did you change your mind to join politics, and why?

MO: Both positions are not mutually exclusive; technocrats have the technical understanding of economics and public policy, and politicians avail themselves for election. Why am I doing this? My name Obadiah in Hebrew implies servant of the most high. I am here to serve the people, I want to be the servant of the people who brings peace to the people of this country who has suffered severe trauma from unrest, disorder and poverty. I believe I have the capability to serve and deliver. I have advised the President on economic matters, worked at the CBN, African Development Bank ... And lastly, I have clean hands and character. Trust me to lead this country as your servant and not your master. We have had too many masters and political jobbers- they're recycling the same people. It is not good enough. The youth of this country deserve something better.

OO: As an economist, I would like your opinion on foreign borrowing to build infrastructure.

MO: I am not saying don't borrow at all, but it is foolish to borrow huge loans at commercial market rates to build railways to another man's country ... I consider it treasonable to borrow money to build a railway leading to another man's country. We should only borrow for capital expenditure and projects with a guaranteed return on investment. For instance, one of the big loans we borrowed at the inception of this administration was one of 1.2 billion for the rehabilitation and reconstruction in Borno; the money was fretted away in grass cutters and other things that ... I am going to put a stop to this nonsense.

RA: Well, Obadiah, we have heard many presidential candidates on this programme. The problem is that you talk more or less about the same issue. I don't know if you have read the manifesto of APC—"the next level" and the policy document by the PDP. What is it that is unique that you are likely to bring to the table?

MO: You know ..."the next level" is the next level to hell if we allow *these people*. This is the worst government for bigotry, and they don't deserve a second term. They don't have the capacity; they don't have the capability to lead this country ... We have what it takes to lead this country" (Obadiah pointing to himself).

Extract 5: A New Nigeria, nation-building, youth empowerment and ethical revolution

Interview on Sunrise Daily @ Channels Television (Nigeria): Mailafia Obadiah (MO) and Moderator (M)

M: We have so many issues facing the nation today. What are your key priorities as you contest for office?

MO: We want a new Nigeria; we want the Nigerian people to be offered a real alternative. Now we don't have an alternative. The real alternative requires a paradigm shift- in the way we do politics, in terms of our policies and our priorities. Right now, many Nigerian people don't have a real alternative. They are tired of the old politicians; they are all the same, they have the class interest in preserving the system. I am new to politics; this gives me a fresh perspective starting with an ethical revolution. This thing about fighting corruption is a bag of nonsense—because you don't go about chasing rats and common thieves when

your house is facing conflagration. So my first priority is to lay down a new foundation for a New Nigeria. This starts with harnessing the power of the youths, nation-building and reintegrating polarised Nigerians.

M: You talked about giving amnesty to the looters of the national treasury. Don't you think that this would act as a precedent on which others in the future can act upon?

MO: We are not going to do that every year. Italy did that one or two decades ago. You are not going to do that unless you put a system in place. The people in power are now chasing common rats systems that are crucial to curtailing financial haemorrhage.

Extract 6: Prof. Moghalu on the structure of political parties in Nigeria

Moderator = M; Prof. Moghalu = PM; Adamu Garba II = AG

M: So, I am more concerned about the structure of political parties in Nigeria. We have more than 190 political parties registered, but obviously, the only known one is two. You belong to one of them, the incumbent presidents' party (a reference to AG with M's hand gesture to him). So, what about party structure that makes it impossible for true democracy to happen? Let me start on this side—because there is no political structure here (M referring to YPP PF).

PM: Now I think we need to know that something is changing in Nigeria.

Firstly, many more people are becoming politically aware, so you have many parties, so people are looking for vehicles to express their political beliefs and visions. Second, these political parties began to consolidate and merge as time went on. Third, inside the big political parties APC- PDP, we do not have internal democracy. The internal delegate system is a fraud- I believe that each party member must vote for a presidential candidate.

M: So, what is the danger of such a delegate system? A delegate system implies nomination, right?

AG: To be sincere with you ... I don't...

M: (Interruption)

You see it differently?

AG: I see it differently. I think it's not altogether wrong. It has to do with the credibility of the people selecting the delegates.

M: Who selects the delegates?

AG: That is it—the same people in the vote would now combine vote for the delegates, and from there (description of the delegate system unclear or muddled up by AG), you know. In a biopolitics system like in China, where you have 1.3 billion people, only 86 million people combine to vote for about 600,000 people. From there, it goes to 40,000 and 400 and from the 400 people you produce the president ... So, it's not actually a bad thing- it is the process of selecting delegates. It is a patronage system ...

M: So, what's wrong in that? (Interrupting AG)

AG: What is wrong is that the criteria used for choosing must be based on nationalistic, patriotic tendencies to Nigeria instead of partisan or ethnic interest. They don't have Nigerian interest at heart- they have their candidate at heart ...

