

## The Media as Tools for Political Propaganda in Adamu Usman's *Sieged*

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### Abstract

This study examines the use of the media as tools for political propaganda in Adamu Usman's *Sieged*. It contends that the untoward use of the medium by politicians and the practitioners' inability to check this is the concern of Usman in *Sieged*. The study argues that Adamu Usman's novel portrays government owned media as one that accepts government's version of events with minimum questioning. It reflects on how the ruling party engages the media in contemporary Nigeria to sway the mind of the people in order to discredit competent candidates as Boyama of UAC did to demean Jamimi of PLM in *Sieged*. The study is anchored on Robert Young's conceptualisation of Literary Criticism and Achille Mbembe's rationale of the postcolony. Usman indicts both the politicians and the media stressing that government media has lost its watchdog role and complicit in post-independence disillusionment. The paper argues that Usman deploys propaganda devices in his revelation to show how politicians in government deceive the people based on their access and control of state Radio and Television. It traces Nigeria's underdevelopment to this wholesale propaganda just as it is being pelted during media debates. The study, therefore, found that politics is lifeless without the media as the world is largely mediated through the words and images of the media. Adamu Usman therefore in *Sieged* presents media engagement in postcolonial Nigeria by politicians as nothing but means to foot their propaganda.

**Keywords:** Propaganda, Media, Disillusionment, *Siege*, Politicians.

### **Introduction**

The mass media are social institutions that influence events in other institutions in a society, such as politics, economy, education, family as well as the value system of people among others. It is in realisation of this impact of the media that stakeholders in different sectors of society strive to influence the content of messages that are presented to the public. Also, ownership of media, which in Nigeria includes government-owned, commercial or private ownership, as well as not-for-profit commercial media determine to a large extent the representation of political issues. This study investigates the representation of government-owned media as a propaganda tool in Adamu Usman's novel *Siege*. It cross-examines the role of the media with that of the politician and its corresponding influence on decision making of the people in a matrix that reveals the causes of the untoward state of the nation Nigeria.

### **Media and Propaganda**

To begin with, the media is acclaimed to occupy the fourth estate of the realm. In other words, it has a special duty which involves acting in public interest as a check on the powerful. However there have been counter claims that the media have failed to live up to this ideal just as it is being indicted for being complicit in post-independence disillusionment, a situation whereby the people are disappointed in socio economic situation occasioned by African leaders. The masses see the media as its saving hope but in some climes (especially when owned by the government) they are further disappointed as the media has become a tool to further dampen the hope of the people. This is so because the practitioners allow a jeremiad and unverified account of the leaders in sensitive situations and revel in self enrichment to the detriment of their profession hence become propaganda machineries of the leaders to deceive and fool the people.

Nwagbara (2008, p.247) captures this disappointment on the part of the people in a remark that "A people whose social advancement is weakened by despotic government or through the activities of socially irresponsible media cannot make any meaningful progress." This has become the fate of the people in Nigeria even with the proliferation of media houses. Switching

from one radio or TV station to the other during news or political programmes has become a norm and characteristic of any ethically minded individual especially during election as only few stations remain unbiased and uncontrolled by the ruling party while government stations do not care at all as the practitioners there do not want to lose their job. The people in other words are retarded by their government and further disillusioned by a socially irresponsible media it controls which should serve as a check on the leaders. This lopsidedness in contemporary Nigeria has become a growing concern in scholarship as the masses is further disillusioned with repeated failure of governance and its jinxed media used in swaying public opinion. Harcup (2007, p.29) echoes that the "Argument about journalism today is that it fails to live up to its self proclaimed watchdog role because of structural problems such as a collusive relationship between media corporations and politicians".

Disillusioned about this, Chomsky (1997, p.6) while speaking on the havoc done by Propaganda submits that: the role of the media in contemporary politics forces us to ask what kind of a world and what kind of a society we want to live in and in particular in what sense of democracy; do we want this to be a democratic society? Confirming this, Bradlee (2001, p.18), cited in Harcup (2007, p.28), pointed out that: government prefer a press that makes their job easier, a press that allows them to proceed with minimum public accountability, a press that accepts their version of events with minimum questioning, a press that can be led to the greenest pastures by persuasion and manipulation. What, therefore, were meant to be a means of disseminating government information to the people and as well fulfilling its two other main purposes of education and entertainment is today anchored on propaganda and hegemony.

Virtually all states in Nigeria has got its state owned media where the practitioners are cowed and present according to Bradlee government version of event with minimum questioning hence sway public opinion. Originally, what most researchers refer to as government-owned media is statutorily classified as public service media. As the name portrays, they are expected to serve the interest of the tax-paying public, not government officials who also benefit from the commonwealth of the country. Propaganda, being

techniques or means to influence public opinion or encourage mass action as in popular support of a policy or programme (Lasswell, 1927 in Severin & Tankard, 2001), has therefore been used to achieve selfish interest in the Media by the powers that be.

