

A Review & Analytical Narrative of Propaganda Activities: A Nigerian perspective

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Abstract

The part-one of this two-part paper reviews propaganda literature, tracing the genealogy of propaganda from its Greco-Roman origins to its contemporary meaning, definition and typology. In its treatment of propaganda typology, the paper proposes 'Social/Educational Propaganda' typology as its contribution to propaganda literature.

In part two, the author breaths fresh air into propaganda discourse by assessing the effectiveness and otherwise of propaganda; in doing this, the paper embarks on an analytical narrative of propaganda activities in colonial, post-colonial, through the various military governments to as recent as the immediate past Obasanjo civilian administration (May, 1999 – May, 2007) in Nigeria.

The Paper argues that propaganda derives its essence, meaning and effects from the dreams, aspirations, preferences and prejudices of the people that it is aimed at; warning that, the neglect of this canon of effective propaganda may not only lead to failure but a most probable disaster for any propaganda activity. Thus, the paper concludes that, with all the manipulative maneuvers associated with Nigeria's immediate past president, Olusegun Obasanjo in his bid to push for a constitutional extension of his tenure in office, the double edged sword of effective propaganda turned against him and his propaganda machine for the elongation of his stay in office.

Keywords: Propaganda Review, Genealogy, Analytical Narrative, Propaganda Activities, Nigeria.

Introduction & Review of Relevant Literature

Propaganda as a concept has existed since 'primates' were sufficiently articulate to use it; and its origin was distinctly religious. It has been confirmed (Kotler, 1976:323) that, propaganda in its earliest stage was practiced by princes and religious leaders who saw the task of winning converts as one of manipulating words, feelings and experiences. Indeed, the use of propaganda (Pratkanis & Aronson, 2001:11) goes back to the birth of human civilizations. One historical version of the origin of propaganda informs us that the systematic design of propaganda and counter-propaganda appears to have begun in the Greek city-states about 500BC. It is also argued that a number of parallel developments appeared after 400BC in other civilisations. For example, the International Encyclopedia (1968:580/2) notes that Kautilya, purportedly Chief Minister to the Indian Emperor claimed to have used propaganda as his 'principles of politics' (see Ngoa, 2006).

However, the first documented use of the word 'propaganda' Pratkanis & Aronson (2001:11) declare occurred in 1622, when, the Roman Catholic Pontiff, Pope Gregory XV established the *sacre congregatio de propaganda fide* - i.e. sacred congregation for the propagation of faith during the Protestant Reformation, when the Roman Catholic Church engaged in the use of arms to forcefully re-establish Roman Catholicism. That campaign, the use of force that is, could be described as an unsuccessful 'holy war'; thus Pope Gregory XV established the papal propaganda office to coordinate efforts 'to bring men and women to the voluntary acceptance of church doctrines'.

Jackall (1995:1) confirms the distinctly religious origins of propaganda; corroborating Pratkanis & Aronson's (2001:11) declaration that Pope Gregory XV (1621-23) established the Papal office of propaganda and issued the '*Papal bull inscrutabili Divinae*' on June 22, 1622 establishing the *sacre congregatio de propaganda fide*.

Quoting the *Catholic Historical Review*, vol. vi, No.4:480 (January, 1921), Jackall (1995:9) reveals that the original name of the 'Sacred commission' was '*Sacred Congregatio Christiano nomini propagando*' whose members consisted of thirteen Cardinals and two prelates. Some forty years earlier (about 1582), Pope Gregory XIII (1572-85) had begun the project under a similar name, the 'Cardinal Commission'.

Perhaps the difference between the Cardinal Commission (1582) and the Sacred Congregation (1622) was in the approach to converting and conquering souls. The Cardinal Commission engaged in the use of arms to forcefully re-establish Roman Catholicism; a forceful approach that seemingly, arguably, was a failed holy war. The Sacred Congregation on the other hand had as its *mittere* - i.e. mission -, a 'sending forth' to conquer, the countries lost by the Church earlier in the sixteenth century and to ensure the diffusion of the gospel in pagan lands; and this according to Jackall (1995:1) had to be done by 'spiritual arms, by prayers and good works, by preaching and catechising'.

Roman Catholic effort at propagation of the faith did not end with the Cardinal Commission and the Sacred Congregation. In 1627, a college named after Pope Urban VIII (1623-44) - i.e. *Collegium Urbanum* - was established to serve the following purposes:[i] as a centre for the worldwide 'Counter Reformation' against protestant revolt [ii] as a seminary for the education of young priests [iii] equally serve as what Jackall (1995) describes as the socialization of the young priests.

Contemporary Propaganda

The Papal Order's use of propaganda in the Counter Reformation campaign did not seem to have sustained the Church's grip on society for too long; church influence as a 17th Century traditional form of social control waned, especially, with the emergence of modern economic, social and political (democratic?) institutions. But the real catalysts in Jackall's (2001:2) view were institutional 'milieux' and marginal public spaces that gave rise to new publics. The author notes that, 'Coffee houses in England and Germany, salons in France, reading societies and lending libraries' along with the synergy created by similar social organizations and the spread of the printed word, helped lay the foundation for public opinion as well as what relatively could be referred to as cohesive publics (Ngoa, 2006).

However, it was not until full force of the Industrial Revolution was felt in the 19th century that (Pratkanis & Aronson, 2001:9) the phenomenal new age of propaganda began to take shape. The Industrial Revolution came with the invention of new devices for living life. The advent of steam engines, railroads, the telegraph and assembly lines, resulted in the manufacture of not only consumer items but also more and more material goods for the mass market.