PM: So, in my view, and I agree with what AG has said. In an ideal world, the delegate system is not necessarily bad. However, Nigeria (emphasis on gestures and high tone of voice) is a developing country, a poor country; our democracy is very immature. At this point, I think we should have a direct democracy within the parties. Because of its absence, it is why always (further intensification of gestures) in these two parties, godfathers take control; moneybags take control (further emphasis on gestures and tone of highlighting the bane of Nigerian politics). We have incompetent leaders as their candidates, and we have

had them for several years.

M: So, tell me, how does one change that kind of thing ... It makes us feel that we are lost and in the hands of certain people. In Nigeria, we hear about such words as cabals ... How do you see that playing out going forward?

AG: The trouble is that both dominant parties owe their existence to the formation of parties prior to Nigerian independence—1957. The NCNC, NPC, and the ANG merged to form the PDP and APC today.

M: So, we are doing the same old same old?

AG: Yes, the same setting. To me, they represent a fundamental institutional democratic history of Nigeria.

If we stay outside and point fingers at the establishment politicians, we might not get inside because they have some established structure, trust and political capital.

PM: I disagree (Overwritten by AG)

AG: That is why I am inside that party to serve as an opposition. Let me contest, let, for the first time, real people with real plans, focus on Nigeria be in there and do the fight from within ... You have to do it from the inside.

PM: (Tries to interrupt) Let me ...

M: I agree with what you are ... I see what you are saying (a reference to AG) ... but ... shifting towards PM.

PM: I have a perspective. That perspective is in a democratic society; you have free choice of political parties (citing South Africa and the changing political landscape). So, the ANC that had exclusive power has been challenged by new parties based on its lack of performance. In Nigeria, we need to look beyond the APC and PDP.

M: You are saying go into the dominant parties and try and democratise, and you are saying open the space for political participation and inclusion. But why is that important for me or the voters out there?

PM Let me tell you why.

M: Why?

PM: If the ordinary Nigerians remains stuck in the mentality that they must vote for PDP or APC, they will remain poor because (Interrupted by M).

M: Or they won't go and vote ...

PM: Or they won't vote because people are now dissatisfied with these two parties. So people are looking for something else. Something new. And that is a good thing ... 20 years of democracy since 1999; two parties have only made us poorer, poorer and poorer. So we keep doing the same thing over and over again and expect a different result.

Extract 7: Scandalous accolade and love for Nigeria

Moderator = M; Prof. Moghalu = (PM)

M: You have risen to the highest rank in the top bank in Nigeria- the CBN. You have turned around now after some kind of sabbatical. We have not seen you for a while ... To rule Nigeria, what's driving you?

PM: (Interruption from PM) Yes (responding with a broad smile)

PM: I don't want to rule Nigeria. Nigeria is currently being ruled, and that's why we are poor. There is a big difference between leading and ruling. The idea of "ruling" is an arrogance-looks down on those that are led. Leading is togetherness, mobilising, inspiring, motivating and moving the society from this point to the next point in progress. That's what I want to give to Nigeria.

M: And you are not a professional politician?

PM: Not at all. In fact, I am shocked to find that am in politics.

M: You are shocked at yourself?

PM: Let me tell you why; the only reason going into this is because I am fed up. I am fed up and angry with the poverty, with this country's bad governance, and angry because Nigeria's population is growing geometrically –400 million people in 2050, and poverty is increasing. What's the future for our children? Is this the sort of Nigeria you want or we want our children to grow up in. What is the future for our children, our youths?

M: So the country has not been good to us? Does "us" mean because he is Igbo or she is a woman? "Us" does not mean retired civil servant?

PM: It includes all that in our minds, but it's much bigger for me. It's the 180 million citizens of 150 million of them earn less than 600 Naira a day. That is absolutely scandalous. We are the poverty capital of the world today.

M: What is the love for country? How would you describe that absent ingredient?

PM: Love of country means understanding that you are a citizen and part of something bigger than yourself, and you have to do everything within your power to make that thing bigger than yourself successful.

M: At whatever level? (Display of hierarchical level of success expected) (Interrupting PM)

PM: At every level, and when everybody succeeds, you succeed.

Extract 8: Presidential debate –Manifesto presentation

Moderator = M; Prof. Moghalu = PM

M: You have two minutes to tell us about your party manifesto and why Nigerians should trust you to lead them for the next four years by casting their votes for you.

PM: Thank you. Hmm, 60 years as an independent country, but too many of our people. Too many Nigerians still don't have the basic things of life. They don't have electricity; they don't have good health care; they don't have good schools or good infrastructure. The time has come to ask as we vote for 2019.

Are we the children of lesser gods? Malaysia, China, Singapore, and Japan were once backward, but today, they are what we look up to. The difference lies in leadership (silenced voice level).