Politics and Promises: A Multimodal Social Semiotic Interpretation of Political Party Emblems and Slogans as Discourse of Hope in a Democratic Nigeria

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Abstract

Working within the framework of multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) and critical metaphor analysis (CMA), this study examines the emblems and slogans of the four main political parties in Nigeria: the People’s Democratic Party (PDP); the All Progressives Congress (APC); the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA); and the Labour Party (LP), which have become instruments of campaign and propaganda. While the emblems/logos are visual (iconic) representations of party ideology, the slogans are verbal rhetorical affirmations of what the emblems represent. Based on insights from the theory of multimodality, this study is an attempt to use a social semiotic approach in the interpretation of visual communication. Multimodality understands visual as representation and communication. The Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) approach which this study adopts tries to interpret how the multiple modes in multimodal communication yield themselves to different levels of meaning realization.

Keywords: Party emblems and slogans, Nigeria, politics, social semiotic, multimodal discourse analysis

Introduction

Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999 after several years of military rule. Democracy opened up the political space for citizens to participate in debates and actions that are intended to bring about social change in the society. This participation was best realized through the formation of political parties of diverse ideological persuasions. Currently the country has twenty-four registered political parties that participated in the 2015 general elections. The parties made appeals to the sentiments of the electorate by making promises to improve on the living standards of people. The party manifesto is one medium through which political parties make their policies and programmes known to the public. However, beyond the instrumentality of the manifesto, which the average electorate may not have access to or may find difficult to comprehend, the party emblem (logo) and its slogan are also veritable rhetorical strategies by which political parties inform, persuade, manipulate, and/or exploit the electorate. Parties adopt the type of logo and slogan that create the impression of its alignment with the suffering majority of the country or frame them as nationalistic and democratic in orientation.

Politicians use verbal, written and pictorial modes as rhetorical strategies of persuasion but the verbal mode has been the dominant form and traces its origins to classical Greece and Rome. Politicians use language to communicate their ideologies and express social power. Sonderling (2009:88) argues that “language is not a simple medium for communication but is a powerful and complex social communication system that requires better understanding”. Politicians and their parties acknowledge the crucial importance of language in political discourse and the art of persuasion by exploiting its magical powers and resources. De Wet (2010) observes that “politicians rise to power mainly because they can talk persuasively to voters and political elites... politicians are endlessly geared to persuading voters to their own or party’s point of view” (p. 103). The language of politics is essentially aimed at persuading the audience/addressee to accept the perspective of the speaker. Beard (2000) therefore contends that it is important to study the language of politics because it enables us to “understand how language is used by those who wish to gain power, those who wish to exercise power and those who wish to keep power” (p. 2).
The modern politician has also realized that the rhetorical force of the verbal medium can be aided and enhanced by other semiotic regimes such as icons, colours, shapes and text compositionality. Politicians and parties therefore adopt the type of emblem (or logo) and slogan that can arrest the attention of the audience easily as discourses of hope in the political system. The emblems and slogans are usually persuasive in orientation and encapsulate the central ideology of the parties. In the Nigerian context, the emblems communicate the understanding and ideology that party democracy is evolving in the country. This study therefore explores the rhetorical use of these items (emblems and slogans) by political parties in Nigeria and their attempt to make party sympathizers cling to or buy into the ideology that underlies them as articles of hope in democratic participation.

**Historical Context of Nigeria’s Political Democracy**

Nigeria has had four attempts at democracy since independence in 1960. Political democracy in the first republic – 1960-1966 was organized along sectional or ethno-religious lines. Political parties made no pretenses regarding their supreme allegiance to regional and religious interests. The three dominant political parties in the first republic represented the interests of the three major ethnic groups that held sway in the three (later four) regions in the country. The Northern People’s Congress (NPC) in the Northern region represented the interests of the mainly Hausa/Fulani group; The National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) in the Eastern region represented that of the dominant Igbo ethnic group; while the Action Group (AG) in the Western region catered for the interests of the Yoruba. The creation of the Mid-Western region in 1964 was politically motivated. It was undertaken to cater for the interests of the minority ethnic groups said to be under the hegemonic dominance of the Yoruba. Surprisingly, such gesture was not extended to the minority groups in the Northern and Eastern regions. In the true sense of the word, none of the political parties was national in orientation. They made it clear that regional interests supersede that of national. The massive corruption, inter-group conflicts, mismanagement of the economy and electoral violence that characterized the period necessitated the January 15 1966 military intervention.