Evidently, as a result of the above, people's lifestyles improved within a rather short space as material goods became not only generally available but its acquisition too, once considered the exclusive privilege of only society's affluent, became the right of all who can afford and who so desired. Again, the improvement in lifestyles reflected in changing tastes, new preference and new meanings to aspirations. As this author have noted elsewhere (Ngoa, 2006), mass production leads to mass market orientation and the need for guiding the consumer in the choices he has to make; that perhaps, more than anything else, explains for modern day propaganda devices of advertising and marketing. Thus in Pratkanis & Aronson's (2001) estimation, the specific date representing the birth of contemporary propaganda was on the day of a rather obscure event in the North American state of Pennsylvania. The authors put the year as 1843 when a young Volney Palmer opened the first advertising agency. Palmer's agency by today's standards could be likened to a rather primitive shop; but it brokered media space between advertisers and media houses – especially newspapers. Palmer's brokerage shop could also be credited, arguably, with laying the foundation stone on which was built today's advertising agency, marketing research firms, publicity agencies, opinion pollsters and perhaps all the various titles in the service of what interpretive experts would refer to as 'hidden seduction'

The academic community was not left out in this race to 'control' the human mind as courses ranging from the 'principles of Advertising', to 'salesmanship' began to be studied at colleges and other tertiary and professional academies; and, whereas academic textbooks with exotic titles on the new field of study equally flooded bookshops and stands, Pratkanis & Aronson (2001:10) confirm that, it did not take long for practitioners and all sorts of self-styled professionals to apply the new techniques and principles of propaganda devices in political communication and the marketing of political ideas/candidates seeking elective or public office.

The 'marketing' of the First World War (WWI) was evidently one of the first applications of such principles as Jackall (1995:137) assert that within one week of the congressional declaration of war on Germany on April 6, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson established the Committee on Public Information (CPI) which brought together, a whole generation of sharp skilled experts with a mandate to sell America to Americans and America as an idea to the world.

George Creel described by Jackall (1995:137) as a one-time Kansas City 'muckraking journalist' was chairman of the CPI who proudly disclosed details of how he and his committee used the principles of propaganda to convince Americans to go to war with Germany; and, the success of Creel's CPI seemed to have inspired quite not a few people, most notable of which was perhaps, Adolf Hitler, who probably thought the 'allies' effective use of propaganda was ingenious and powerful.

Hitler did not seem to have wasted time in creating the ministry of Public Enlightenment and propaganda as soon as his Nazi party came to power in Germany. The Nazis, along with other extremist social movements of the 1930s, gave propaganda a bad name; but Jackall (1995) notes that, up to the late 1950s the propaganda label was used variously with neither remorse nor regret. But, Hitler's Nazi Germany probably elevated propaganda to an unprecedented height both in terms of the efficiency of methods used and in the totality of the kind of mind sweeping objectives which they achieved, especially in respect of the German community in various countries in Europe at that time.

Today, the ancient art practiced by princes, a few skilled men and the papal 'order' has become the quasi science of opinion management, employing among others socio-psychological and scientific techniques and methods; and, Propaganda has taken a much broader meaning, generally synonymous with deceitful manipulation of symbols, 'hidden seduction' etc for the affectation of opinions and attitudes, mostly, through the elitist view of mass media influences on its audience.

Propaganda Defined

The definition of propaganda is as varied as the different human relationships, institutions, organizations and individuals defining the subject; as well as the circumstance dictating the definition. For example, the military formation understands and approaches propaganda to include varied forms of communication in aid of achieving some territorial/national objectives which amongst others would include the protection of a country's territorial integrity, a reason to go to war or react to the imagined advances of real or equally imagined aggressor/enemy. Institutionally or within organizations, propaganda may mean communication designed to either directly or indirectly influence the opinions, emotions, attitudes or behaviour of a targeted group, usually, for the achievement of desired institutional objectives or organizational goals.

For some others, propaganda is (see Lasswell, 1927) any technique, be it in writing, speech, music, film or other means; any association, plan, activity etc for the spread of principles and opinions especially to effect change, reform, or that attempts to influence public opinion or encourage mass action as in popular support of a policy or programme.

The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences – IESS - (1968) defines propaganda as the relatively deliberate manipulation of other people's thoughts or actions (as in beliefs, values and behaviours) by means of symbols such as words, gestures, flags, images, monuments and even music. According to the IESS, these deliberately manipulated thoughts and actions of other people are usually regarded by creators of propaganda as 'controversial'.

In a collection of writings published in 1929 as *Agitation and Propaganda*, Vladimir Lenin, the Bolshevik thinker, views propaganda as distinct from agitation. Lenin advances that whereas propaganda is the reasoned use of arguments from philosophy, history and science to influence the educated and reasonable few, 'agitation', is the use of emotional slogans, what he refers to as '*Aesopian*' parables and half-truths to influence the uneducated, the semi-educated and the unreasonable (see the IESS 1968; Kenez, 1985; Lenin, 1902). By the etymological origins of propaganda, Roman Catholic priest, Matthew Hassan Kukah¹, former Secretary-General, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria and until recently, Harvard University Research Fellow knows the definition of propaganda. According to Reverend Father Kukah, propaganda is simply the skill employed to persuade, communicate and market or sell an idea or a particular vision. 'As a political marketing tool', he emphasizes, 'it has been persuasive in very many ways depending on the circumstances or the environment' (Ngoa, 2006).

