

# The 'War' of Appropriate Pricing of Petroleum Products: The Discourse of Nigeria's Reform Agenda

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## Abstract

This study focuses on the newspaper coverage of the debate on the pricing of petroleum products (petroleum, diesel, kerosene, etc.) in Nigeria. It seeks to examine, specifically, the discursive constructions of economic development with particular concern for the reform agenda in the country's petroleum sector. In doing this, the paper tries to analyze and characterize the debate on the increase in the prices of petroleum products in the country between 1999 and 2004; following on the heels of World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF)-driven reforms. It further situates the analysis of the debate within the history and politics of oil and development in the country with particular concern for the 'angles of telling' of the participants. Using the framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA), the paper attempts to show the ideological elements in the discourse of socio-political development in Nigeria as constructed by the different sociopolitical groups and concludes that the different angles of telling result from different underlying issues of identity and power.

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## 1 Introduction

Governments in developing countries often find it difficult to implement public policies, especially as outcomes are often perceived to be at variance with public interest by a number of contending political forces including the civil society, NGOs, workers unions, the press and academics. These governments try, on their own, to explain such policies, often, in laudatory terms and as very beneficial to the country and the masses of the people. African countries, in particular, are held to be beleaguered by poverty and it has been argued that for the continent to get out of poverty, it needs sustained economic growth partly by, for example, restructuring and transforming its economies (cf. Akinrinade 2003: 4). In what is regarded as the new initiative for sustainable economic development in the continent, its leaders now focus on issues such as reforms, private capital and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

As noted by Akinrinade (*ibid.*), there is the urgent need to implement far-reaching reforms and programmes in many African countries as the goal of these reforms is to enhance Africa's rapid integration into the world economy. However, discourse studies show that people have perspectives on how the world unfolds and such viewpoints are consciously or unconsciously encoded in language. According to Simpson (1993: 6, cited in Thomas et al. 2004: 32), language is not a transparent objective medium for communication but, a projection of positions and perspectives and a way of communicating attitudes and assumptions.

The expression 'appropriate pricing of petroleum products' is used by the Nigerian authorities to refer to its planned withdrawal of petroleum subsidy which was viewed as a drain on the economy. 'Appropriate pricing of petroleum products' was one of the palliative measures recommended by the IMF/World Bank to enable Nigeria's economy get back on course. The expression became a feature of Nigerian media-political discourse as diametrically opposing positions were canvassed in the media in the past three or more decades. The debate came to a head when it became a national policy problem that confronted the Olusegun Obasanjo-led government between 1999 and 2004. The issue generated an intense public debate in which the government, members of the ruling and opposing political parties and the civil society were engaged in what can be aptly described as a war of words in several public forums, especially the print media. The Yar'Adua administration, which took over from the Obasanjo administration in April 2007 is being confronted with the same debate at the time of writing

this paper. Thus, this paper focuses on the 'angles of telling' employed by the different participants in the discourse.

## 2 Theoretical Background

In a preface to "At war with words", Billig (2003: viii) observes a common assertion among academics that everything could be contained within texts and that their deeper meanings demand expert decoding. Studies in critical discourse analysis have shown that many of the ordinary choices we make and decisions taken have political consequences. Thus when language is used in the context of politics, we try to examine views encoded in the language being used in terms of its potential to reflect thought. This is because language can be used not only to create and reinforce certain value systems, but also that certain discourses do help in shaping the beliefs which impact on people's behaviour, motivations, desires and fears (Jones/Peccei 2004: 36). Above all, such discourses tend to establish certain ideologies as 'common sense'. In other words, words and language use are not just the verbal representations of a deeper reality but they are integrated into human reality. Thus, according to van Dijk (2003: 352), critical discourse analysis does not see the possibility of a value-free science, as scholarly discourse. For example, it is part of and influenced by social structure and that explanations in discourse analysis are socio-politically situated.

As noted by George Orwell (1946, cited in Jones/Peccei 2004: 36), in our age, there is no keeping out of politics, as all issues are political. And for Jones/Peccei, politics is concerned with power: the power to make decisions, to control resources, to control other people's behaviour and often to control their values. The power acquired and the enforcement of one's beliefs, perspective or ideology can be achieved through physical coercion or by persuasion. This implies that power can be exercised through the manufacture of consent (Fairclough 1992).