The socio-political activities of the second republic – 1979-1983 were not significantly different from those of the first republic. The three major political parties that emerged became mere incarnations of the political structures of the first republic. The National Party of Nigeria (NPN) was an incarnate of the defunct NPC; the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) was a reincarnation of the defunct NCNC; while the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) was a rebranded AG of the old western region. The military cited corruption, misplacement and mismanagement of development initiatives, large scale political violence as reasons for the December 30 1983 coup. The third republic was the shortest. The transition programme that started in 1991 became comatose in 1992 with the annulment of the June 12 presidential election by the military. The interim civilian-military government that was put in place by the military was finally overthrown by the same military in 1993.

The fourth republic started in 1999 and has continued until now. It has had five successful general elections since commencement – a feat unprecedented in Nigeria’s political history. The system broadened the space for robust political participation and social engagement through the formation of political parties and associations. The wish to gain power, retain power or exercise power led to the alignment and re-alignment of forces by politicians and political parties. Since 1999, some political parties have maintained their identity and ideology; some have completely disappeared; some have merged with others; while new ones have been formed. These are indices of a vibrant political culture and participation in Nigeria.

Consequently, this study examines the emblems and slogans of the four major political parties in Nigeria as signifiers of political participation and development in the country; hence the focus is specifically on the four as they are the only parties that have representatives at state and national levels. The governorship seats also rotate among them, depending on the political climate of the time. Parties like the Accord Party (A) and the Democratic People’s Party (DPP) have a number of seats at the federal level (Senate & House of Representatives) but have no state governors or majority control of any state house of assembly.

A close study of party emblems and slogans reveal they are ideologically mediated and gear towards positive Self presentation in public estimation. The aim of each party is to present Self and its major actors in a populist frame that is all inclusive in orientation. The struggle by political actors to communicate with citizens has become so fierce in modern democracies that politicians and other elites of established political institutions adopt diverse persuasive strategies to communicate their ideologies to the people. This is, of course, as a result of the mistrust the citizens have in politicians. As Brants and
Voltmer (2011) put it in their Political Communication in Postmodern Democracies, “Never before have politicians put as much effort, resources and sophistication with communicating with citizens as today. But this seems to only further fuel public mistrust in the authority and honesty of political leaders” (p.1). Party emblems and slogans are semiotic resources through which the political class communicates its ideologies and constructs the doctrine of oneness and commonality with the citizens. They (in the Nigerian context) also signify the presence of a political culture that is emergent or nascent in orientation after several years of military rule/misrule. The sixteen years (1999-2015) of uninterrupted democratic practice in Nigeria is a sign of a modern democratic culture that is gradually coming into being in the country.

Relevant Literature and Theoretical Approach

Roland Barthes studies on multimodal semiotic analysis in the 1960s obviously inspired further enquiries into that domain of knowledge in the later part of the century. Towards the end of the 20th century linguists like Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2006), O’Toole (1994, 2010) among others commenced serious academic enquiries into the social communicative functions of multimodal resources such as language, image, music, gesture and architecture which integrate across sensory modalities such as visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory and kinesthetic. The mid 2000s witnessed expanded researches into multimodal discourse analysis (MDA). This also gave vent to the emergence of diverse theoretical approaches in the study of multimodal resources.