Diplomats are known for their not oft but effectively used ‘double-speak’ in the line of duty and equally respected for their acute understanding and application of propaganda devices² and tools. Dr. George Obiozor, former Director-General of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), and later Nigeria’s Ambassador to Israel and Washington respectively, therefore, refers to propaganda as a ‘virile tool for projecting a positive course’. But propaganda could work for and against its creator or user too and thus a double-edged sword (Ngoa, 2003).

For the not so educated or enlightened, for whom Lenin said ‘agitation’ is used to influence, surprisingly, propaganda is treated with not just disdain but fear and morbid skepticism. In 2001/2 this author conducted a survey and personal interviews on the effectiveness and ethical nature of Propaganda among some Nigerians (Ngoa, 2003) and the response of a respondent in particular reference to the effectiveness and ethical nature of propaganda in politics speaks volumes: ‘propaganda is full of lies. When they want us to vote for them, they tell lies about their opponent, even their mother. Propaganda is evil,’ he says.

Indeed the general objective of propaganda it does seem has always been to convince as many people as are targeted about the viability of a given idea and getting them to act in accordance with what the propagandist wants; thus one could argue therefore, that propaganda is as old as civilization.

Also, it does appear the definition of propaganda means different strokes for different folks; but a consensus and perhaps commonality in the definition of propaganda is that, it is a technique or skill for persuading and (or) influencing people. No matter whether it is religious, political, racial or ethnic, propaganda has in this author’s view only one objective; which is to seek, change or alter the minds of people, to get people to see the world or to see a particular issue from a particular point of view. Usually, that point of view tends to be quite simple, the kind of simple idea or point of view that can sink into the heads and minds of people without their having to think too much about it, but quite often that simple idea or point of view could be very economical with the truth.

Harold Lasswell's doctoral thesis on the use of propaganda during WWI, published as a book (*Propaganda Technique in the World War*) in 1927 is seen as one of the first careful attempts at defining propaganda. In the classic work, Lasswell (Severin & Tankard, 2001:109) defined propaganda as referring ‘solely to the control of opinion by significant symbols, or to speak more concretely and less accurately, by stories, rumours, reports, pictures and other forms of social communication’(see also Smith, Lasswell & Casey, 1964). About 10 years later (1937), Lasswell presented a slightly different but broader definition. Propaganda in its broadest sense he redefines, is the technique of ‘influencing human action by the manipulation of representations. These representations may take spoken, written, pictorial or musical form’; either way, Lasswell's definition of propaganda as ‘...to speak more concretely and less accurately’ as well as ‘the technique of influencing....’ is corroborated by Pratkanis & Aronson (2001).

According to the authors, propaganda was originally defined as ‘the dissemination of biased ideas and opinions, often through the use of lies and deception’. However, they were quick also to remind us that propaganda is also a technique of mass persuasion, which often consists of more than just clever deceptions. The word propaganda they insist has since ‘evolved to mean mass “suggestion” or “influence” through the manipulation of symbols and the psychology of the individual’. Contemporary propaganda, they (Pratkanis & Aronson, 2001:11) insist, involve the dexterous use of images, slogans and symbols that play on our prejudices and emotions. It is the communication of a point of view, with the ultimate goal of having the recipient of the appeal come to ‘voluntarily’ accept this position as if it were his or her own.

Types of Propaganda:

Although propaganda typology is not as topical and popular as 'propaganda devices' and ‘tools of Propaganda’ etc., this paper takes the view that the various human relationships, organizations, individuals, even countries and interpretive experts who apply the technique of propaganda must as of necessity have their mind on not just the reason but also the circumstances that call for propaganda. Accordingly, this paper here, attempts a description of what constitutes:

- (i) Wartime propaganda
- (ii) Political propaganda
- (iii) Social/Educational propaganda

Wartime Propaganda:

This usually refers to and will have to do with the use of public communication designed to whip up sentiment amongst members of the general public in favour of, say, why a country should go to war with its neighbor or even embark on acts of territorial occupation while portraying the aggrieved party or country as the real aggressor and offender.

This form of communication is usually in the form of stories of atrocity whose objective as it were is the mobilization of hatred against the envisaged if not imagined enemy/aggressor. Stories of atrocities could be false but they did a great deal to make war time propaganda effective. True or false, people usually believe wartime propaganda because they are packaged for easy acceptance. For example, WWI stories about German soldiers cutting off hands of Belgian children became part of war-time oratories usually delivered by 'four-minute men' in American public places of the time; and nearer home, perhaps, is the propaganda of war-time crimes and the subsequent charges of crime against humanity leveled against Liberian war-lord Charles Taylor currently on trial at the Hague. Taylor's soldiers were dreaded and said to be reputed for designing 'short and long sleeves'³ on fellow citizens.

Perhaps the Nigerian civil war (1967 – 1970) will be a good example to bring nearer home the two sides of wartime propaganda. While the Federal Government in Lagos sang, 'to keep Nigeria one is a task that must be done', the secessionist republic of Biafra propaganda machine in Enugu saw the civil war as a war of 'genocide' from which Biafra must be free. Thus: 'the price of liberty is eternal vigilance, Biafra, be vigilant'. Biafra's atrocity stories of 'genocide', train loads of butchered bodies and the trampling on a peoples' liberty seemed more readily and easily acceptable (at least to the outside world) than the call 'to keep Nigeria One is a task...'

