

Ghana Dagbon Chieftaincy Crisis: To What Extent did Government Propaganda Abet Gbewah Palace Ram Down and Evasion of Justice?

Seth Sayibu Mahama^{*}

Box 764 Tamale, Ghana

Email: mahamaseth10@yahoo.com

Email: smahama@uds.edu.gh

Abstract

This article examines the extent to which media propaganda has played out in Ghana's latest Dagbon chieftaincy crisis. The dispute over the Dagbon kingship, traceable to developments in 1948 between the Abudus and the Andanis was settled by Ghana's Supreme Court in 1986. This settlement came at the back of many failed attempts by Commissions of Enquiry set up by successive political regimes. In March 2002 disagreements over the performance of certain traditional rites between the Abudu and Andani royal gates culminated in an attack on the Dagbon king, Naa Yakubu II that eventually claimed his life and scores of his retinue. Government's denial of media reports of attacks on the Yaa Naa, its failure to intervene in the matter, the imposition of media censorship after the regicide and its failure or inability to prosecute persons suspected of complicity in the regicide triggered suspicions of a politically motivated act. This paper investigates media propaganda by government in the run up to the murder of the Dagbon king and the escalation of the conflict and how these techniques of propaganda activated allegations of government shielding the culprits. Using a qualitative design with a purposive sampling approach to generate data, the study found that government propaganda played a huge role in the regicide of Naa Yakubu II and the evasion of justice by his killers. The study is significant given that it is the first study on exclusive media propaganda by government in the Dagbon crisis reportage.

Keywords: Propaganda; Media; Censorship; Government; Dagbon-conflict.

^{*} Corresponding author.

1. Introduction

Within conflict research, there is a large body of literature on the Dagbon conflict ranging from its causes, effects, political interference and possible solutions. This body of literature dates back to 1972, [1] and continues to flourish today [2]. Authors of Dagbon chieftaincy conflict, including authors in [1, 3, 4, 5, 6], have examined the conflict, focusing on its causes, genesis, political interference and possible solutions to the conflict. Author in [1] traces the genesis of the conflict in which a traditional matter became a political issue and blamed the activities of Dagomba elites for the conflict. Even though traced to developments in 1948, its violent nature often surfaces any time a particular political tradition is in power [7, 8]. Following this line of argument, Author in [5] asserts that political maneuvering and intrinsic actions by influential individuals who are connected to the two gates and supported by ruling political elites occupying sensitive positions in the past have contributed to the complexity of the crisis. Author in [6] places the blame on the denial of justice, mistrust and the relegation of traditional methods of conflict resolution. He proposes a traditional method of resolution as the way forward for sustainable peace in Dagbon. Author in [2] discusses the role of media propaganda in the conflict. He concludes that government, the military, and the intelligence community propaganda as well as propaganda by the warring factions played a large role in the regicide of Naa Yakubu II and the perpetuation of the conflict. His work, *the first of its kind in media propaganda and the Dagbon conflict, did not however discuss the exclusive role of government propaganda in the regicide of Naa Yakubu II. It did not also discuss the role of government propaganda in the evasion of justice by the perpetrators of the crime.* This study fills that lacuna by examining the exclusive role of government propaganda in the regicide of Naa Yakubu II and how government propaganda influenced the evasion of justice by the killers of the Dagbon king.

One of the significance of the study for scholars of media and conflict as well as journalists and historians is that it is the first study on the exclusive role of government propaganda in the regicide of Naa Yakubu II. Again, it is the first study on the role of propaganda in the evasion of justice by the killers of the Dagbon king.

Information for this paper was based on firsthand account gathered through key informants' interviews, scholarly works and newspapers' accounts on the Dagbon conflict. Qualitative research design was utilized to generate the data through purposive sampling approach. Purposive sampling otherwise known as subjective sampling is the picking of interview objects based on the researcher's judgment to fit the study's focus [9]. The interview data was collected from Abudu and Andani opinion leaders, civil society and journalists. Respondents were chosen to reflect the hypothesis that sought to examine government propaganda of the media in the reportage of the Dagbon conflict. In coding, data was categorized into government propaganda and sub-categorized into different types of propaganda like half-truths, censorship, lies, the fear factor and manipulation and recorded same for the analysis by using thematic and textual analysis.