There hardly is any likelihood of objectivity in the news programming of any government owned media today just as same goes for outfits footed by individuals with political interest. Journalists too are now groomed in this cesspit of delusion to the extent that the future of the news media as hope of the masses is threatened. Perhaps the lack of objectivity has given rise to citizen journalism on the social media through blogs, online radio, television, newspapers and posts on WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook among others. Through these platforms individuals post their views on different issues. The desired objective reportage by the public is further compromised by the absence of ethical standards or monitoring of the social media content by government or relevant governmental agencies and policies. The Nigerian Broadcasting Commission, NBC which happens to be the watchdog for broadcasting organisations in the country is also sieged as the coverage of the Lekki shootings of the #ENDSARS# unarmed protesters by military men on 20th October, 2020 has proven.

The Nigerian youth had on this tragic day embarked on a peaceful protest to end police brutality and also request good governance but were confronted by armed soldiers. While the Nigerian Television Authority, NTA had been careful in coverage and reportage of the event, the likes of Channels T.V, Arise TV and AIT which are independently owned covered and reported the incident just as international media did. NBC had however described the coverage as unprofessional, politically influenced and sanctioned the three stations on 26th October saying the clips and news reported were fake and untrue. However untrue they are, authorities have confirmed that the protesters were attacked, many injured and two died. NBC sanction logically is an attempt to gag the independent media who risked their lives to report an incident being monitored world over. This is because the selected media had decided to feed the public the situation of the incidence and refused to be part of government propaganda.

To say the least about the taint government media has brought on the profession is the aura of indifference that greets news from government media which in a normal parlance would be taken

serious as often the people say “they are lying.” Berelson and Janowitz (1999, p. 400) corroborates this that “public suspicion of information as nothing but propaganda is especially strong when the information comes from the government”. All these in a way are seen to gradually water down the integrity and truthfulness traditionally reposed in the media. There thus exists collusion between the media and government which is unethical for the good of the masses which the media claims to protect. Adamu Usman in *Sieged* seeks to unravel this with a view to purifying government media by making it socially responsible. This at the same time is to unveil how politicians had through propaganda sown the seeds of disillusionment in the media to retard society’s growth. It is, however, imperative to note at this juncture that the issue of media and propaganda just do not come to fore without some underlying facts. Foremost among these facts is the connection between operation and ownership of the media. This is so because the media is largely owned and paid for by the elites and run in their interest hence they control whatever is dished out on air. This ownership is however informed by the truth that the media are tremendously important in shaping our understanding of the world around us because the world is largely mediated through the words and images of the media (MacLeod, 2019). That is why MacLeod had emphatically submitted that the media is not the masses’ friend noting that:

The media is a weapon of the elite in the battle for your mind. They are not plucky truth-tellers but, for the most part, are enormously powerful corporations propagandizing us for their own interests and agendas. They do not challenge power; they are power, the voice of the powerful. The mass media is not trying to provide the public with factual information, but rather to gaslight and propagandize them into subservience and support for elite positions, most of which are against our own interests. (MacLeod, 2019, p.10)

MacLeod further contends that the elite in Walter Lippmann’s words have long seen the public as a ‘bewildered herd’ of ‘ignorant’ and ‘meddlesome outsiders’ that needs to be placated with necessary illusions via the media in order to keep them from challenging the material interests of the elite. He posits that there is hardly any difference in state dominated media noted for

propaganda during dictatorship and corporate owned media under capitalism which should constitute free press as in both cases the entities that controls the society also controls the media (Macleod, 2019, p.10). Macleod further explains that just five gigantic corporations, Comcast, Disney, News Corporation, AT&T, and National Amusements control the vast majority of American media and similar monopolies exist worldwide. He substantiated this with a known fact that Media owners like Rupert Murdoch are known to demand their outlets to follow their own political outlooks adding that such media cannot bite the hand that feeds them and their reliance on big business as the principal source of income means stories questioning corporate power, capitalism and consumerism are systematically discouraged (Macleod, 2019, p.12).

This is the main reason why leading media scholars like Noam Chomsky (1989:viii) advises that 'citizens of the democratic societies should undertake a course of intellectual self-defence to protect themselves from manipulation and control', because corporate media no longer perform this function. Intellectual self-defence in this wise, according to Soules (2015, p.204) "involves seeking out alternate news sources and opinions, questioning source credibility and researching the context for important stories." It is therefore averred that propaganda and the media today remains inseparable from each other as every media outfit is found on interest and ruled by the interest of those that have access to it. Propaganda therefore remains the reason behind the establishment of many media outfits while the best means for politicians to pelt their deceit in the words of Walter lippmann to their supposedly bewildered herd of ignorant and meddling outsiders that needs to be placated with necessary illusions remains the media especially the government owned as contended in this study. This article thus conceives media and propaganda as highly interwoven.