Politics is power and to secure power, it makes sense to persuade everyone else that what you want is also what they want. To achieve this, an ideology needs to be established: one which makes the beliefs that you want people to hold appear to be 'common sense', thus making it difficult for them to question the dominant ideology (Jones/Peccei 2004: 38). In political debates, politicians strive to persuade their audience of their basic claims in order to influence people's political and ideological views. It is observed that our varying understanding of reality is mediated, often, by the language and the system of signs available to us. This system of signs is not an unbiased reflection of the world but a product of the ideologies of our culture. It can also be used to establish and maintain ideologies (Fairclough 1991; van Dijk 1998).

Language, it is also argued, can be used not only to steer people's thoughts and beliefs but also to control both. This, for example, can be carried out, in a way, through the control of discourse. This is because the kind of language we use represents the way we perceive, and therefore we can alter or influence other people's perception of a particular issue/point/agenda through the control of discourse (Jones/Peccei 2004: 39). Thus today, although the dominant economic system is still capitalism, its operations are couched in seemingly positive phrases like *liberalization*, *deregulation*, *outsourcing*, *rightsizing* and *appropriate pricing*, among others.

In order to adequately do justice to the understanding of social problems which are the focus of CDA, we require a multidisciplinary approach as a mono-causal explanation to social problems can be problematic, especially as they are not only complex, but are also historically embedded to be easily explained in unidirectional ways (Wodak 2001). Wodak notes that in very many instances in everyday conversations, a lot of background information is required as there are complex and multi-layered social interactions and social practices. As critical discourse analysts, we assume a dialectical relationship between particular discursive practices and the specific fields of action (including situations, institutional frames and social structures) in which they are embedded. On the one hand, the situational, institutional and social settings shape and affect discourses. On the other hand, discourses influence discursive as well as non-discursive social and political processes and actions. In other words, discourses as linguistic social practices can be seen as constituting non-discursive and discursive social practices and, at the same time, as being constituted by them. Therefore, we need a

multidisciplinary or cross-disciplinary approach to better understand the micro-level properties of discourse with macro-level phenomena in larger societal, cultural, and political contexts and also to explain how these two levels influence one another.

### 3 Oil, Reforms and the Nigerian Economy

Nigeria produces 25% of all African crude oil and 3% of the world total. The country's crude oil production averaged 2.45 million barrels per day in 2006 and its estimated oil reserves in January 2007 was 36.2 barrels (Revenue Watch Institute 2010). According to Okonta and Douglas (2001), Nigeria was ranked as the 13<sup>th</sup> biggest producer of crude oil in the world. Nigeria is also a leading producer of natural gas with reserves of 3,398 billion metric tonnes, representing 2.4 per cent of total world reserves. Mukwaya (2005: 132), citing several sources, corroborates the above figures with the following statistics:

Since the production of oil in 1958, when it accounted for only one percent of national revenue, until the present, oil has contributed several billions of dollars to Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings. Tamuno (1999: 11), citing *Time Magazine* puts the figures earned between 1974 and 1999 at about \$300 billion. [...] Today oil and gas resources from the Niger Delta account for over 85 percent of the nation's GDP, over 95 percent of foreign exchange earnings, over 90 percent of national budget, and 80 percent of the nation's wealth (Tamuno, 1999; Owugah, 2000; Obadan, 1998).

It is clear from the above that Nigeria's status as a force to be reckoned with as an emerging African power is predicated largely on her oil and gas potentials. The country's overdependence on oil and gas revenues has been a major source of concern to Nigerian economic and political players.

Nigeria recorded a smooth transition from military dictatorship to multi-party democracy on 29 April 1999. The new administration was confronted with the challenge of improving the living standard of Nigerians through the provision of vital social amenities, and meeting its obligation to its creditors, represented especially by the London and Paris Clubs of creditors. As part of the palliatives for solving the nation's economic problems, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank were understood to have prescribed several economic reforms which included the removal of subsidy on petroleum products in Nigeria.

The history of 'appropriate pricing' of petroleum products in Nigeria can be traced to 1973 when petroleum motor spirit (PMS), diesel (AGO) and kerosene (DKP) sold for 95 kobo, 88 kobo and 18 kobo per liter, respectively. By 1986, the same products sold for N3.95 (or 395 kobo), N2.95 and N1.05 per liter, respectively. Barely a year after the inception of the country's Fourth Republic, precisely June 2000, the Olusegun Obasanjo-led administration decided to increase the prices of petroleum products by about 50 percent. The breakdown is as follows: PMS (N16–N26 per liter), AGO (N14–N24 per liter) and DPK (N12–N22 per liter). After much public outcry and negotiation between labour union leaders and the government, the prices were brought down to N22, N21 and N17, respectively. On January 1, 2002, the prices were upwardly reviewed again. After the usual outcry and negotiation, the prices were pegged at N26 per liter for both PMS and AGO and N24 for DPK. By the middle of 2004, speculations were rife that the government proposed to review the prices of petroleum products yet again.