2. Background of the Dagbon Chieftaincy Conflict

The Dagbon chieftaincy is based on rotation system put in place as far back as the nineteenth century after the death of Yaa Naa Yakubu I. His first son Abdulai succeeded him, followed by another son Andani II. This rotation system continued until the death of Mahama III, an Abudu in 1953, when an Andani, Andani III who

was to succeed him was short-changed, and the Gbanlanaⁱ ascended the throne as Abdulai III in March 1954. The Andanis dissatisfied, mounted a campaign to have the Yaa Naa deskinning on a number of grounds. They argued that a physically deformed person (defective eyes and defective toes) was not allowed by tradition to be installed Yaa Naa [1]. However, that campaign conflicts another Dagbon tradition that says that once installed, a Yaa Naa cannot be deskinning. Abdulai III survived the crunch and passed on in 1967 (Ibid).

Following an earlier agreement brokered in 1960 during the Nkrumah government (1957–66) Andani iii became the next Yaa Naa in 1968. The Nkrumah administration had attempted to restore the rotational succession system in Dagbon where the royal clans agreed that after Abdulai III's demise, an Andani would ascend the throne. However, in the same year of 1968, the National Liberation Council (NLC) government (1966–69) that overthrew the Nkrumah regime set up the Mate Kole Committee that declared that Yaa Naa Andani III was not properly installed in line with Dagbon custom and therefore invalidated his enskinning. The Progress party government (1969–1972) headed by Dr. K. A. Busia that took over from the NLC in 1969 accepted the recommendations and effected the Mate Kole committee report and installed an Abudu, Gbanlana Mahamadu as the king (with the skin name Abdulai IV), [1].

In 1972, Acheampong's military government (1972–78) that overthrew the Busia regime set up the Ollenu Committee in response to Andanis' agitations for a review of the decision of the Mate Kole Committee. Based on the recommendations of the Ollenu Committee that the deskinning of Yaa Naa Andani III was illegitimate, Yakubu Andani II, the eldest son of Andani III, who died in 1969, was enskinning as Yaa Naa in 1974 with the skin name Naa Yakubu II.

In 1986, Ghana's Supreme Court, during the era of the Provisional National Defense Council upheld the recommendations of the Ollenu Committee and acknowledged the rotation system arrangement [7, 10]. One of the far-reaching orders of the court was that notwithstanding how one seizes to become Yaa Naa, that person should be considered a former Yaa Naa [7]. This 'order' provoked 'a skirmish of wit' between the two feuding factions regarding the fate of Abdulai IV who passed on two years after the ruling. While the Andanis argued that the order was to ensure a balance to promote peace but not to establish a twofold authority, the Abudus contended that by the order, Abdulai IV was a former Yaa Naa and should be recognized as such, including the performance of his funeral rites at the royal mausoleum in the Gbewah palace, having been buried there [2]. This disagreement was to have dire consequences on Naa Yakubu II's life as he constantly opposed it.

2.1 The Regicide of Naa Yakubu II

On March 27, 2002, Naa Yakubu II was murdered at the Gbewah palace in Yendi after three days of attack, reigniting an age-old conflict over succession to the Dagbon kingship between the Abudu and Andani Royal clans. Earlier on March 25, media reports suggested the Gbewah palace was under siege by the Abudus over the performance of the fire festival, a traditional rites in Dagbon. The fire festival is the sole preserve of the king, and in the case of Yendi, the Yaa Naa, however, Mahamadu Abdulai, (dd.2022) the eldest son of Abdulai IV (a deposed and deceased Yaa Naa) was leading the Abudus to perform certain rites associated with the festival. The impression his action created was that of a dual authority in Yendi, which the Yaa Naa presumed to be a

challenge to his authority as the king. The tensions that followed forced the Northern Regional Security Council to impose a dusk to dawn curfew and ban the festival. However, the (then) Northern Regional Minister, Prince Imoro Andani [dd. 2021] lifted the ban after talks with Naa Yakubu II [10].