This study is based on Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) theoretical approach to multimodal discourse which draws heavily from the systemic functional linguistic orientation of Halliday. Studies in multimodal social semiotics were inspired by Halliday’s (1975) view of language as a social semiotic. He argues that social and cultural contexts are important in the construction and interpretation of social meaning because language as a system of social interaction is a veritable resource in the creation and interpretation of our social and cultural experiences. Social semiotics studies how semiotic resources such as speech, writing, pictures, colours, artefacts, and actions can communicate social meaning. Van Leeuwen (2005) notes that these semiotic modes need to be studied in social context because “Almost everything we do or make can be done in different ways and therefore allows, at least, in principle, the articulation of different social and cultural meanings” (p. 4). It is therefore the social and cultural contexts where language is used and how it is used in those situations that determine its meaning. The term language as used here means any form of social communication such as verbal, textual or graphic modes.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) adopted the three metafunctions of Halliday (1975) as a framework for semiotic theory of communication. The ideational metafunction enables a semiotic mode to represent aspects of the world as it is experienced by humans. A semiotic mode has to be able to represent objects and their relations in a world outside the representational system. The patterns of representation are ideational. Generally, representations enable us to encode our experiences visually. In the interpersonal metafunction, the semiotic mode has to be able to project the relations between the producer of a (complex) sign, and the receiver of that sign. A semiotic mode therefore has to be able to represent a particular social relation between the producer, the viewer, and the object represented. For instance, the visual space, distance or position between an object and its viewer communicates the form of interpersonal relations between them. The textual metafunction denotes that semiotic modes must possess the capacity to form texts, complexes of signs which cohere both internally with each other and externally with the context in and for which they were produced. Perspectives from the dimension of textual metafunction show that different compositional arrangements permit the realization of different textual meanings. It therefore means that the arrangement or placement of image and text affects meaning realization or interpretation. This realization or interpretation is politically and ideologically motivated (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).
Visual structures, according to Kress and Leeuwen (2006), like linguistic structures, point to particular interpretations of experience and forms of social interaction (p. 2). Thus, words and images interact in the construction and interpretation of social experiences. To van Leeuwen (2008), “words provide the facts, the explanations, the things that ‘need to be said in so many words’; images provide interpretations, ideologically colored angles, and they do so not explicitly, but by suggestion, by connotation, by appealing to barely conscious, half-forgotten knowledge” (p. 136). An emblem or logo and the slogan of a political party are semiotic resources that explicitly communicate positive evaluations about it and implicitly evaluate the opposition negatively. Van Leeuwen (2008, p. 142) contends that social actors and their actions can be visually represented and the “language of images” enables the producer to depict entities from a particular angle and also enables the viewer to make explicit that which is concealed in the images. According to him, “If images seem to just show ‘what is’, we need to show that they may not always be quite so. If images seem to just allude to things and never ‘say them explicitly’, we need to make these allusions explicit” (van Leeuwen, 2008 p. 137). The meanings and ideologies that are encoded in political party emblems or logos are connotative or associative and derive from the values and ideas that popular culture associates with their source domain or place of origin.


The conceptual metaphor theory of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) (see also Kovecses, 2010), contends that metaphorical insights can be used in the study and interpretation of visual semiotics because social actors, their actions and other social experiences can be framed metaphorically. Insights from critical metaphor analysis (CMA), developed by Charteris-Black (2004, 2005), brings together perspectives from critical discourse analysis, corpus analysis, pragmatics and cognitive semantics. These approaches can be adopted in the interpretation of the ideology that underlies a visual representation or image. The crucial importance of the CMA approach is that it enables the analyst to establish the ideological and rhetorical motivations that underlie the use of language (verbal and visual) in social contexts and contexts of culture. As Charteris-Black (2004, p. 42) states, “metaphor analysis can be employed to explore ideology.” Semiotic forms are carriers of ideology and the analyst also approaches them from ideological standpoint. Eggins (2004 p.10) observes that to use language at all is to use it ideologically. According to her, “…our use of language will also be influenced by our ideological positions: the values we hold (consciously or unconsciously), the perspective acquired through our particular path through culture”. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006 p 14) validate this when they argue that “…we see images of whatever kind as entirely within the realm of the realization and instantiations of ideology, as means – always – for the articulation of ideological positions”. Insights from CMA will enable us unearth the ideologies that underlie the conceptualization of political party emblems as representations of social actions, experiences and attitude.