### **Political Propaganda**

According to Ngoa (2011) there are three main types of propaganda which are Wartime Propaganda, Social/Educational Propaganda and political propaganda. Wartime Propaganda is to whip up sentiments for war while social/educational Propaganda is the creation of awareness on the dangers of

propaganda, which is counter propaganda (Ngoa, 2011). Political Propaganda however 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 seeks to alter or change the minds of people against an opponent that is, a candidate (for elective office/appointment), political party, policy or cause. It presents one-sided issue from a specified point of view, which could be economical with the truth (Ngoa, 2011).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study is predicated on Robert Young's conceptualisation of Literary Criticism and Achille Mbembe's rationale of the postcolony. The postcolonial era realities of disillusionment which traces the problem of Africa to failure of leadership is substantiated and further extended with a compendium of evidence to accommodate the complicity of the media as it is being used by the leaders to contribute to the people's disillusionment. Robert Young according to Syrotinski (2012) "was perhaps the first critic to link Derrida's work to postcolonial questions in his 1990 volume *White Mythologies*, where he claimed that Derrida had always challenged the founding assumptions of colonialist ideology, beginning with *Of Grammatology*, insofar as his meticulous analysis of the historical privileging of speech over writing in the Western metaphysical tradition" (p.411).

It is on this frame the current study is based, to also meticulously show through literary representation the unbecoming use and disposition of the media, as a way of challenging contemporary assumptions of leadership as the entire cause of Africa's backwardness. Similarly, the Cameroonian social theorist Achille Mbembe's position (1992) employed to complement the framework is a provocative challenge to African scholarship as Robins (2004, p.20) puts it that "rather than critique of neo-colonialism and global capital, Mbembe writes about the excess of the postcolony" including the connivance of the technocrats in rituals of state power. Mbembe (1992, p. 25) therefore in cautioning the African critics insists that the analyst must watch out for the myriad ways in which certain elements in the society guide, deceive and actually toy with power instead of confronting it." Mbembe (1992) describes these groups of people as sycophants saying:

Posts and palaces and public places have been filled with a large number of buffoons, fools and clowns at various levels, offering a variety of services – journalists, insiders, clerks, hagiographers, censors, informers, party hacks expert in eliciting votes of confidence, praise singers of any kind, courtiers, intellectuals in search of an official perch, middlemen . . . Their function is to preach before the fetish the fiction of its perfection. Thanks to them, the postcolony has become a world of narcissistic self-gratification. But flattery is not just produced in order to please the despot; it is manufactured in a quest for profit or favours. The aim is to share the table of the autocrat, to ‘eat from his hands’. Hence extraordinary deeds are attributed to him; he is covered in vainglory. (p.21)

With the foregoing, Mbembe avers that there exists a symbiotic relationship between the ruled and media practitioners, one which is to the detriment of the postcolony. To therefore idealise the media to Mbembe is uncritical as it has become apparent that there is collusion, a conspiracy, and an almost domestic familiarity between rulers and the media which effectively water down the integrity of the media thus turning power-play into performance (Mbembe, 1992). The study thus did not absolve leadership as albatross in postcolonial Africa but as a way of reinforcing that claim sets out to open up the frontiers of contemporary criticism to be more incisive in looking inward in order to address recurring post-independence disenchantment. It is on this framework the critical analysis of Adamu Usman’s *Sieged* is built.

#### **Adamu Usman’s *Sieged*: An Overview**

*Sieged* is a satiric bite on the fictional state Bivan’s House, which is a portrait of Nigeria’s social, political, and economic situation. In Bivan’s House, a picture of politics in a typical African state where politics has become the only route to wealth and, do or die affair is presented. Usman thus presents politics as a venture for never do well in other fields, an all-comers affair while the actors are streetwise and uncivil. The media because of its influential role in this piece becomes an avenue for the corrupt leaders and politicians to disillusion the people as they engage in unethical use of the media to promote wrong candidates thereby perpetuating their ill intentions about governance.



Adamu Usman's delineation of politicians in Bivan's house projects the average politician as one being certified by the street. The narrator indicates that "In Bivan's house if you had failed at everything, if no one could engage you in any job because you were not qualified for any, you joined politics" (p.3). Hence, looting of public wealth by politicians who like head hunters that have brought down an Elephant creates sieges in Bivan's house. The political office titles in Bivan's house attest to this as a myth in Bivan's house points to the fact that its politics originated from a society of head hunters. The leader of the society of head hunters was thus called the Prime head and so he who was called president in other country came to be called Prime head in Bivan's house while the National Assembly is called House of Archery. A governor is the big feast, Ambassadors are close banquets, Commissioners are ceremonial plots, Local government chairmen are common calabashes and councillors are hunting bags (p.3). From this head hunting ancestry, politics in Bivan's house later graduated into a game played by the people of the street.