Contrary to claims by the Interior Minister, Malik Alhassan Yakubu, that Yendi was calm, telephone services to Yendi were disconnected and fighting between the Abudus and the Andanis persisted around the Gbewah palace between March 25 and March 27, 2002, leading to the assassination of Naa Yakubu II [10]. His body was burnt after his head and one of his arms were severed from the body. The killers bolted with the severed parts that were found a week later at the crime scene [11, 134]. The crime scene together with the entire palace area was under guard by soldiers amid dusk to dawn curfew imposed immediately after the regicide. The military-led state security told the Wuaku Commission of enquiry that they could not go to the aid of the king because the battery of their armoured vehicle failed to function [12]. As the alleged killers remained evasive even after returning the severed parts of Naa Yakubu II, suspicion was rife that they were being shielded by government.

Two significant issues have been identified as having sparked off the Gbewah palace attack. Olawale [13], identifies the outstanding funeral of Abdulai IV at the royal tomb, while according to the Wuaku Commission, the Abudu family's resolve to perform certain traditional festivals and the Andanis opposition to it triggered the attack [12].

2.2 Government's Response to the Regicide

A Minister of State at the Presidency of John Kufour, Miss Elizabeth Ohene while addressing the media said a sense of complacency gripped the security thus resulting in the murder of the king [14]. In order to ensure order in Dagbon after the king's murder, government of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) declared a State of Emergency and dusk to dawn curfew in the Dagbon traditional area. It also declared the whole palace area a restricted area with heavy military and police presence. Government professed a censorship regime and by this, media organisations were required to clear every report on the Dagbon issue with the Information Ministry before dissemination [15]. As part of its response to the crisis, a mediation team, called the Committee of Eminent Chiefs was established to investigate the traditional aspect of the crisis. Government also set up the Wuaku Commission of inquiry headed by Justice I. N. K. Wuaku to investigate the criminal aspect of the crisis [10].

The commission's findings absolved all government officials accused by the Andanis of complicity in the crisis. It also recommended the prosecution of suspects from both the Abudus and the Andanis for various crimes, including possession of arms. Prosecutions were recommended against some Abudus for conspiring to murder and murdering the Yaa Naa [12]. These recommendations however fell short of any significant impact. Government issued a White Paper on the Wuaku Commission report and framed the conflict as 'a three-day war'ⁱ and disagreed with some of the commission's recommendations, including the transfer of the Yendi Municipal Chief Executive, Alhaji Mohammed Habib Tijani and the prosecution of the Northern Regional Minister, Imoro Andani for criminal negligence, arguing criminal negligence was alien to the country's laws. Alhaji Mohammed Habib Tijani and Imoro Andani were amongst a group of Abudus selected to serve in the Kufour administration. The others included Alhaji Malik Yakubu as Interior Minister, Major retired Abukari

Sulemana, a senior security officer at the national security outfit and General retired Joshua Hamidu as National Security Advisor. Government hailed the commission's exoneration of these security officials implicated by the Andanis but wondered why the commission treated Alhaji Ibrahim Mahama, counsel for the late Naa Yakubu 'so lightly' for allegedly establishing a training camp to train fighters to defend the slain king and suborning witnesses during the commission's sittings [16]. The Andanis also disagreed with the commission's final report [17].

The Eminentⁱⁱⁱ Chiefs' committee that considered the traditional aspect of the crisis advised that funerals of Naa Yakubu II and Naa Abdula IV be performed at the Gbewah palace and all rights accorded a Yaa Naa extended to them. Naa Yakubu II's successor was to emerge from the Andani Royal gate and in line with tradition, to be decided by Dagbon king-makers led by the Kuga Naa who is the principal custodian of Dagbon tradition. The committee's advice was however in sharp contrast to positions held by the two chieftaincy factions. The Andanis long held posture since 1988 was that Abdulai IV did not die as Yaa Naa and therefore his funeral should not be performed at the royal palace. They argued that such a move was uncustomary and a sacrilege. This position of the Andanis was notwithstanding the fact that Abdulai IV was buried at the Gbewah palace when he passed on in 1986. The Abudus had also indicated it was their turn to occupy the vacant Yendi skin in line with the rotation system after the demise of Naa Yakubu II. This was also notwithstanding the fact that Naa Yakubu II was killed allegedly by the Abudu fighters and therefore did not die a natural death that would trigger the system of rotation.

Following from the decision of the eminent chiefs, Naa Abubakari Mahama was on Saturday January 19, 2019 chosen as the new Yaa Naa with the skin name Naa Bukali II. He was the chief of Savelugu before his elevation. On January 25, 2019 his enskinment took place at Yendi and attended by the President, Akufo Addo and former President, John Mahama.