Political Propaganda:

Politics in its entirety is controversial and multifaceted; so also is its communication. Perhaps, one of the finer ways of defining political propaganda is to assume Aristotle's definition of Rhetoric (communication), - that is, (see Aristotle, 1994; Kotler, 1967; Berlo, 1960) the search for all the available means of persuasion. Political propaganda therefore, can be referred to as the use of all the available means and techniques to convince as many people as are targeted about the viability of a candidate, an idea, policy, party, group, project or a cause. Political propaganda tends to be quite simple, often so simple an idea or point of view that it sinks into the heads and minds of people without their having to think too much about it.

The immediate past campaigns for office of the president between America's (then) Senators Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton – now President and Secretary of State respectively - to secure the Democratic Party ticket is perhaps, an appropriate example of a political propaganda.

To stay in the race, Mrs. Clinton did not only make what is arguably a spurious claim of being more experienced than (then) Senator Obama 'when that phone rings at three o'clock in the morning' (CNN – 'On the Campaign Trail'), but had to get raw at Obama. 'Shame on you Barack Obama' she cried out in a sympathy seeking voice and I wonder if anybody had enough time to contemplate Obama's sins before the Senator from New York claimed her 'big win' in Texas and Ohio.

Political propaganda seeks to alter or change the minds of people against an opponent -i.e. a candidate (for elective office/appointment), political party, policy or cause. It presents one-sided issues from a specified point of view, which could be economical with the truth.

Although Severin & Tankard (2001:109) listed Harold Lasswell's four major objectives of propaganda as:

1. To mobilize hatred against the enemy
2. To preserve the friendship of allies
3. To preserve friendship and if possible, to procure the co-operation of neutrals
4. To demoralize the enemy...

They (Severin & Tankard) were also quick to declare that, 'these are obvious wartime objectives that would not apply to advertising or other peacetime types of persuasion'. Yet, it is the opinion of this author that political propaganda has effectively utilized Lasswell's four major objectives of propaganda. Thus we can argue that the objectives of political propaganda include dislike and distrust or hate for opponent, as well as to preserve friendship of allies and where possible procure and reinforce the co-operation of neutrals.

It can also be argued that the most important objective of political propaganda is to demoralize the opponent; as did the Clinton camp (not directly though) with the portrayal of Obama as a Muslim, knowing of course that, with the memories of '9-11' Americans will be impatient with a 'to-be' president 'Barack Hussein Obama'.

To further make their point, a photograph of Senator Obama in religious 'warrior-like' attire (probably taken during a visit to Kenya, his fatherland) was circulated; and this is representative of propaganda's one-sided point of view that may as well be economical with the truth. The truth they say, is that, the then Illinois Senator is a Christian; but was that little piece of political propaganda effective? May be, may be not; but in its search for all the available means of persuasion, political propaganda attempts to influence human action through what Lasswell (1927) generalized as manipulations. Manipulation (Wilson, 1989) is a propaganda device that seems to evoke in people fear, dislike and distrust.

Social/Educational Propaganda: a proposition

For purposes of clarity it is prudential that we understand the distinct nature of propaganda education from my proposition -i.e. social/educational propaganda. The prime responsibility of propaganda education is the creation of awareness on the dangers of propaganda; which by implication is equally dangerous because it is counter propaganda to an earlier position; in the sense that one propaganda principle is being applied to counter another.

Propaganda education became a major concern in the United States in the period prior to World War II, because (Severin and Tankard, 2001:110), 'perhaps, some Americans were worried that the techniques the United States has used so effectively in World War I were about to be used against them'. Propaganda Education to a large extent deals with infusing fears into the minds of people on the possible dangers in propaganda. This is amply expressed in Hitler's success with propaganda and the German nation and confirmed by the emergence of Nazi rallies in New York's Madison Square Garden and other parts of America in the 1930s. The above, led to the establishment of the American Institute for Propaganda Analysis, whose recorded success in my view was not in teaching people how to think; but also, how not to think.

My proposition, *Social/Educational propaganda* on the other hand, refers the communication process or better still, a propaganda activity designed for the general good of most of the people. It puts into effective use the mass communication theories of the Diffusion process and, to some degree, agenda-setting function of the media (more on the informative role). Diffusion here refers to the widening communication of policy, an idea or spread/filtering of positive information in community/society, through the 'established structures of community' (Ngoa, 2006). Everett Rogers, the prime agent of Diffusion studies views the 'diffusion of innovation' as essentially a social process in which subjectively perceived information about a new idea is communicated through a process of social construction and possibly what this author proposes as the 'established structures of community'. By the 'established structures of community', I mean, some, quite often neglected but traditionally potent specific tools/devices of propaganda. They include rumour, gossip and language as it is best used and understood by native users of the tongue; and of course religion, as in information obtained from places of worship. Bellow, this paper attempts an analysis of 'propaganda in action'; an analysis of some propaganda activities in Nigeria dating back to colonial times.