**Research Data and Analytical Framework**

The aim of this paper is to interpret the emblems and slogans of the four political parties, PDP, APC, APGA and LP along the following paradigm: (1) image (2) colour (3) shape (4) text. The paper also endeavours to make explicit how these features enable the parties to communicate their ideologies to the citizens. The process will examine the emblems and slogans as signifiers of an emergent and participatory democracy in Nigeria. More importantly, drawing from the history of the parties and party politics in Nigeria in general, it will be demonstrated that the appropriation of the visual languages by the parties is intended to communicate, mislead, deceive, manipulate, and/or persuade the Nigerian populace to buy into their ideologies.
Discussion

The People’s Democratic Party (PDP)

The People’s Democratic Party (PDP), which has been in existence since 1998, has an umbrella as its logo and “Power to the people!” as its slogan. Its followers carry umbrellas designed in the party colours of green, white and red, to campaign grounds and rallies as an affirmation of its people’s oriented ideology. It dominated the political landscape of Nigeria as a ruling party until it lost the March 28 2015 presidential and national assembly elections to the opposition - APC.

The People’s Democratic Party image

The umbrella as a semiotic resource has multiple social, cultural and ideological meanings. Socially and culturally, an umbrella is a shield against natural elements like rain and sun. It protects its carrier from the vagaries of bad weather and provides them with warmth. Thus, the primary and universal function of an umbrella is to provide a cover from the elements and warmth for its carrier. Its metaphorical potential is recognized and tapped even in traditional societies and is explicitly expressed in their rhetoric. In the Igbo society of southern Nigeria, for example, great personalities and political figures bear the title “ochendo” (umbrella) which signifies and designates them as protectors and defenders of the people. The adoption and exploitation of the metaphorical potential of the umbrella by the PDP is politically and ideologically motivated.

The party, by adopting the umbrella as its emblem/logo, seeks Nigerians to perceive it as a party that has the potential or capacity to protect and shield them from harsh elements of the weather. The harsh elements being metaphorically conceptualized are the social, economic and political upheavals that have plagued the country since independence such as poverty, corruption, unemployment, underdevelopment, violence, lack of freedom and so on. Ideationally, these social problems represent the true life experiences of postcolonial Nigeria. The image also bears the ideological undertone that previous and other political parties and regimes were and are still incapable of protecting Nigerians from these social problems. The party therefore presents itself as the only political party that can protect Nigerians from all the upheavals associated with under-development and undemocratic practices. This explains why Kress and van Leeuwen (2006:2) argue that “Like linguistic structures, visual structures point to particular interpretation of experience and forms of social interaction.” The image implicitly encodes and frames the social and historical experiences of the Nigerian people and constructs a tenor relation that is friendly, accommodating and inclusive.

Besides the protection of its carrier from bad weather, the umbrella also is a “container”. The container metaphor of the umbrella exudes interpersonal functions. The umbrella frames the PDP as a political structure that can accommodate people of all gender, social, religious, political and ethnic backgrounds. It shows that its political space is wide enough to accommodate all Nigerians in spite of their different religious and ideological persuasions. This explains why the party boasts of being the biggest political party in Africa, which supports its rhetoric that “the umbrella is large enough to accommodate all Nigerians.” The image also serves the interpersonal function of inviting all Nigerians to come under the umbrella for protection and accommodation. This is what makes it a party of the people and being
a party of the people also signifies that power and sovereignty reside with the people. Politically, the image of the umbrella is used by the PDP to visually communicate a social meaning and ideology that is inclusive and protective in orientation.

The image also encapsulates an interaction between text and colour in the process of creating social meaning. The colour and visual shape of the image is used by the party to communicate social meaning that is ideological. Before we discuss the communicative significance of the colour combinations and their ideational meanings, let us first examine the significantly symbolical representation of “three” as a carrier of meanings in the composition of the image. The acronym PDP is a three letter word; the three interactive parts of the umbrella’s wing are also composed in three distinct colours of green, white and red - the letter P rests on the green colour of the wing, D on the white, and the next P on the red colour. The figure three occupies a significant space in the configuration of Nigeria’s political and religious experiences.