3. Propaganda, the Media and Bloody Conflicts: A Theoretical Framework

Propaganda could be traced back to 2,400 years ago in 'The Art of War' by Sun-tzu [18] and is a form of communication with an effort to accomplish a response that advances the desired intentions of the sender of the communication [19]. Thus it seeks to deliberately and systematically influence public opinion to favour the sender [20]. Even though not a bad concept as it could be a tool for assisting in attaining democratic values, propaganda has received an immoral repute over time because of its long standing role of driving terror, pretence and ignorance [21]. During World War I (1914-1918), propaganda was deployed in 'an organised and scientific manner' against the media (18, p.85) and in World War II, (1939-1945), Josef Goebbels, the Germany Minister for Propaganda, instructed the media to galvanize public support in favour of the Nazi doctrine in Germany and beyond by instructing and enlightening the masses in order to magnify the ideology [22]. Goebbels averred that news is a war weapon that has a purpose of wagging war and not giving out information' [ibid].

Propaganda has since featured in media and political communications and has been used throughout bloody wars and conflicts against the media like in World Wars I & II, the Vietnam War in the mid-50s, the Rwandan

genocide in 1994 and the Gulf Wars of 1991 and 2003 among others. Propaganda includes lies and half-truths [23, 24, 25, 26, 27]. It also includes manipulation [28, 18, 29, 26], and the fear factor [21, 30].

A lie is a deliberate false statement made by one who warrants it to be true [31]. Lying is saying something you believe is false with intent to deceive [32, p.35]. Lie as propaganda tool has featured prominently in bloody conflicts across the world. For instance, during World War I, Britain peddled a big lie against Germany when it accused Germany of melting down German soldiers' bodies for glycerin in the famous 'German corpse factory story'. This atrocity propaganda by the British was envisioned to arouse anti-German emotion in China [28, 3]). The United States (U.S) government in its attempt to justify war claims against the Saddam regime demonized Saddam Hussein with the use of outright lies and half-truths to mobilize public opinion against his regime. A daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to the U.S., Nayirah, shed tears in a testimony to the U.S Congressional Committee on Human Rights of how she observed Iraqi soldiers tossing Kuwaiti babies from their incubators into an orgy. After the Iraqi war of 2003 she admitted that it was staged for propaganda drives [33]. The baby incubators story was inspired by a lie told by Britain during World War I when Britain accused German soldiers of throwing Belgium babies into the air and catching them by their daggers [19].

Saddam was alleged to have concealed 'Weapons of Mass Destruction' (WMD) and was harbouring 'Mother of All Bombs' and was conniving with al-Qaida's Osama bin Laden for terror activities [26, 33]. These were later found to be untrue, and 'manufactured with dubious legality' [34, p.441]. Iraqi's military might was exaggerated by the Pentagon whose disinformation about 'artillery powerful beyond imagination' and 'vast stock of chemical and biological weapons' was to manipulate the media, mobilize public opinion and find excuse to justify the bombing of Iraq [28, p.131]. U.S Defense Secretary, William Cohen revealed, after the war in Iraq, that none of the targets in Iraq contained any Weapons of Mass Destruction [35]. Lies by the Kuwaiti teenager, Nayirah and the Pentagon disinformation about weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq were enough to manipulate the media to mobilise public opinion in the West to go to war against Saddam. Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell claimed after the war that, 250,000 Iraqis died but a Freedom of Information request to the Pentagon revealed 100,000 deaths and 300,000 injured [18].

Media manipulation in war times includes the establishment of a Media Operations Centre or Media Management Centre to co-ordinate press activities to avert a propaganda disaster or to guard against conflicting reports that could lead to negative publicity. A clear case of a Media Operations Centre as a manipulative propaganda tool was during the 1999 Kosovo conflict when NATO was confronted with a torrent of conflicting responses to its bombing of a refugee convoy at Djacovica [18]. NATO's Supreme Allied Commander, General Wesley Clark admitted that civilians were bombed by NATO soldiers, but Pentagon's spokesperson Ken Bacon denied any civilian fatalities. Amidst a barrage of criticisms from the media, and outrage from the western public, NATO was paralyzed into a confused state compelling them to hire the services of Alastair Campbell, the Press Secretary to British Prime Minister, Tony Blair. He established a Media Operations Centre to manage the bad news. The idea was to co-ordinate media activities to avert the temptation of giving further conflicting reports on the civilian bombing. Campbell managed the crisis by admitting the facts but passed the back on the Serbs. As he later puts it, 'it is presentation and not just performance that matters' [18].