The prices of petroleum products went up by up to five times during the eight years of the Olusegun Obasanjo presidency. Each time this happened, the Nigerian government, represented by the president and other public officers, employed several discourse strategies at their disposal to persuade the Nigerian public that it meant well. The people, on the other hand, usually challenged the position of the government through media publications and public demonstrations. A few Nigerians especially commercial vehicle operators continued to buy, albeit grudgingly, at the new price with the expectation that the ongoing campaign against the new price would make the government reverse its decision. The government allowed the debate to drag on for a while until most members of the public got used to the new price. Then peace and quiet returned and it would seem that the government had won the 'war'.

This polarization between the government and the people on what has been described in Nigerian political discourse as 'appropriate pricing' of petroleum products was visible in the

media on all the five occasions when the pump prices of petroleum products were upwardly reviewed between 1999 and 2004. At the time of writing this paper (July 2008), the Nigerian authorities had hinted that petroleum prices would be upwardly reviewed in January 2009. This sparked off another round of debate in the media about the wisdom and fairness of the removal of petroleum subsidy in the country.

#### 4 The Data and its Analysis

The data for this study were collected from purposively selected newspaper reports, articles and editorials in four Nigerian dailies at the height of the debate ('war') on appropriate pricing of petroleum between October and November 2004. In other words, newspaper reports of debates on the pricing of petroleum products to the Nigerian public were gathered and portions that were considered relevant to the objectives of the paper were extracted for analysis. The newspapers, which are private, included *The Guardian*, *The Comet*, *New Age* and *The Daily Independent*.

We observed, earlier in this paper, that language use tends to reflect and reinforce a particular perspective; that is, an ideology. Ideology is understood to refer to "the taken-for-granted assumptions, beliefs and value-systems which are shared collectively by a social group" (Simpson 1993: 3, cited in Thomas et al. 2004: 27). In the data analysis presented in this section, we tried to show how the various viewpoints in the debate on 'appropriate pricing' of petroleum products are linguistically encoded. In doing this, we looked specifically at the ideological context, some lexico-grammatical choices and some significant pragmatic strategies employed by the participants. Since controversial ideological issues that centre on equity, fundamental human rights, fairness and living standards are at stake, the roles played by word choice to project such ideologies and perspectives in the discourse are identified and described. Significant lexical features in the paper include lexical choices, collocations and repetitions. Also, significant in the data is the figurative use of language exemplified by metaphor and Marxist related rhetoric.

Cohn (1987, cited in Thomas et al.: *ibid.*) holds that "the angle of telling" may be such that a worldview may be skewed against the victim. Apart from differences in representation being signaled by particular features of grammar, structural choices within one language do also signify differences in representation. In this 'war'/debate, we observe a number of strategies, which include the use of polarizing strategies and structures, such as scape-goating, stereotyping, use of metaphors (imagery), manipulation of moral concepts, emphasis on ideology over information and so on. The observation being made here is that the combination of sign and structural choices is integral to the creation of certain representations.

##### 4.1 The Case for 'Appropriate Pricing' of Petroleum Products

The texts from government, politicians in the ruling party and people who sympathize with their position appear to use language to steer people's thoughts and beliefs as to the 'facts' of under-pricing and the benefits of fixing 'appropriate prices' for petroleum products in the country. For instance, instead of using the stark expressions such as "removal of petroleum subsidy" and the inevitable corollary of "job layoffs" or "downsizing", the government opts for their euphemistic alternatives, "appropriate pricing" and "right sizing", respectively. Such lexical choices are expected to make the public more receptive to the reforms being introduced by the government. Texts 1–6 below present the 'angles of telling' employed by the discourse participants who favour the removal of petroleum subsidy.

###### Text 1

Since embarking on reforms, we have built a basis for better dialogue with our creditors and we are now beginning a new drive for the realistic solution to our debt problem. Attracting the private sector in the context of a large debt overhang is very difficult.

Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, Incumbent Nigerian President (*The Comet* on Wednesday, October 13, 2004)

## Text 2

As a former President, I think the people have to understand what the nation is going through because I know it is not easy to go through this as we embark on a lot of reforms right now which are in process. You people castigated me during my own time as President of this nation over the Structural Adjustment Programme. But this deregulation is unnegotiable [sic] and I think the government should remain steadfast on the issue of reforms.

General Ibrahim Babangida, former Nigerian Military President (*The Comet* on Monday, October 11, 2004)

In Text 1, Nigeria's incumbent president resorts to rational argument supported with the jargon of international public finance, exemplified by realistic solution and debt overhang, to show that the government's approach to the problem is not only rational but scientific. Underlying this presentation is the implication that the reforms will usher in a more conducive economic platform for the private sector, which will be advantageous for the country and its people. In Text 2, a former military president throws his weight behind the president, who incidentally is a retired General like him. The former military head of state employs persuasion based on privileged information he possesses (as a former Nigerian head of state) on facts about the nation's economy and his support of the economic reforms being undertaken by the government. His reminder of the fact that his past government was castigated over the structural adjustment programme (SAP) shows that unless reforms are allowed to be carried out, there would not be a positive turn-around of the nation's economy. His impatience with the ongoing public debate can be seen from the way he describes deregulation as 'unnegotiable'. Such disdain for democratic processes by military leaders is common with Nigerian leaders with military background.

In Texts 3 and 4 below, two public opinion leaders lend their support for the government's reform agenda.

## Text 3

The reforms are necessary. He [Obasanjo] said if we don't act, who would act? If we don't do this, who will do it? Now it behoves a leader, who has a lot of goodies in stock for the people to embark on reforms, a courageous leader should embark on reforms. [...] Even during the time of the Israelites, when they were taken out of Egypt, you saw how they were reacting, that if you brought us here to come and suffer better take us back to Egypt [...] like the Israelites of the Old Testament, Nigerians have no patience.

Okeaga Ogada, a former Attorney General and Justice Commissioner (*New Age* on Thursday, November 4, 2004)

## Text 4

Government decided to remove subsidy on the various petroleum products and free the downstream sector of that industry from regulation in order to allow many players in it. The almost instantaneous result is that it became more profitable to engage in petroleum products marketing [...] [and] stimulated more supply to the advantage of the consumers. [...] [The] truth of the matter is that Nigerians can now see and can easily buy petrol, diesel and kerosene for their industrial use.

Ejike Nwosu (*The Comet* on Monday, October 11, 2004)

Text 3 is a compelling presentation by a member of the public who believes in reforms. The text opens with a terse declaration, "The reforms are necessary". This is followed by two parallel complex interrogative sentences which serve the psychological purpose of making the reading public to search their conscience. He uses positive lexical items such as courageous and goodies to describe the president and his good intentions for his people. He finally berates the Nigerian public by insinuating that they are ignorant and impatient like the biblical Israelites, who resist progress because of a temporary setback.

In Text 4, the writer makes the Nigerian public to salivate, so to speak, by a tantalizing description of the future benefits of reforms when the meal is done. The underlined expres-

sions in Text 4 express the writer's positive prediction that the new policy will bring about many benefits, which include more employment (many players), wealth (more profitable), an end to long queues (more supply) and end scarcity of petroleum products (Nigerians can now see and can easily buy). It can be further deduced from the text that the writer views the public resistance of the removal of petroleum subsidy as unwise and self-destructive.

#### Text 5

Now with the renewed focus on the economy, we have NEEDS (National Economic Empowerment and Development) programme that has been elaborated by the government aimed at addressing the economy, and we are receiving accolades from the international community. And that is good for us.

Dr Mansur Mukhtar, DG, DMO (*The Comet* on Monday, October 18, 2004)

#### Text 6

As far as I know, there is no country with heavy foreign debt which is asking for debt forgiveness and not rescheduling. I know of no country where that is happening without formal IMF programme. Democracy is all about building consensus. The subsidy on fuel here is clearly a difficult issue. We in Britain care about the success of reaching and building consensus in the country. The ministers and the President have to do a job of persuasion and debate.

Mr Richard Gozney, the British High Commissioner to Nigeria (*The Comet* on Monday, October 18, 2004)

Very much like the president in Text 1, the public official in Text 5 uses the plural personal pronoun we creatively to imply an existing partnership between the Nigerian government and its public. The implied joint project, NEEDS, is described as already generating accolade from the international community and that it is good for us. The official uses this endorsement of the reform activities of the government as a good reason why the Nigerian public should accept it. This is a remarkably persuasive ploy on a public that frequently looks up to the international community, especially the European Community and the World Bank, for leadership and direction in many significant respects.