First, the country is historically and politically understood as consisting of three major ethnic groups – Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Politically, it is also perceived in terms of the old regional structures of north, dominated and controlled by the Hausa/Fulani; east, dominated by the Igbo ethnic group; and the west, dominated by the Yoruba. The present restructuring of the polity into six geopolitical zones (for political convenience and to allay the fears of minority ethnic groups in the country) has not changed traditional perceptions and political patterns that defined the old regional arrangements.

Second, the Nigerian constitution recognizes three main religions – Christianity, Islam and the African Traditional Religion, even though the country is a secular state. Religion, more than any other factor, defines the political structure and voting pattern in Nigeria’s democracy. Thus, the three interactive parts of the umbrella’s wing; the three letters of the party acronym; and the three different colours of the umbrella’s wing, frame the three old regional blocks in Nigeria’s political equation; the three main ethnic groups; and the three main religions in the country. Ideologically, it means that every Nigeria must come from any of the old regional blocks and may belong to any of the three main religions.

Again, the three parts of the umbrella converge near its tip as a symbolic point of interaction and unity among the different and divergent entities that make up the Nigerian nation. This visual rhetoric reinforces the contention of the political elite that the PDP is a party of all Nigerians in spite of their diverse ethnic, cultural, social and religious backgrounds.

The image’s colours of green, white and red intertextually connects with Nigeria’s national flag of green, white and green. The green colour stands for growth, harmony, fertility, freshness and healing. It is also associated with stability and endurance. Metaphorically, the green colour communicates the message that the PDP will bring about stable and enduring democracy in Nigeria after so many years of military interregnum; heal political and socioeconomic wounds; bring economic growth and socio-political harmony in the Nigerian society. The white colour stands for light, goodness and peace. The colour can be metaphorically conceptualized as a sign that the party will bring peace, social and political wellness to the society. It also frames the party as constituting of people who are committed to bringing enduring peace and good governance to Nigeria. The red colour frames the energy, strength, power and courage with which the party hopes to drive the desired social change and transformation in the country. The party colours which borrow significantly from Nigeria’s national colours are ideologically directed at presenting the party as sharing in the vision of the Nigerian nation. It is intended to give the party a national and nationalistic frame, and present it more positively than other rival parties. The black colour on the stem of the umbrella conceptualizes its beauty and also frames it as party for the black race.

All Progressives Congress (APC)

The All Progressives Congress (APC) came into existence in 2014 as a mega opposition to the ruling PDP. It is a marriage of major opposition parties like All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), Action Alliance of Nigeria (AGN), Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), and a faction of All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA).
A broom tightly held by a faceless and bodiless masculine arm and fist is its logo, while its slogan is “Change!” Its followers claim they want to effect positive changes in the system by sweeping out the ruling party (PDP). APC is the first opposition party in Nigeria to defeat a ruling party in presidential and national assembly elections. Culturally, the broom is a common household item in most traditional African homes and societies. A broom can only be found where dirt exists. Thus, the existence of a broom presupposes the presence of filth and dirt in the immediate environment and the need for a clean up. The APC by adopting a broom as its emblem activates the knowledge frame of its followers that the Nigerian political space is dirty and needs to be cleaned up. Implicitly, it frames the ruling PDP as contributing to the pollution in the country. Metaphorically, the dirt or filth being presented by the party include vices or negative practices such as corruption, insecurity, leadership failure, unemployment, mismanagement of social and economic resources, and so on. The party, through the symbol of the broom, invites its followers and other Nigerians to embrace change by sweeping the PDP out of office at every level of governance. Again, the ideology of “change” which forms the fulcrum of its campaign presupposes that the “present” order or regime is bad, outdated, or out of tune with contemporary realities, hence the need for change. The campaign for change is an explicit acknowledgement that the present situation is disorderly or out of tune with the desired social order.