Lie as propaganda technique in bloody conflicts is not confined to the West alone. In Rwanda, the Hutus used the media to demonize and marshal public support against the Tutsis. This demonization drive through the use of outright lies and half-truths led to the genocide [25]. Hutu led government media told the audience that Tutsi rebels were rushing in from Uganda to 'pauperize, displace and subjugate Rwandan majority population' and encouraged them to kill and maim the Tutsis [25, p.20]. The (mis) use of the media through the use of lies and half-truths exacerbated the conflict by encouraging the Hutus to attack the Tutsis leading to the death of about 800,000 people [36].

Propaganda also includes the fear factor which arises when a person warns an audience of adversity if they do not act in a precise manner. It is often used to achieve an explicit outcome regarding audience behavior [30]. Carruthers explores how Hitler's Third Reich demonized and mobilized public support against their adversaries by 'conjuring a fearful imagined future; as antagonists 'they casted themselves as victims' and the 'victims as aggressors...a theme that often originates from mobilization propaganda' [33, pp.19-21]. Using state-controlled media and feature films, the Third Reich portrayed Jews as everlasting adversaries who were burnt on dominating the world, and therefore needed to be confined to halt their threat to the German race [33]. This technique of the fear factor deployed on the German Nazis by Hitler's Third Reich, encouraged the participation in violence by the German Nazis against the European Jews, leading to the Holocaust that rendered over 6 million European Jews and several other millions of people dead.

Propaganda during war and conflict times functions effectively with censorship, which is itself a tool for propaganda. To 'censor' is to scrutinize for purposes of deleting or suppressing whatever is considered objectionable (Webster's dictionary). Censorship is the authorized clampdown or prevention of methods of expression [37].

During World War I and II, Western governments' deployed censorship against the media by imposing strict restrictions on the flow of information [38]. While the German government established War Press Office to suppress news and warned the media not to inform their readership of the control methods, Britain imposed widespread proscriptions against the use of information in the media that could possibly prove helpful to the opponent [33]. A *New York Herald* reporter Frederick Palmer who covered World War I, revealed that their conducting officers fed and accommodated them and that having written their dispatches, they handed them for censorship and left out the important items, making them public liars [23].

These acts of suppression of dissent were replicated in the United States in 1962 during the Vietnam War of 1954-75 when the government issued the 'telegram 1006' that ensured reporters were denied access to military operations to guard against negative reports [39].

While the war on terror was raging on in Afghanistan, the United States government asked the ruler of Qatar to restrain Al-Jazeera from further publishing the Bin Laden tape and tempted the American electronic media to desist from reporting on the Bin Laden tape live and unedited [26, 40].

In Africa, during the Matabeleland conflict in Zimbabwe in the 1970s, the Zimbabwean government banned the

reportage of the local conflict and foreign journalists were deported for reporting the conflict [41]. The action denied access to the media to report the conflict.

These media propaganda techniques of lies, half-truths, manipulation, censorship and the fear factor in the media reportage of bloody conflicts will form the framework for this discussion on government propaganda in the regicide of Naa Yakubu II and the evasion of justice by the culprits.

4. Discussions and findings

4.1 The Deployment of Lies as Propaganda Tool in the Regicide of Naa Yakubu II

Lies as a propaganda tool, was arguably deployed by the NPP government in the lead up to the regicide of the Yaa Naa. On March 26, 2002 in a JOY FM news interview, the Yaa Naa's secretary, Michael Mahmood broke the news that the Gbewah palace was under attack by supporters of the Abudu Royal gate. Shortly afterwards, telephone lines to Yendi were cut. Government officials led by the Interior Minister who doubled as Member of Parliament for Yendi while in the nation's capital, Accra, dismissed the news reports and assured there was nothing untoward happening in Yendi and that the area was peaceful [42]. According to JOY FM when they spoke to the Yaa Naa's secretary on Tuesday, the police were conspicuously absent even though fighting was going on [Ibid]. They claimed that government officials would not admit to the fighting and accused them of mischief until the Yaa Naa was killed, confirming their reports of disturbances in Yendi [42].