Boyama is the outgoing Primehead of Bivan's house inhabiting Jonka's palace. He is of the ruling party, United Action Congress (UAC) and is poised at ensuring the power returns to the flag bearer of the party, Merima. UAC in Usman's *Sieged* portrays the party-politicking in Nigeria where everything both good and evil are done to ensure a ruling party, as in UAC, remains in power. Jamimi is from the opposition party, Peoples' Liberation Movement (PLM) and he is the peoples' choice. PLM is ready to wrestle power from UAC not only because the people are fed up with the corruption and degeneration that has bedevilled Bivans House through the UAC government but also because of the confidence reposed in their candidate. Jamimi has a humble background as his friends had from the secondary school believed in his intelligence and adjudged him capable of turning things around in Bivan's house. He also played a significant role as the labour union leader by championing the cause of the civil servants while in the civil service. Jamimi thus becomes a threat to the globalisation of eating (corruption) of Boyama, Merima and the UAC. The rising action of *Sieged* is laced with the campaign tour of both the PLM and UAC. Jamimi's ingenuity brings to the railway, the abandoned train in Bivans House for his campaign. The train becomes a

metaphor of incapacitation for UAC, its ruling candidate Boyama, and presidential candidate Merima as their government has brought no development to the people rather than destruction of legacies left by previous government. In Bivan's house: The roads are bad, only the wealthy can eat two times a day, there is no water, there is no light, every social infrastructure that was healthy before UAC took over the reins of power is now sick, limping and wobbling (*Sieged*, p.133).

This tone of anger, dissatisfaction and disillusionment expressed by Jamimi reveals the author's anger over how the game of politics is played in Nigeria where social infrastructures are day by day disintegrating. The Train suddenly becomes UAC's target as it has become a personification of hope for the people through Jamimi and also an impediment for UAC's rally. UAC and its loyalists have to wait for the train to pass with the peoples' acclaim for PLM whenever the two parties meet (p.46). To avert their impending doom, contrary to an advice by Makwu the only moral voice in UAC, UAC derails the PLM train causing the death of hundreds of PLM supporters. The government owned media, Chuwa Radio becomes a quick avenue for the ruling UAC party to throw PLM in the mud by challenging its prime candidate, Jamimi of orchestrating the massacre of his supporters especially for not being in the train when it derailed. The media therefore becomes a political propaganda tool for Merima and UAC as attention is shifted from their corruption and vicious activities over to Jamimi and the PLM.

Realizing the import of this, Jamimi suggests a national media debate between the two parties on how to move the nation forward. Though obvious from the debate that Jamimi-PLM candidate will win the election because of his transformative intentions, unfortunately he loses to UAC's rigging. The riot which Jamimi's party leader cautions him not to incite was sparked off by Chokali, one of the political thugs of UAC who was spurred by a drunk's song that opens his eyes to the absurdity of his condition "...looters are plundering his inheritance while he fights beggars over alms..." Riots break loose on the streets leaving a trail of blood and death in their wake. A new power equation emerges as Boyama and Merima are killed by their party leaders in connivance with the deputy Prime head.

### **The Media and Political Propaganda in *Sieged*: Focus on Chuwa Radio and Television**

Postcolonial Nigerian rulers are noted for their ingenuity in using and patronising the state media that makes their job easier, allows them to go without accountability, and accepts their narrative of events with little questioning. With these, they have been able to carry out their corrupt and nefarious activities as the people almost often remain deceived. Angered and disillusioned by this, Adamu Usman in *Sieged* goes on to (re)present this malaise as one of the avenues from which corrupt leaders sow their seeds of disillusionment. As such, we see on Chuwa Radio and Television the interplay of political propaganda and its devices as employed by the rulers to sway the mind of the masses from the people's choice for Jonka's palace. Any Government in power in Nigeria at the Federal and state level use the mass media that is owned by the government and those owned by their cronies as a tool to promote their propaganda through unbalanced reportage, mostly supported by misrepresentation of corruption and other anti-masses policies.

This is manifest in Usman's *Sieged* as Boyama the outgoing Primehead of Bivan's house and Merima, UAC candidate for the next election, in close succession appeared on National Television looking sorrowful and full of empathy to hypocritically condole and canvass the support of the people after they had derailed the PLM campaign Train of Jamimi. Merima looking like the Good Samaritan he had been called by Chuwa Radio, after condoling families of those who died in the crash, said "he was only grateful to be of help when it mattered most to the surviving victims of the crash" (*Sieged*, p.130).

The Plain folk propaganda device is employed here by Merima. Meanwhile, Plain folk according to Onuh (2010, p.17), "is a device used by politicians to win our confidence by appearing to be like us." Onuh (2010) adds "In other words, the propagandist identifies himself with the people, with the masses so as to carry them along with him" (p.17). Merima thus comes to Chuwa Radio not to condole the people but to use the mourning period as an opportunity to canvass the masses' vote, knowing full well that his name by virtue of his party UAC is not in the good record of the people. The poignant implication of this scene is telling, as

already the news making round as cooked by the UAC is that Jamimi intentionally kills his supporters, which is not true. Shortly after Merima's message, Boyama the outgoing Primehead's message came on air. Boyama in his condolence speech to the families of the victims of the crash said: certain people who were supposed to be in the crashed train had been found to have fortunately not be in it. But he wondered where such people were and why they hadn't come out to condole those whose relations were unfortunately in the ill-fated train (*Sieged*, p.130).