The logo also has a gender dimension in its conceptualization and presentation of social meaning. Traditionally, it is the priority of women and children to sweep and keep the house and environment clean. Adult men are assigned more taxing and demanding roles like farming, climbing palm trees, felling trees, providing security, and so on. However, the broom in the APC logo which is tightly held by a masculine arm and fist upsets traditional gender roles and ideologies in the Nigerian society. It frames men as sweepers or cleaners. Closely examined however, one can perceive the ideology behind its composition. Culturally and traditionally, when women hold a broom and are ready to sweep they point its tip downwards, signifying readiness to commence the act of sweeping. This is not the case of the APC broom being held by a man – the broom points upwards. By holding it upwards, the holder is signifying a great number of things – an indication that the dirt is monumental in size and sweeping must start from the top; the large size of the dirt demands a hard masculine (not the soft and gentle feminine) effort to clean up or eradicate; the metaphorical strength and solidarity associated with the unity of individual broom sticks in the formation of a bunch. Thus, besides framing Nigeria as dirty and unclean, the party also celebrates the unity and resolve of individual opposition parties who had to shed their individual identities to form a formidable opposition against the ruling party.

The shape and colours of the image are means of communicating social meaning visually. The image has four colours arranged in the shape of a rectangle. Three colours – green, white and blue stand vertically on the red colour which lies horizontally. The icon of the broom is located on the white colour background at the centre thereby constructing an interaction between image and colour. The acronym APC, written in white, rests on the red colour. Visually, the acronym APC appears like a giant carrying the green, white and blue structures, while the red colour forms its base or foundation. The position of the red colour is also symbolic. Red is a colour of power, strength and courage. This frames the party as a powerful and courageous political organization that is determined to bring a positive change in a filthy social and political system.
Most Nigerians can easily associate the party’s green and white colours with the colours of the nation’s flag. Thus, the APC, like the PDP, wants Nigerians to perceive it as a national party or a party through which the nation can realize its dreams of greatness. While the PDP logo has three main colours of green, white and red, the APC has four colours of green, white, blue and red. The difference in the colour composition of both parties is the blue colour in the APC logo. Blue is associated with softness, freshness, loyalty and trust. The fact that both parties exploited identical colours in the virtual communication of their ideologies gives the impression that they have similar vision and ideology for the nation. This is not surprising when it is realized that most of the major actors in the APC were formerly in the PDP. They left PDP owing to some internal disagreements within the party. Thus, it can be inferred from our knowledge of the political history of Nigeria that members of the “New PDP” now in APC may have injected some of the PDP ideologies into the new party (APC). Again, when all are deconstructed, an informed reader may arrive to the conclusion that the APC led government may not provide an alternative direction or effect some reasonably positive social change in the country because of its ideological affinity or similarity with the PDP.

The All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA)

The All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) was formed to contest the 2003 general elections and has been in existence since then. It is said to be an Igbo party because it is dominated by the Igbo in the southeastern part of the country and pursues issues that are in the interest of the Igbo ethnic group.

It has a mature cock as its logo and “Be your brother’s keeper!” as its slogan. Sometimes a member of the party will say “Kokorokoooo” and others will respond “chi efoona!” (It’s dawn) - This is an onomatopoetic imitation of the cock’s crow signaling a new dawn. APGA controls only one state, Anambra in the southeastern Nigeria. The party was formed primarily to give the Igbo a platform for political representation in Nigerian politics and intends to spread to other parts of the country so as to give it a national outlook. The cock which it adopts as its logo is seen as a symbol of pride and emerging light. It announces the beginning of a new dawn and wakes everybody up in the morning. Taken within the Nigerian context, the APGA cock is a wakeup call for the Igbo to wake up from their political slumber. The ethnic group could be said to have been politically asleep since the end of the civil war in 1970. It has consistently complained of being marginalized since the end of the war. Lack of unity and apathy among Igbo political elite are chiefly responsible for the marginal role being assigned to the Igbo by other groups in the Nigerian polity.

The wakeup metaphor presupposes that the Igbo have been asleep politically and need to wake up. Again, the cock announces the rise of the sun and the sun rises from the east – the geographical location of the Igbo. It therefore means that the Igbo should, ordinarily, be the symbol of emerging light on the Nigerian nation. Ironically, this group which is supposed to be the source of light on the nation has been eclipsed by political darkness. The cock metaphorically wakes the Igbo people to their responsibilities. It is also a wakeup call to other groups in Nigeria to arise to the arrival of a new dawn in the country’s politics. The APGA cock is strategically located on the platform – it appears to be emerging
from the direction of the east, looking directly at the west, with the north and south on both sides. This may symbolize the new light emerging from the east and the emergence of a new dawn in Nigeria’s political space.