Purpose of study

The purpose of the analytical narrative of some of the rather relevant propaganda activities in the political evolutionary process that leads to present day Nigeria, beginning with, colonial Nigeria, the post-colony and up to present day or better still modern Nigeria is to try and establish with analytical but equally narrative evidence the true characteristics of propaganda as an anti-imperialist but pro-self-determination and democratic protest tool in managing the political process. The purpose is to present a thematic if not chronological analysis of the focus and content of anti-colonial propaganda and ultimately to highlight, signpost and emphasize how successful the themes of anti-imperialist propaganda were; and how bereft of ideas and confused the neo-colonists (nay the soldiers and their collaborators who invaded Nigeria's political space) and some of those who became part of that country's endless military transition programmes comparatively were.

Methodology

The historical research methodology is not only utilized here but equally adopted as a technique to systematically and perhaps thematically too analyze the propaganda activities of the various political power usurpers of Nigeria's many years of military interregnum; as well as those of the few democratically(?) elected/selected few 'unwilling presidents.

PROPAGANDA IN ACTION: A Nigerian perspective.**Propaganda in the Colony, a Discourse:**

In Nigeria, the struggle for independence was preponderantly a propaganda struggle. Speeches, articles in the newspapers, sermons in churches and the mosques were things that the founding fathers and political leaders - Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Bode Thomas, Adegoke Adelabu, Ahmadu Bello, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Aminu Kano, Anthony Eremosele Enahoro, Harold Dappa Biriye and a host of others - used to alter the minds of the Nigerian people. Most of these leaders/politicians were people who mostly were abroad during the war (WW11) years and had seen how Hitler managed to convince his own people that if it were necessary, they must be prepared to die for their fatherland. Also most of them saw how the allies – i.e. U.S., Britain, France and the Soviet Union used basic propaganda methods to convince their own people that it was necessary for them to go to battle and sometimes lose their lives in defense of a particular idea – in defense of the fatherland.

When the heroes of Nigeria's independence returned home therefore, it was very easy for them to simply attempt to apply the knowledge that they have acquired abroad in respect of the uses to which propaganda can be put. Strictly, basically, simply, they said: the white man, (in this case the British) is not good for us. They are here to seize our resources and transport them to their own country to enrich their country and to impoverish us. Secondly, they deny us all the fundamental rights that all individuals and human beings are entitled to. They rule us as though we were slaves and the time has come for us to tell them: **ENOUGH!**

One of the interesting things about the independence struggle in Nigeria is precisely the fact that in the end, many people went to jail but very few people actually lost their lives. There were times like during the Enugu Miners strike and the Aba women's riot when some people were shot; but in the end, relatively very few Nigerians had to lay down their lives in the struggle for power independence. Evidently, what seems to have given victory in the end was the power of propaganda. Perhaps in terms of sophistication of methods applied (in my view, propaganda is ethics neutral though) issues may be raised; but in terms of objective, the first republic politicians can be said to have been quite successful in skillfully applying the propaganda tool of manipulation, by manipulating regional and religious sentiments whose final objective was to capture political power, and to that extent, those who employed propaganda were successful.

For example, in the west, Obafemi Awolowo⁴, tribal leader of the Yorubas did succeed in containing his political territory; so did the Sardauna of Sokoto – Ahmadu Bello⁵ – in keeping the north to himself. These they did successfully, and arguably, by raising the level of consciousness of ordinary people who belong to the geographical area called the 'west' and the 'north' respectively. Obafemi Awolowo in the 'west' and Ahmadu Bello in the 'north' respectively raised the consciousness of their people to a particular level where it became not only possible but convenient for the people to identify with their leaders objectives.

However, on hindsight, one is of the conviction that when propaganda is used to sensitize people as to the reality of their deprivation it may have an immediate benefit because people have been brought together and consciousness heightened; but by and large in a plural, most religious, most ethnic society such as Nigeria, there comes the sudden discovery that there is the need to either deploy another kind of propaganda or as it were begin to readjust. Because, one of the weaknesses of propaganda is that so many years after, a certain kind of awareness begin to emerge and people begin to realize the extent to which they may have been shortchanged.

For instance, in the beginning, what the outside world knew of geo-political Nigeria was exactly what the three dominant tribes – Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba - (aided by the British colonial administration) wanted to be known. In the north of the country was Hausa country, Igbo country in the east and Yoruba country in the west. Interestingly, in each of these regions of the country, there existed equally other nationalities that in some cases were quite far away from the physical locations of the so-called dominant entities? Examples here were the remarkable distance in space and culture of the present day middle-belt and their Northern Nigeria dominant Hausa Fulani tribe; and the Ijaws (originally Izons) of the Niger-Delta region and the Igbos of then Eastern Nigeria.

Yet, perhaps with the exception of the Yoruba who were considered to be naturally monolithic (by the common denominator of language and political will), other nationalities in the north and the east of the country were respectively under the strangle-hold of Hausa and Igbo hegemonies. Hence even before the collapse of the first republic, it became clear to the other nationalities that they too deserve to strategize towards the ethnic politics that will secure them recognition, acceptance and respect in future Nigerian regional-cum-religious politics.

Thus this paper propose that, depending on the limitation of the objectives of a particular course, when propaganda is employed, the result tend to be immediate on the short term; but from the point of view of long term strategy, propaganda is employed sometimes at great cost to other issues. The limited objective or the long term or medium term objective might all be different; which means that, every issue, objective or circumstance may have to employ a completely new propaganda tool in order to be able to sustain say, the issues of the time. On that note, let us look at propaganda in action in the post-colonial era.

Propaganda in the post-Colony.