For Boyama, we see the employment of the Name-calling technique and Glittering generalities of propaganda. Although Jamimi's name is not mentioned but it's evident that he is the one being referred to. Onuh (2010) describes this Name-calling as "a situation whereby a person, an issue or a programme could be called name which will block their acceptability because listeners have little or no time to examine the object properly and it matters so much how it is presented to them" (p.16). This is not unconnected to the fact that when you give a bad name to a person or thing, such a person or thing stands damaged as a popular proverb reads "give a dog a bad name to hang it". Meanwhile Glittering generalities is a device to make us accept and approve without examining the evidence levelled against a person (Onuh, 2010).

So Boyama, as Dr Olusola Saraki, the Nigeria's second republic senate leader in *This Day Newspaper* on May 5, 2003 did against his former party ANPP, used Name-calling and glittering generalities against Jamimi with the intention of dragging him in the mud before the people who loves and wants him as the new Prime head. In the case of ANPP, Dr Olusola as Boyama did to favour Merima did his to favour his son Bukola Saraki. Dr Olusola Saraki in the mentioned daily says "ANPP, Dishonest, Insincere." This Saraki was a major financier and co-founder of All Nigeria Peoples Party, ANPP before he joined the ruling party under which his son Bukola Saraki was "selected" as the Governor in Kwara state, Nigeria (Onuh, 2010). Because of Dr. Olusola's status in kwara state, many of his followers in ANPP rejected and condemn ANPP without examining the evidence levelled against the party. Thus for Saraki, Name calling as a propaganda device in the media helped him to achieve his deceit. However in Boyama's case it failed as the masses confidence in Jamimi neutralized its impact; this is evident as UAC eventually rigged the election.

The deduction from this analysis is the unethical usage of the media as a tool for political propaganda especially as against credible candidates, the consequence which both the media practitioners and the masses continue to grapple with. Journalism in Nigeria's 21<sup>st</sup> century therefore leaves much to be desired when one considers the role it played in the 90's as enumerated in Ajibade (2003). This is so because it now contributes to the plight of the people by not giving optimum support to credible candidates who lack the financial strength needed for their ambition. This ought not to be as the creed which institutionalised them as the fourth estate requires they have optimum knowledge and opinion of the milieu hence their ability to promote credible personality not withstanding their financial outlook. Their failure in this respect however is not unconnected to Mbembe's (1992, p.21) position that "The aim is to share the table of the autocrat, to 'eat from his hands'." This awkward act as evident in government media and well orchestrated by the ruling parties in Nigeria since return to democracy in 1999 are ably represented in *Sieged* as they do everything possible to deceive the people and remain in power. Boyama hence employs all propaganda devices through the media to ensure Merima the presidential candidate of his party UAC comes into power and continue sowing the seeds of disillusionment in Bivan's house. As the narrative proceeds, we see how Boyama and Merima's statement shook Jamimi out of his shocking state. Jamimi states that:

At this moment of national grief, we must put politics behind us and give victims of the crash and their families the sympathy they deserve. To play politics with a loss like this shows lack of human feelings. Only those used to passing human beings through misfortunes or nightmares like the one caused by the train crash are capable of such lack of feelings. While some of us are still in shock, those who are not shocked by the chilling disaster rushed to the radio and television houses to pay condolences that sound mocking. Shock apart, we do not have the same access to television and radio. I have to pay for my condolence. Others do not have to pay to mock the people in television and radio houses built with the people's money. (*Sieged*, p.130)

One other area that Jamimi's condolence addresses is the access to the media which the power that he abuses. Being owned by

government should make a radio or TV station readily accessible for the people but in contemporary Nigeria an opposing politician is either denied access or price bar is raised beyond being affordable. The implications of this are enormous in that it discourages among other things capable candidates vying for election while incisive criticism of incumbent government by analyst and human right activists are denied. Jamimi further affirm that government radio are being used by politicians in power to perfect through propaganda their heinous acts as he reveals how the UAC derails the train and with the intention of terminating his life:...it was not God that derailed the train but the devil. A mischief cut the train in Okunno forest which caused the train to crash. A mischief dug ditches in the forest and poured petrol into them to ignite the crashed train...the people seeing me on television and me telling the people I am still alive wouldn't have been necessary. If the good people of this country don't see me and I don't tell them I am still alive, on Election Day-a week from now, the electorates would be told I am dead and the PLM has no candidate. So UAC should be returned to power to continue doing what it knows best: living on the people instead of for the people; sapping the people instead of serving them (*Sieged*, pp.131-132).