In the same vein, the opinion of a highly placed international personality, in person of the British High Commissioner to Nigeria, in Text 6 corroborates the position of the public official in Text 5. The British High Commissioner's endorsement of the Nigerian government's position suggests that the advanced economies of the world sympathize with the Nigerian government. It is in this context that Mr Gozney's definition of democracy as building of consensus and his declaration that the British people care about the success of reaching and building consensus in Nigeria could be positively interpreted as a support for 'appropriate pricing'. The financial jargon rescheduling is used synonymously with the government's use of reforms. His use of building consensus is ambiguous in that it could refer to consensus building between the Nigerian government and its people, on the one hand; or consensus between Nigeria as a debtor nation, the creditors (Western democracies) and the Breton Woods institutions, on the other hand. On the one hand, Mr Gozney's declaration that no country with heavy foreign debt asking for debt forgiveness can fail to embrace the IMF directive is the voice of Nigeria's foreign creditors. From another perspective, it is a political alignment of his country with the Nigerian government's position and a rejection of arguments against the removal of petroleum subsidy.

We have observed that the bureaucrats/politicians and IMF/World Bank officials see deregulation or removal of petroleum subsidy as one of the measures to be taken for the resolution of the country's economic problems. The analyses done in this section demonstrate the use of several discourse features in the presentations that support the position of the government on this contentious issue. The perspectives identified include the use of direct persuasion, logical arguments, historical and religious allusion, scientific and economic evidence, positive prediction, political alignment and international public opinion.

According to Nkuhlu (2003: 29), African leaders' concerns are anchored on the determination to extricate Africans and the continent from the malaise of underdevelopment and exclusion

in a globalising world. From this background, it is not surprising that their rhetoric of development cannot but tally with the globalising world of free market, deregulation and foreign direct investment. Thus the Nigerian government and its agents seem to have concluded that Nigeria's oil-based economy is in dire straits for its non-compliance with global trends in line with the prescriptions of International Financial Institutions (e.g. the IMF and the World Bank).

However, as noted by Randriamaro (2003: 40), those opposed to the reforms think that the economic model being adopted dispossesses and impoverishes the majority of ordinary Nigerians. This second classification of discourse participants appears to employ much more compelling and uninhibited modes in the presentation of their perspectives. Some of these are presented in the following section.

## 4.2 The Case against 'Appropriate Pricing' of Petroleum Products

In our examination of the discourse of 'appropriate pricing' of petroleum products in Nigeria, we see a systematic construction of categories aligned to ideological orientations or perspectives such as patriotism, nationalism and welfarism. The participants are mainly members of the public with access to the mass media, which include opposition politicians, labour union leaders, opinion leaders, newspaper columnists and professionals in various fields. We were able to see from the data a systematic stringing of language and emotion, and a circulation of beliefs and perspectives which come out mainly from relating the micro-structures of the discourse to a macro-level world-view, which include culture and history. Data analysis is undertaken in this section under three sub-headings: emotive use of language, metaphors of resistance, and Marxist-Socialist Rhetoric.

### 4.2.1 Emotive Use of Language

The anger and resentment of the public is palpable in the use of direct verbal attack and insinuations by opposition politicians and opinion leaders about the motive of the government. Emotive use of language in the discourse, among others, takes the form of lexical choices, direct verbal attacks and insinuations. Each is discussed presently. Lexis is often used as missiles by the underdog, or the representatives of people who feel oppressed, to portray the ruling class negatively as being insensitive to their plight and unconcerned about their welfare. Some of the underlined words and collocates in Texts 7 and 8 below are replete with examples of emotive use of words by participants who are unfavourably disposed to the removal of petroleum subsidy by the government:

#### Text 7

In the midst of grinding poverty, the Government had the state of mind to allow further increases in the prices of petroleum products. These increases, which have become the pastime of the Obasanjo Administration, led again to the rise in the costs of essential services and daily maintenance for impoverished Nigerians.

Chijioke Nwankwo (*Daily Independent* on Tuesday, November 9, 2004)

#### Text 8

[...] inhuman [...] part of the economic agenda of this administration led by President Olusegun Obasanjo is to further impoverish Nigerians. As long as this imperialist-imposed regime remains in power, it will continue to perpetrate the dictates of the IMF, World Bank, Paris Club and other Breton Woods institutions.

Coalition of Oodua Self-Determination Groups (COSEG) (*The Comet* on Monday, October 11, 2004)

#### Text 9

[...] the production line will get slower and the people will get poorer.