Whereas colonial propaganda activities for political power independence can be referred to as successful, it is rather unfortunate however, that, one cannot make the same claims for propaganda activity in the post-colonial period. Starting from 1966 (when the first military *coup de' tat* took place) or 1967 when the Nigerian civil war started, the Federal Government was particularly inept in its use of propaganda. It did not seem to have been able to make up its mind as to exactly what it was fighting for or why the people of Nigeria should adopt the idea that it was necessary where the occasion arose to actually lay down their lives. The Biafrans⁶ on the other hand achieved far greater international recognition and sympathy for their cause than the Federal Government ever did.

It is true indeed that in the end, the Federal Government won. But in specific relation to our subject of discourse, perhaps the Federal Government won for the same reason that the allies defeated Hitler in the end. And the reason for that is that in the end, the Federal Government had more resources available to it than Biafra did; so did the allies (Western powers) when they combined forces against Hitler. Propaganda may be the preliminary condition on which a particular idea or objective is prosecuted, but there is a correlation between the effectiveness of propaganda and availability of resources. It may be very effective but ultimately it is the material resources that determine the success or failure of a particular idea even where the propaganda is extremely effective. Wars are not won for instance, just by radio jingles or radio announcements; somebody had to go out there and do some shooting which of course involve huge resources. In the case of the colonial struggle for independence, there wasn't that kind of war as such and that may account for the reason why propaganda became so effective on its own. However, the Nigerian civil war produced one of the most sophisticated propaganda machines ever seen and likely to be seen in these parts. So efficient and effective was the Biafra propaganda machine that one could safely say 'Biafrans' were so 'brainwashed' that it seemed as if Biafra was the best thing that happened to that generation.

'On Aburi we stand,'⁷ a one liner. It was so powerfully used to blackmail the then young military head of state, Yakubu Jack Gowon and the federal side that even those who knew nothing about the 'Aburi Accord' believed that the federal side reneged on an agreement earlier reached. Biafra stood symbolically on Aburi in '*the struggle for survival*'; a propaganda pamphlet published by the ministry of Information Enugu and printed by the government printer of the newly declared republic of Biafra.

Sloganeering is a major propaganda device whose effect is electrifying, especially amongst the masses of the people. Slogans are words or a sentence put together to symbolize an event, issue, idea, policy or condition. Slogans can simply be referred to as rhymes with a natural sense of rhythm. They are short, simple and precise in delivering a message; as in: '*On Aburi we stand*', and when Biafra was finally done with, a new one liner was quietly but quickly pushed through the populace. This time, it didn't 'stand' on anything but simply an end of war salutation: '*happy survival*'. Another propaganda device that was effectively utilized by the Biafra propaganda machine was **Language**, the instrument for human action and expression. On the use of language to intimidate the opponent, Odumegwu Ojukwu, leader of secessionist republic of Biafra brought to bear his Oxford Education as he often indulged in intellectual and (if you like) academic arrogance; and in the process making the (then) youthful Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon (then Nigeria's military head of state) look inadequate in many ways.

For instance, on March 13, 1967, Ojukwu granted a special Interview to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) during which rather than answer simply, 'what the consequences of the use of forces' will be; he lectured: 'certainly, the East can take care of itself and should the government in Lagos or the government in the north in their lunatic frenzy think of attacking the east, we would not only repulse them but we would also certainly be sure that they would never again want to attack the East'. Some threat, and since after the Biafra propaganda experience, there had been nothing like it. The next time there would have been some excitement, would have been the second republic; but Shehu Shagari's government (1979 – 1983) never took an expert approach to propaganda. They simply tried some sloganeering, as in '**One nation, one destiny**' until the military struck again early in New Year's Day 1984.

1984 – 1999:

There has (in this author's view) been a progressive decline both in the use of propaganda and in respect of the benefit that have been derived from it. The military, strictly speaking, had no use for propaganda or creative approach to public communication. They were there because, they have the guns and they made it quite clear that anybody who opposes them would be shot or locked up. Secondly, they really had no specific ideas that move the minds of men, communities and societies.

Although 'queue culture' as a propaganda idea came with the Generals Buhari/Idiagbon regime (1984 – '85), 'queue culture' came as crude as its creators did with the exercise of political power; and may at the best be dismissed as just elementary, convenient and operational attempts at propaganda. The military were not interested in propaganda because they had the military might and probably felt having the guns was just and quite sufficient more than anything else. They were imposing themselves on the community and frankly, didn't care whether the community accepted their views or not. All they did was simply tell the people: this is the way things are going to be.

As it is very well known, the period (1984 –1999) was taken over completely by the military and it was the presence of the military that made propaganda no longer such an important tool either in the political or whatever other arena. The soldiers didn't need it; and that perhaps explains the woeful failure of political power in the hands of military dictatorship. However, the General Ibrahim Babangida (IBB) regime (1985-1993) with its collection of sociology and political science lecturers tried a few tricks with some tools of propaganda; but they were not very successful, because for propaganda to succeed, it must have a single idea, and that idea must be simple.

The IBB administration was involved in too many things all at the same time. There were too many ideas flying around and the result was that they never succeeded in captivating the minds of the people. People could not concentrate on a single, powerful idea that they could easily relate and be happy with as well. Indeed propaganda strives with co-ordination and concentration on a single, simple, lowest denominator that is capable of moving the people, but the lowest denominator one could associate with that era of propaganda activity is the virile propaganda tool known as **manipulation** which involves the complex interplay of power channels and **glittering generality** (Wilson, 1989), a propaganda activity that associates something with a 'virtue word' in order to make people accept, love or approve of it without proper examination of the evidence.