Jamimi here recognises the influential power of the media on the people and now that his opponent UAC and its candidate had switched to it, using it as a tool for propaganda to drag him in the mud before the people, he also quickly comes on air with counter-propaganda to redeem his image. Meanwhile, Jamimi is not responsible for the crash; he chooses not to go by rail the very day of the accident because he has influenza. So he decides to travel by road to Babika for the campaign instead of rail (p.112). A day after Jamimi's paid advert, Merima comes on Television again, this time around with another version of propaganda in response to Jamimi's statement which obviously had foiled his initial propaganda. Merima says: It must excite national curiosity why certain people were only not in the train on the day it was to crash. Now such people had rushed to the radio and television to tell the world they were not in the train when it crashed and roasted their innocent supporters to death like grasshoppers in a wild forest fire. Such people had sounded as if they were too happy to be alive even though those they aspire to lead were dead (p.132).

The import and weight of Merima's statement as seen above can be measured in the response of a respondent in a survey by Ngoa (2003) on the effectiveness and ethical nature of propaganda in politics among some Nigerians. According to the respondent, "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" (20), he says. The obvious therefore is that Merima like his political father Boyama is out with lies against the suitable candidate Jamimi.

Usman's presentation of the use of media by politicians is evident here as postcolonial Nigerian corrupt leaders will do anything to debar young, dedicated and vibrant upcoming candidates from occupying the seat of power. The media is the least of these means and they are brilliant in its usage. An occurrence similar to this in Nigeria's history and perhaps refracted by Usman in *Sieged* is seen in the *Sun Newspaper*, Saturday 10 May, 2003 pp.38 (quoted in Onuh, 2010), when a chieftain of the Northern Socio-Cultural Group, the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) Alhaji Mohammed Abdurrahman set the nation against Muhammadu Buhari's presidential ambition. He cautioned, "Buhari Presidency, A Repeat of Abacha Orgy" Meanwhile, to many Nigerians, Abacha remains the worse head of state Nigeria had ever produced. Alhaji Mohammed either because of party differences or personal hatred wanted to condemn Buhari by comparing him with Abacha, just for people to have deep hatred for him. However, years after may seem to have proven Alhaji Mohammed's caution as prophetic as the cries of Nigerians especially after the country clocked 60 on October 1st 2020 drew global attention.

The corruption of Buhari's government and brutality of the Police as enshrined in the nationwide #ENDSARS# protest is shocking as compared to what obtains during the administration of former president, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. While the President refused to initially speak by abusing the sensibilities of the people despite calls on him to address the nation, the Lagos state governor Babajide Sanwoolu who had ordered military to disperse the peaceful protest at Lekki Toll gate gave false figures of casualties in his broadcast. This is when independent and foreign media had reported casualties. President Buhari by this act sets the

Nigerian youths against himself thereby throwing weight behind Alhaji Mohammed's claim. Meanwhile, according to the summary of Testimonial, a propaganda device, whenever one hates someone whatever he does is bad and once love is there, whatever he does is right. The president thus discredits himself as the social media became awash with abusive language and horrendous cartoons of his image. Buhari's silence had incited the masses while his eventual speech now tagged "speechless Thursday" nailed him as he failed to address the plight of the masses rather he stacked the card against the truth by giving empty promises and enumerating his achievements. Card stacking being a propaganda device of employing all arts of deception to present oneself in good light was thus employed by Merima by enumerating his rescue effort when the train derailed. When combined with the Testimonial device, one understands better what Merima aims at in *Sieged* as he is poised at discrediting Jamimi's reputation with a testimony of the train crash in order for the people to hate him and consequently reject his candidature for presidency.

Usman not only refracts Nigerian leaders' employment of propaganda in the media as ludicrous but also (re)presents the government media and the journalists therein who should be the conscience of the people as shallow minded and sieged. Investigative journalism empowers the media to alongside security operatives unravel the cause and perpetrators of ugly incidences and consequently help bring justice to the voiceless. The otherwise is what is obtained in Chuwa Radio and Television in *Sieged* as manifest in government media outfits in Nigeria. While investigations should have been carried out to unravel the cause of the train crash, which really would have confirmed UAC's party chairman and Merima's deputy as the master minders (p.212), Chuwa Radio and Television are busy propagating the lies of Boyama and Merima. They would not have done this anyway according to Okediran (2009, p.29) without some 'fertilizers' (bribe). Chuwa Radio and Television in Usman's *Sieged* therefore in a way are refractions of the Nigerian Federal and State Radio and Television and other bought over media outfits, which the leaders employ for propaganda purposes in order to perpetuate their bad governance, corruption and seat tight syndrome. The journalists therefore lack professionalism or have jettisoned it to



retain their jobs. Jamimi's response to Merima's broadcast opens us to another world of disillusionment through propaganda in Usman's *Sieged*. In Jamimi's words:

What is the gain of PLM in the death of its supporters? The nation is dying a slow, painful death and we are here dancing to the beautiful gaze of the moon. Let's face what is eating our people. The roads are bad, only the wealthy can eat two times a day, there is no water, there is no light, every social infrastructure that was healthy before UAC took over the reins of power is now sick, limping and wobbling into the grave. Let's debate on how to move our nation forward instead of snapping our fingers at each other. Let's talk on how our actions can make our people dream again. (*Sieged*, p.133)

Jamimi, therefore, calls for a national media debate which normally would not have come up or agreed upon on economic and social problems facing Bivan's house but knowing full well that the media would afford the two candidates the opportunity of winning the people to their side, especially Merima who is mostly on the losing side because of UAC's ill track record, Merima accepted the challenge. Usman (2011) in the novel therefore sees the media as sieged just as it is politicians that now prods it and decides its direction.