Lagos State governor, Bola Tinubu (*The Comet* on Monday, October 11, 2004)

## Text 10

The rising price of crude oil exported by Nigeria is a blessing. Nigerians are getting poorer despite the inflow of more foreign exchange. A responsible government will find a way of protecting the poorest from getting worse off.

National Council of Muslim Youth (NACOMYO) (*The Comet* on Monday, October 11, 2004)

## Text 11

When government abandons the task of subsidising its people, such a government has no business being in office [...] Even during the colonial era, the government subsidised the people.

Senator Afikuyomi (*The Comet* on Thursday, November 11, 2004)

## Text 12

Prices of crude oil are at all-time high. The sensible thing to do is to take from that earning to cushion the effects of price increase, call it subsidy if you must. But the way our leaders talk about the money for this cushioning, you will think that they are talking about the use of their personal money.

Mr Obienyen, a lawyer based in Abuja, Nigeria (*The Comet* on Monday, October 18, 2004)

## Text 13

The Federal Government unfolded measures, which it claimed were targeted at providing relief from the excruciating sufferings and an unimaginable burden foisted on the citizenry by the recent hike in fuel price.

Felix Ofou (*Daily Independent* on Tuesday, November 2, 2004)

Perhaps the most predominant lexical feature in this discourse is poverty and its lexical and semantic relations can be exemplified by the following items and collocations:

impoverished Nigerians (Text 7)	the poorest (Text 10)
get(ting) poorer (Text 9 and 10)	getting worse off (Text 10)
excruciating suffering (Text 13)	unimaginable burden (Text 13)
grinding poverty (Text 7)	impoverish Nigerians (Text 8)

These words and collocations are used significantly to draw attention to the likelihood of the public becoming the victims and not the beneficiaries of the government's reforms in the end. It is pertinent to observe in this analysis that during electioneering campaigns in Nigeria, a popular strategy often employed by politicians is the promise to the electorate that it would enjoy great abundance and comfort once the campaigning party is elected. The frequency of critical words and collocates is a direct reference to the failure of the government to deliver on its promise to the people.

While the use of the lexical collocations such as imperialist imposed regime (Text 10) insinuates that the government is a puppet of Western powers, expressions such as the dictates of the IMF, [...] other Breton Woods institution (Text 8) and the sentence underlined in Text 10, can be described as direct attacks against the Nigerian government and the international institutions backing it. The expression such a government has no business being in office (Text 11) by an opposition party member is an insinuation that the government should resign. This critic develops this thesis further by historically alluding to a vague and unsubstantiated view that the colonial government subsidized the people. The author of Text 12 insinuates that Nigerian leaders are not only incompetent and out of touch with reality, but are selfish and stingy. The ultimate purpose of such emotive use of language is to make the Nigerian government reverse its decision to remove petroleum subsidy or render itself unpopular with the electorate.



#### 4.2.2 Metaphors of Resistance

Metaphors feature in various forms in Nigerian political discourse such as name calling, dysphemism, euphemism, sarcasm, extended metaphor and so on.

Text 14

Perhaps the mother of all deceits is the area of petroleum price increase.

Uba Maximus, Columnist (*Daily Independent* on Tuesday, November 2, 2004)

Text 15

The last fuel price increase was indeed satanic.

Barrister Otunba Kunle Kalejaye (*The Comet* on Monday, October 18, 2004)

Text 16

Any reform must have a human face. The reforms are meant to help the citizens of this country. We must be alive, to enjoy the benefits of the reforms.

Chief Ugbane, a banker (*The Comet* on Wednesday, November 10, 2004)

Text 17

Government is dancing to the music being played by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and IMF policy is a pill which no patient has swallowed and survived.

Sylvester Ejiofor, a labour leader (*The Comet* on Saturday, October 9, 2004)

The metaphoric expression, mother of all deceits in Text 14 is clearly a dysphemistic portrayal of government action in superlative terms. The use of this phrase is apparently influenced by the expression 'mother of all wars' attributed to Saddam Hussein during the US-led military intervention against Iraq for the restoration of the sovereignty of Kuwait in 1991. The Nigerian government action has also been referred to as satanic in Text 15 and a reform without a human face in Text 16.