There is the temptation here to perhaps include, for argumentation purposes, the IBB administration's population control campaign as one good attempt of a propaganda activity of that era; but that campaign too, failed to take into consideration a cardinal principle of effective propagandizing which derives its essence, meaning and effectiveness from the dreams, aspirations, preferences and prejudices of the people that it is meant for. In this instance, one could safely argue that most Nigerians saw the birth control campaign as a population control measure consistent with Western values, norms and interests as a condition for 'debt-forgiveness' by western creditor nations; bearing in mind that, the military government of the day had introduced the IMF belt-tightening policy in which the opinions of Nigerians hardly mattered.

Viewed from the above prism, the population control propaganda may not have succeeded as its promoters would have wished because, there was the probability that the programme was the imposition of (or pressures from) powerful 'outsiders' on Nigeria. Thus Kalu (2004:80) argues that the urge by creditor-nations for sub-Sahara Africa to embrace the experiences of the developed social formations of the West is all but '... a well-orchestrated strategy to make Western interest seem African for the purpose of continued economic benefit for Western firms, banks and institutions'.

The Sonekan's Contraption

When the IBB government came to an end by the amiable 'army general' stepping aside, an Interim National Government (ING) contraption led by Ernest Sonekan was left in its wake; but both Sonekan and the ING was seen as an imposter; Sonekan had no power and therefore was in no position to develop any particular idea about which propaganda machinery could be permeated. Secondly, in any event, his tenure was very, very brief. However certain professional attempts were made by some of the people hired to manage issues of the day; but the cards were already stacked against the interim government. **Card stacking** as a propaganda device refers to the selection and use of facts or falsehoods, illustrations, distractions, logical or illogical statements in order to give the best or worst possible case for an idea, person, policy etc.

Card Stacking is synonymous with slanting of messages, information, opinions, views etc; and slanting is known for its general semantic technique, all of which came into play during the ING. Card stacking selects arguments or evidence (Severin and Tankard, 2001:119) that ‘support a position and ignoring those that do not support the position. The arguments that are selected can be true or false. The device probably operates most effectively when the arguments are true’ (as in the annulled June 12 1993 polls⁸) but other equally true arguments are ‘ignored; because then, it is hardest to detect’

The Abacha Era (1993- ’98):

General Sani Abacha who served as Defense Minister in the IBB government stayed behind in the same capacity, in ambush for the ING until he eventually toppled Sonekan in November 1993. Abacha and his junta were neither interested in propaganda nor were they interested in any creative, imaginative or constructive management of public communication. Abacha’s government believed in bribing and buying its way by simply using the financial resources of the state to get as much people as possible quiet. He had no idea to sell and ideas are what propaganda is about. Propaganda requires that you must have something that you want to sell to the people. Abacha had no ideas of what to sell except perhaps himself; ‘Khalifa’ – the maximum ruler’.

However, in his bid for permanent residency in power, there was a lot of creativity on the part of those he had hired to sell him, but the one fundamental element that was missing and lacking was that, whatever it was that Abacha wanted to achieve had very little to do with the consciousness of the people. The regime even lost an opportunity for a counter propaganda activity. In the midst of international condemnation for the hanging of the play-write and environmental activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa and the ‘Ogoni eight’, the Abacha government ‘blithely’ in the words of the *Economist* (December 9, 1995 issue) floated ‘on waves of its own phantasmagorical propaganda’ of being victims of a global conspiracy. Perhaps the most memorable propaganda activity and device that could be associated with that regime until 1999 was rumour; and, the Abacha junta applied this in abundance with ‘terror’ as the regime’s most lethal weapon.

NADECO:

However, worthy of note was the propaganda activity that eventually drove Abacha to his grave. It was the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) initiated strategy to heighten awareness among the populace on the dangers of continued military dictatorship, as well as encourage agitation for the revalidation of the annulled ‘most peaceful and fair June 12’ elections of 1993. The NADECO, a coalition of pro-democracy movement’s propaganda collective was reminiscent of colonial pro-independence propaganda. The NADECO refrain that has come to stay is ‘**June 12**’, about the most successful national single phrase since the colonial era. ‘JUNE 12’ was and perhaps is the most successful propaganda idea that Nigeria and any Nigerian ever invented. ‘June 12’ was very powerful and very simple and to some extent, one could argue that it worked; and will for a long time, work.

The return of OBJ:

General Olosegun Obasanjo (OBJ) returned⁹ in May 1999 as Nigeria’s second (the first was Shehu Shagari to who Obasanjo handed over in 1979) democratically elected leader since the 1966 military *coup de’ tat*. The propaganda activity that led Obasanjo to power this time around (1999) was a potent one, and promises of vibrant propaganda activity was in the air; but president Obasanjo no sooner than he got into office became all-knowing, from issues of public opinion to managing the national treasury. The only propaganda activity in Nigeria that is noteworthy since 1999, one is tempted to argue had been agitation.