### **Media Debates as Propaganda in *Sieged***

One of the social responsibility the media owes the society is a duty both to promote community and the individuals within it. Hence, the litmus test of whether or not the news profession fulfils its mission over a long term is its advocacy for those outside the socio-economic establishment (Christians 1986, p.110). Christians by advocacy here does not mean reporting that espouses only one sort of political or social agenda. Rather he insists: in its loftiest sense, the press ought to amplify public debate and reconstitute the argument so that it becomes an important public forum where significant issues of social justice are fruitfully raised and resolved (Christians, 1986, p.123). Discontented with the use of this worthwhile medium (Political media debate) by politicians in post-independence Nigeria, Adamu Usman goes on in *Sieged* (2011) to (re)present how it is now being employed to disillusion the people.

In *Sieged*, Jamimi, the peoples' choice knowing full well this responsibility of the media challenges Merima to a national debate on how to move Bivan's house forward "instead of snapping fingers at each other over the train crash claiming lives of PLM supporters" (p.133). Merima takes the challenge with a view to using all manners of propaganda to win over the mind of the people in the next election which he eventually rigged. The debate takes place three days before the election. It was the first time there was a debate by Primehead candidates in Bivan's house politics which prompted someone after the debate to say: "anytime we want a debate on what politicians have for us, we have to cause a train to crash" (p.133). The debate, anchored by the Managing Director of Visual Communications Network, begins with the first question posed to Jamimi, the peoples' choice: "The taps are no longer running...and there is no light... What will you do about water supply and light if elected into office as Prime head?"(p.135). Jamimi responds:

It is quite embarrassing that in the 21st century, we are still talking of how to provide clean, portable drinking water to our people when all over the world this social amenity is taken for granted. The soaring unemployment in the country is because of power shortages. Usually power shortages are caused by increase in power demand. In Bivan's house where industries that used to place heavy demand on power supply are all dead, one would have expected that power shortages and outages would disappear with the dead industries. But the opposite is the situation. Boyama's UAC government seems to be saying that less power demand means less power supply- an absurd thing. As we explore the possibilities of generating power from wind and solar energy, the old, decayed turbines and transformers of our hydroelectric power generating system that cause power shortages would be replaced with new ones. (*Sieged*, p.135-136)

It is obvious that as a socialist realist Adamu Usman is presenting Jamimi as how a responsible politician should be in thought and act, as Jamimi's words are poignant, pregnant and promising. However, similar statement in the past have been made by corrupt politicians to canvass for votes from the electorates and after winning, such statements become empty with nothing tangible done for the people. But Jamimi's track record even in the mouth

of his opponent and adversary, the UAC, speaks much for him thereby ratifying his views and promises at the debate as real and not propaganda. This is evident at a meeting by the UAC leaders after the prime head television debate. Makwu the only moral voice in UAC begins this that: 'It's a big political capital to do great things in any position of authority one finds himself. A mere labour leader heaping up this kind of popularity because of the credible leadership he gave workers is such a big advice no one needed more'. Responding, Jamimi's opponent, Merima notes 'with the little money he had as labour leader, he bought fertilizers for peasants.' 'He influenced the establishment of a foundation for orphans and widows' said Makwu.

Corroborating, the chairman points out: 'He is a man without a price. Even the corrupt government of Hamman could not buy him.' (p.144). All these establish Jamimi as the incorruptible Prime head candidate best for Jonka palace in Bivan's house and that he is a man of his words. Meanwhile, as the debate progresses we see Merima's ingenuity at the use of the media as a tool for propaganda to disillusion the people. The first question posed to him by the anchor man reveals this. "Under UAC your party, the whole country lies prostrate under the wind of free trade. Globalization with your party seems to mean that Bivan's house needs not produce anything because it can get all it needs from the global market. That is why even the diamonds in our country need not be polished here as we can buy polished diamond in the global market. Is globalisation only of consumption under which we are reduced only to consumers or of consumption and production under which we are required to produce something?" (p.138). Merima responds: globalisation is both of production and consumption. The death of our industries didn't happen overnight. The rot started long before UAC came to power. Yes, this government has not done very well in arresting the rot and turning things around. But I assure you under me things will be different. The comatose industries would breathe again. "That was what Boyama said when he was campaigning to be elected, says the anchor man" Boyama is Boyama and Merima is Merima. Every tortoise carries its shell" (*Sieged*, pp.138).