The use of sarcasm can be exemplified with the occurrence of pastime (Text 7) and first love (Text 21). While pastime is used to criticize the offhand manner the Nigerian government treats its public, first love is used to criticize the IMF as a partisan organisation. Text 17 contains two extended metaphors of a government dancing like a show monkey under the bidding the IMF, on the one hand, and as a hospital patient gulping down a death pill, on the other. Very much like Texts 14–16, these usages exhibit some evidence of dysphemism, which achieves the effect of ridiculing the action of the government in the public eye. The metaphors described above express the anger, disappointment or general disapproval of the Nigerian public at the withdrawal of petroleum subsidy.

Text 18

Nigeria is the only country in the world where the resultant high cost of fuel price has not been subsidized [...] that was not the case in the United States and Britain.

The Editorial (*The Comet* on Monday, October 18, 2004)

## Text 19

The administration's deregulation policy is a clear case of failed policy marketing. It would not have taken much to sell the policy to Nigerians over a short period of time, rather than ram it down their throat with the attitude that they know it all.

Nigerians have seen how even Mr President of late sits on his throne with his starched agbada [dress] spread his arms akin to the picture book depiction of God, saying, come onto me my children.

Alphonsus Owelli (*Daily Independent* on Tuesday, November 9, 2004)

## Text 20

Why, despite the huge sums of money coming into the coffers of the government, it still found it difficult to spend N350 million daily to cushion the hardship faced by Nigerians. Nigerians don't believe their leaders anymore. There is no sincerity on the part of government with the current reform programmes. Ghana is not producing oil, yet they have not increased price. And here the government is keeping the excess funds from oil sales in an account. Would a father have money in the bank while the children starve?

Joe Igbokwe (*Daily Independent* on Tuesday November 9, 2004)

## Text 21

The President seems to value the endorsement of his foreign benefactors as more important than the voice of his own people, hence his cosy relationship with the IMF and the World Bank, even as they pushed for policies that could only impoverish the people. Obasanjo must learn to accept the conclusion of his erstwhile Malaysian counterpart, Mahathir Mohammed, which is that the first love of the IMF and the World Bank and of our Western benefactors is profit for Western conglomerates, not our welfare.

Mohammed Haruna (*The Comet* on Wednesday, October 13, 2004)

The declaration, Nigeria is the only country in the world in Text 18 is an unsubstantiated exaggeration that expresses the emotion of the writer. This kind of expression is commonly found in the speeches and writings of left-wing political activists in Nigeria. They tend to employ sensational expressions which often contain unsubstantiated claims in order to win over the public to their point of view. In personal attacks against the person of the president, Text 19 paints the picture of a power drunk king while Text 20 portrays him as a foolish father who has money in the bank while the children starve. In Text 21, he is described as maintaining close ties (cosy relationship) with the enemies of his people. His foreign benefactor (Text 21) is a double swipe at both the president and the IMF as direct beneficiaries of the reforms and not the Nigerian public. The choice of dysphemism and abusive metaphors by members of the public opposed to the removal of subsidy show the depth of the people's anger and their feeling of being oppressed, on the one hand, and the profundity of their helplessness in making the government see things their way, on the other hand.

### 4.2.3 Marxist-Socialist Rhetoric

Marxist-Socialists are renowned for fighting the cause of the downtrodden members of the community, frequently referred to as 'the masses'. Their modes of resistance often include the use of Marxist-Socialist jargon and opposition rhetoric. Such strategies are visible in Texts 22 – 24 below:

## Text 22

The tragedy today is that the Nigerian authority has fully surrendered to IMF and World Bank. We must halt the policy framework that hurts the masses even more than the elite. Something is wrong with price policy formulation in this country. Unemployment can only increase if there is anti-people policy. No leader can change the society by alienating the citizen. We want to ask whether the reforms of the Federal Government is to send Nigerians to the graveyard. It remains

a paradox that we cannot enjoy the natural resources that has been given to us. This paradox must be resolved and it must be resolved to the benefit of Nigerians.

Mr Adams Oshiomole, President, Nigeria Labour Congress (*The Comet* on Saturday, October 9, 2004)

Text 23

The increase in the price of fuel is anti-people, oppressive and totally uncalled for.

Afenifere, a socio-political association (*The Comet* on Monday, October 11, 2004)

Text 24

Government has a responsibility to satisfy the citizens in preference to capitalist suckers. The Government should fashion out living reform instead of the present killing reform.