Agitation is the use of emotional slogans and what Lenin refers to as ‘Aesopian’ parables and half truths to influence the uneducated, the semi-educated and unreasonable. But that was Lenin’s time. Agitation today, is the use of all the available means of persuasion to fight, in this case for a right, not just to influence the down-trodden but to influence as well as prick the conscience of ‘whom it may concern’. Agitation is the only propaganda activity in Nigeria today. It is personified in Niger-Delta region militancy, a campaign calling the attention of the federal government as well as the international community to the inhuman conditions in which people of the oil-bearing region live; and perhaps to remind the world that it is for this same agitation that the novelist/activist Ken Sarowiwa faced Abacha’s hang-man in 1998. Nigeria’s Niger Delta region, an area spanning more than 30,000 square kilometres of mangrove swamps and snaking waterways that stretches for hundreds of miles should not only be known for the deposits of black gold - oil which was first found in the region in 1958 (Oloibiri); by 1884 some parts of the Niger Delta basin, Akasa for example, also served as an influential slave-trading outlet as well as the beachhead of British colonial occupation of the area (Ngoa, 2006).

This Delta basin that stretches between the Benin River in the West and the Cross River in the East, according to the SABC Africa News (8.30 a.m., June 15th 2004) produces about 95% of Nigeria's (plundered resources) foreign exchange earnings; yet the people live in a desolate world of their own.

Until a few years ago when some canals were dredged to make way for speedier transportation by sea, a journey from Port Harcourt, the Rivers State capital city as well as Nigeria's major oil city to, say, Nembe/Brass area could take as long as a week with all the inherent risks of sea travel by canoe.

However, as a result of youths restiveness leading to the incessant abductions of foreign oil field workers in the area (SABC Africa 4 a. m News, June 19th 2004, confirm that locals in the area abducted expatriate Shell oilfield workers, demanding \$20 million ransom) the Italian hydro-carbon 'exploitation' company – AGIP – had supplied the natives of some areas of their primary operations (Brass for example) with power generated source of light. Yet, the people are only superficially affected by modernity. They have community schools, but in name only. Nothing more. This is Nigeria's Niger Delta Basin where the discovery and production of hydrocarbon rather than improve the living conditions of the people had destroyed the ecology and left the natives more isolated and insulated. Agitation personified in Niger-Delta region militancy, a campaign calling the attention of the federal government as well as the international community to the inhuman conditions in which people of the oil-bearing region live is the most noticeable propaganda activity in Nigeria today; and this has seemingly paid-off for the agitators.

The Niger Delta propaganda activity of 'Agitation' used all the available means of persuasion to fight its 'war' against what the people view as impudent marginalization and for a right to participate in the decision making process as it concerns that, which the region/area produces. As in all wars, the Niger Delta agitation/campaign for 'resource control' had taken some lives; but, some fall-outs of this propaganda activity is that, the Niger Delta had produced its first Nigerian president, a Ministry of the Niger Delta has been created as a step towards correcting the wrongs of the past, the two powerful ministries of Petroleum and Foreign Affairs are respectively run by a female and male 'Niger Deltans' and, it has become fashionable nationally, to dress in the Niger Delta tradition.

Conclusion

Propaganda derives its essence, meaning and effects from the dreams, aspirations, preferences and prejudices of the people it is aimed at; the neglect therefore of this canon of effective propaganda may not only lead to failure but a most probable disaster for any propaganda activity. Thus, with all the manipulative maneuvers associated with Nigeria's immediate past president, Olusegun Obasanjo, in his bid to push for a constitutional extension of his tenure in office, the double edged sword of effective propaganda turned against him and his propaganda machine for the elongation of his stay in office.

Notes:

- 1) Rev. Fr. Matthew Hassan Kukah is currently Vicar General, Catholic Archdiocese of Kaduna, Nigeria.
- 2) Wilson, Stan Le Roy (1989; 269-73). *Mass Media/Mass Culture: An Introduction*. NY: Random House.
- 3) Charles Taylor's soldiers were said to have asked their perceived enemies what they will prefer – 'short or long sleeve' as punishment. 'Short-sleeve' thus becomes excruciatingly painful experience of amputation (without anesthesia) at the wrist; while 'long-sleeve' represented amputation above the elbow.
- 4) Obafemi Awolowo – To the Yoruba speaking people of Nigeria is the late 'sage of Ikenne'; a messiah and the god-essence in human form who even in death, is believed to dictate the pulse of Yoruba politics.
- 5) Ahmadu Bello – the Sardauna of Sokoto (seat of the Caliphate) – spiritual and political leader of the Hausa Fulani people of northern Nigeria.
- 6) The Igbo country of Nigeria's east-central region (due to fall-outs from the January 1966 military coup) seceded and declared the republic of Biafra and went to war with the Federal Government of Nigeria. The war which lasted about three years (1967 – 1970) was also declared (by then head of state-General Yakubu Gowon) as 'no victor, no vanquished'.
- 7) Before the final outbreak of hostilities, then lieutenant colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the secessionist Biafra leader and the Nigerian head of state- General Yakubu Gowon met at Aburi in Ghana (under the auspices of the Ghanaian Government) where it was alleged that certain agreements were reached. However, upon their return from Aburi, Biafra accused the federal side of renegeing on the agreement reached at Aburi; thus, Biafra chose to 'stand on Aburi'.
- 8) The 'June 12' elections of 1993, is in Nigeria's electoral history considered to be the most peaceful and fairest. The IBB government annulled the results of that election; and its acclaimed winner, M.K.O. Abiola died in detention while seeking the revalidation of his mandate.
- 9) General Obasanjo had earlier served as military head of state (1976 -1979) following the assassination of Muritala Mohammed to whom he (Obasanjo) was second-in-command.

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