Adamu Usman's authorial vision in *Sieged* is well inferred here. First, Merima like most politicians in Nigeria acknowledges the fact that his party UAC and his predecessors have not performed

well and goes ahead making empty assurances of what he will do if he is voted as the Prime head forgetting that the people are aware that he is coming in to fulfil the popular saying 'like father like son.' Similarly, the debate could be described as a fictional account of the presidential candidate debate that preceded the administration of former president Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of Nigeria where his promises were considered propaganda in view of socio-economic and security realities that characterised his administration. To worsen matters, the Chairman, National Publicity of Goodluck/Sambo National support organisation (GNSO), Rotimi Omoboriowo in an interview before the election published in the Nigerian Tribune (January 21, 2011, p.24) to disillusion the people said: "Jonathan Will Surely Deliver." When asked on assurances of Jonathan's fulfilment of his campaign promises, he claims: "Jonathan unlike some people does not just talk and make empty promises. He does not want to just impress Nigerians. No, he want to justify his position in proffering lasting solutions to the problems facing the country and its people...Jonathan incontestably remains the appropriate man for the job and he can be entrusted with the people's mandate...forget sentiments, Jonathan has what it takes to take this country to the next level. This is not propaganda; this is reality" (p.24).

Juxtaposing these lines with the socio-economic and security realities that pervaded the nation then reveals the emptiness of the statements, making them propaganda in the media and pitching the president as wanting in view of his promises to Nigerians. Indeed another replica of post-independence disillusionment. Nigeria therefore could be described as being in a ratchet; that is, merrily dancing at a spot without moving forward under the administration which Boko Haram almost stifled life out of. As the television debate continues, Merima answers the second question which reveals how unrealistic a fraction of Nigerian politicians are. The question: "under globalisation of consumption promoted by UAC your party, members of Bivan's house have been reduced to eating, farting and defecating. We are either eating a car produced in Finland or a computer produced in America. How will you relocate us to thinking, production and wealth, if elected Prime head?" (138). Responding, Merima says: eating, farting and defecating...Hmmm...well you know it is not easy getting people to leave Bonga - a place of eating and drinking,

for malo- a place of labour. But if elected prime head, I will relocate our people from Bonga to Malo by pointing at Meya- the home of want which receives those Bonga has pushed out. (*Sieged*, p.138) Adamu Usman here presents the oration and rhetoric of Nigerian politicians that are laced with propaganda to sway the mind of the people instead of presenting them facts. When asked the same question, Jamimi the peoples' choice responded amazingly. Jamimi submits to the same that: "we can do that if we have the courage of our conviction, which we do. We will freeze trade and freeze tastes. We will close the sluice gates against the floods of goods coming from outside and tell our people to discipline their tastes for foreign goods.

There will be protests and treachery against us, but I tell you we will not budge and we will survive and Bivan's house will prosper" (p.137). From the foregoing, we see the clear difference between the two contestants as evident during preparations for election in postcolonial Nigeria. The Nigerian media especially the state owned ones are therefore exploited by the ruling party for propaganda to disillusion the people and against their opponents. When invited to media debates they do the same with empty promises. Unfortunately, like in Bivan's house, the peoples' choice hardly gets to the seat of power as the elections are being rigged even through the media as indicated by the narrator in *Sieged* that: "There were four main points of election rigging in Bivan's house: election material collection centres, the polling units, collation centres, radio and television houses where election results were announced." (p.152). A startling revelation by Usman is the least expected use of the media to cheat the electorate at the point of announcing result. This becomes easy as almost often it is through government media that results are announced hence the results are doctored by the returning officers

### **Conclusion**

This study concludes with the known fact that the world is largely mediated through the words and images of the media, which makes the media susceptible to political propaganda. The TV and especially the radio via which information are easily dispersed have, therefore, been over the years engaged by politicians to gain and win the interest of the masses especially during campaign for elections. It is, however, disheartening that in postcolonial Africa,

especially Nigeria that blessed with human and natural resources, the leaders have continued to disappoint the masses and have further infiltrated the media which ought to have served as a check on their ill administration to deceive the people. State owned media are particularly bastardised to serve, in large scale, this disillusionment to the people in democratic dispensation. What we, therefore, see in Usman's *Sieged* is the portraiture of the media being used for political propaganda by the rulers and ruling party to rubbish suitable candidates and the peoples' choice. Media professionals of government outfits are also indicted as they cannot be described as belonging to the fourth estate of the realm as they cannot rise to the responsibility and to the challenge of personal example as Ajibade (2003, p.12) states that "journalism is not meant to make the environment cosy for leaders of nations, it is to prod them to act in the interest of the larger society: it is meant to cause them sleepless night". Government owned media in view of the above in contemporary Nigeria have lost audience as they are rubber stamping agents and diffusers of propaganda, hence, only a few and especially the rulers watch or listen to them for self gratification. This article thus conclude that politicians in postcolonial Nigeria have in their wits and crafts continually engaged the media with a sole intention of using the media to sway the mind of the people and that only a people oriented media can divest their propaganda by pitching their odds with the truth to usher in good governance.

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