**The Labour Party (LP)**

The Labour Party (LP), founded in 2002, is said to be a party for the working class and average Nigerians. It is committed to entrenching social democracy in Nigeria through political participation.

![Figure 4: The Labour Party image](image-url)

Its logo is man, wife, and their son, while its slogan is “Forward Ever!” It used to control one state, Ondo, before its governor defected to the PDP. The shape of its logo is rectangular like that of the APC and has three distinctive colours – red, green and white. A thin line indicates the interaction between the red and green colours, while the white colour in a circular shape is superimposed on both. The white circle is actually a wheel that rolls from the right direction to the left – signifying the onward movement of social democracy and the struggle of the working class. Within the wheel or circle are the images of a man (father), woman (wife) and young male adult (son). It is not clear whether they are representatives of the traditional family system of father, mother and child (or children). The image can be interpreted as that of a typical family - the man and the woman occupy the same height within the wheel, standing at almost equal shoulder level or shoulder to shoulder with each other - signifying the perceived oneness and equality of both individuals as major voices in the family, while the young male adult is captured some steps below them. This signifies the subordination of the young adult to the authorities of the man and the woman. The white circle around them signifies the peace, harmony and bond within the family.

They may also be a visual representation of the working class. The man is traditionally the bread winner while the woman is the house keeper and also a worker. The young male adult stands for the youth that constitute a considerable size of the labour force. His subordination signifies the plight of many youths who still roam the streets in search of employment. It also shows that many Nigerian young adults are still unemployed and thus dependent on their parents for survival.

The image of the family can also be viewed from gender perspective. It is not certain why the image-maker chose two males as against one female. The image of father (man), mother (woman), son (boy) and daughter (girl) would have been a more balanced representation of the family. The LP image appears to be a reaffirmation and reincarnation of the old patriarchical order that privileges men over women in most African societies. The image does not reflect gender equality in social and political participation.

The picture also enacts a form of interpersonal relationship between the viewer and the viewed. The man, woman and young adult are looking directly at the viewer at an equal eye level. The space and position from which the image is captured shows a great degree of social equality between the viewer and the viewed. This reflects the ideology of social equality which the Labour Party represents. Again, in the LP logo, picture and text occupy distinct but interactive territories. The slogan “FORWARD EVER” is placed within the colour space below the image and the wheel in a manner that gives the

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visual impression that the words actually necessitate the forward movement of the wheel. The figures within the wheel are “objects” or actors – the intended recipients or beneficiaries of the forward movement of the wheel. They are also the major drivers of the wheel. The capitalization of the words and their lettering in white colour are to foreground their significance in the semiotic world of the design and to give them distinct identity.

**Conclusion**

A multimodal social semiotic interpretation of a semiotic resource that draws essentially from a social theory like critical discourse analysis (CDA) will aim at explaining how visual materials such as image, colour, size/shape, and text represent an ideology or communicate social meaning within the social and cultural contexts of the image-makers and their viewers (or consumers). The image-maker selects semiotic features that best represent the interests of the group. Visual images, like spoken and written discourses, enable viewers to understand the social functions and ideology behind a product, political or religious movement, ethnic or racial group, social services, and so on hence image-makers endeavour not to communicate the wrong idea through misrepresentation. It is also discovered that the image-makers of political party emblems in Nigeria use visual images to communicate the ideology of a better Nigeria through political participation. The emblems constitute a form of political discourse that frames Nigeria as an emergent democracy. The party emblems and slogans also visually communicate the understanding that democracy is gradually getting entrenched in Nigeria after three failed attempts. They communicate a positive evaluation of political democracy and participation in Nigeria and construct a scenario in which social actors rise to power through appeals to the electorate. Thus, each political party selects semiotic resources that communicate a positive representation of Self in the social and cultural contexts of the Nigerian society.
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