The Secretary General of the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (*The Comet* on Saturday, October 9, 2004)

Text 22 is an example of a speech by the Marxist-Socialist labour leader. It opens with the metaphor of a government that fully surrendered its authority to the IMF and adopts a policy that hurts the masses. This biting remark is closely followed by three declarative sentences conveying three terse declarations of where the government went wrong. The speech reaches a peak with a rhetorical question: does the government want to send Nigerians to the graveyard? The labour leader's use of expressions that exhibit his Marxist-Socialist leaning can be exemplified with expressions such as hurt the masses, unemployment, and anti-people policy. The text ends with an expression of the writer's frustration with the paradox of suffering in the midst plenty that plagues contemporary Nigeria. The lexical item is repeated in the text and so is resolved in the paratactic construction: This paradox must be resolved and it must be resolved to the benefit of Nigerians. Text 22 is a dramatic articulation of the displeasure of the ordinary people by one of their foremost champions against a government that strives to be seen to be pursuing the well being of the people.

Text 23 summarises the opinion of a socio-political association with tremendous influence in a section of the country. The view of this group is captured by two lexical items: anti-people and oppressive, which are echoes of Marxist-Socialism. The use of the expression capitalist suckers in Text 23 by a labour leader to refer to members of Nigeria's ruling elite is another pointer to Marxist-Socialist ideology. The play on words, living reform and killing reform in Text 24 achieves the effect of presenting the government as enemies of the people. In presenting their perspectives, Marxist-Socialists politicians and activists often use rhetorical devices which include high sounding anti establishment diction, repetitive phrases and structural parallelisms to present the government as insensitive and anti-people.

## 5 Conclusion

We observed that the responses to the discourse of reforms in the Nigerian economy, particularly the petroleum sector, fall within two major contending ideological frameworks – capitalism or neoliberalism. While the first espouses 'free market', the second expresses concern for the well being of the common man/woman. In other words, these representations reflect the political orientations of the different speakers in the data (political right, left and the conservative). The analysis also reveals that in spite of the waning influence of Marxist socialist ideologies in global political discourse, their perspectives are still being employed as tools by the opposition in Nigeria's young democracy to resist unfavorable government policies.

We have been able to demonstrate the extent to which dominant groups in today's world use discourse to control or oppress the majority, on the one hand, and how dissidents and members of the dominated group equally rely on it to resist domination and oppression, on the other hand. Consequently, the tools of critical discourse analysis have been found invaluable for accurate interpretation of the meanings and the elicitation of the ideologies underlying

such texts. Critical discourse analysts are aware of the contribution of scholarly insights to the progress and transformation of society.

The analyses demonstrate how the representatives of the capitalist West and the Nigerian government attempt to use discourse to persuade the Nigerian public to accept a potentially unpopular economic policy. The Nigerian public, on the other hand, use their access to the media to fight this trend through robust and firm rejection of the policy on the grounds that it is potentially harmful to the well being of the general public. The participants from the government's side use direct persuasion, logical arguments, historical and religious allusion, scientific and economic evidence, positive prediction, political alignment and international public opinion to make its planned increase in the price of petroleum products acceptable to the public. Opposition activists counter this move with direct verbal attacks, negative metaphors, exaggerations, hurtful remarks and insinuations. The analyses further demonstrate the extent to which opposition activists and media practitioners employ lexical and grammatical resources to portray the Nigerian ruling class as insensitive and uncaring.

We would like to mention that although the data is not a coherent entity, it is a collection of several individuals' use of discourse strategies to promote their political goals and perspectives. One important advantage of working with public discourse is that it is possible to talk about what people said and explain what would seem like irrational or contradictory responses to economic and other socio-political problems in the mass media. The Nigerian public may be aware of the need for appropriate pricing but their historic mistrust of government, arising from a poor record of financial accountability, has been observed to be a major source of the general resistance to the removal of subsidy on petroleum products in the country.

The different angles of telling observed in the analyses result from different underlying issues of identity and power in the discourse. This validates van Dijk (2006: 379) position about media-political discourse as one that is replete with manipulative strategies which include "emphasizing one's own power and moral superiority, discrediting one's opponents, polarisation between Us and Them, negative Other-presentation, ideological alignment, and emotional appeals" (van Dijk 2006: 379).

Finally, we subscribe to Randriamaro's (2003: 40) observation that concerns are voiced over economic reforms in Africa because of what is perceived as the marketization of governance by which the state is rolled back and recognized in the form of deregulation from public interest to deregulation in terms of private interests. Thus the opposing discourses cannot but see the Nigerian state as being reorganized to serve the interests of the ruling elites and the 'moneyed' class while the ordinary citizens are systematically sidelined and impoverished.

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