Once the king was murdered, Commander-in-Chief of the Ghana Armed Forces and President of Ghana, John Kufour admitted that there were instabilities in Yendi that culminated in the loss of lives. '...over the last few days, there has been extreme violence resulting in many deaths in and around Yendi...' [15].

This contradicted government officials' claim that Yendi was calm following a JOY NEWS report of fighting around the palace area. The use of 'few days' can only confirm speculations that government was aware of the fighting in Yendi for at least three days but failed to intervene. As discussed elsewhere in this paper, the Abudus' attack on the Yaa Naa was informed by their persistence to have the funeral of Abdulai IV performed. The matter of his funeral dominated political discussions in Dagbon in the lead up to the 2000 Presidential Elections in Ghana and the NPP pledged to assist in its performance when they won political power. A Presidential Spokesperson, Ms Elizabeth Ohene confirmed this claim to JOY FM and said for the funeral to have taken place, the Yaa Naa would have had to evacuate the palace. The statement of the minister suggests that the NPP government had assured the Abudus that Abdulai IV's funeral would be performed if the party emerged victorious in the 2000 Presidential elections.

Many had argued as gathered in my interviews that government's dismissal of media reports about the Gbewah palace attack was to create opportunity for the funeral of Abdulai IV to be performed at the Gbewah palace, an agenda the reigning Yaa Naa would not countenance. It became clear then that Malik Alhassan Yakubu, the Yendi parliamentarian and his colleagues in government who insisted (at the time of the fighting) that Yendi was calm were lying with the motive of ensuring that the funeral of Abdulai IV was performed at the Gbewah palace to fulfil a political campaign promise. Lies by government officials in the media in the Dagbon case

could be compared to the lies told by Hutu-led government officials in the Rwandan genocide story. Hutu led government officials lied in the media against the Tutsis whom they accused of plotting to exterminate the Hutus, leading to the genocide. The motive of government officials in the Rwandan example was to exterminate the Tutsis from Rwanda, while in the Dagbon case the motive was to facilitate the Abudus agenda of executing Abdulai IV's funeral.

4.2 Manipulation as Propaganda Tool in the Regicide of Naa Yakubu II

Government tried to manipulate the media regarding security response to the conflict. As discussed earlier, Miss Elizabeth Ohene, a Presidential Spokesperson indicted the security for being complacent in the lead up to the murder of the Yaa Naa but a ministerial team report made public by the Information Ministry praised the security for containing the situation in the face of irresistible weapons [43].

Interestingly, when the security services led by the military appeared before the Wuaku Commission, they claimed that they could not save the Yaa Naa because the battery of their armoured vehicle could not spark [12]. Yet government wanted the media and Ghanaians in general to believe the security services controlled the fire power exchanges. These conflicting statements from the two officials from government communication shows the level of desperation on the part of the NPP government to ward off criticisms of refusing to act on intelligence. Government's failure to manage the information about its refusal to act on intelligence in the Gbewah palace attack is exemplified in the case of NATO's initial failure to manage the story of the bombing of civilian refugees in the Kosovo crisis of 1999. In both situations, story actors gave conflicting statements to the media, thus exposing the inconsistencies in their responses.

Having failed to manage criticisms of intelligence ignoring in the media that led to the regicide, government set up two media monitoring centres at the Ministry of Information in the nation's capital Accra and at the Northern Regional capital, Tamale, 60 miles away from Yendi where the regicide took place. The idea was to co-ordinate all press activities on the conflict. Local journalists were directed to handover their reports to a military taskforce under the Ministry of Defence in Tamale for vetting. Military minders vetted reports and those that were unfavourable to government were rejected. The same strategy was applied to journalists in Accra whose reports were vetted by the Information Ministry before broadcast. The establishment of the media monitoring centres was arguably inspired by the War Press Office set up by the German government during World War I to subdue news reports [33]. It can also fit into Alastair Campbell's Media Operations Centre that was set up to manage the stories on NATO's bombing of the civilian convoy in the Kosovo crisis after NATO's initial failure to manage the information that outraged the western journalists covering the crisis and the western public.

4.3 Censorship as Propaganda Tool in Naa Yakubu II's Regicide

Soon after the regicide of Naa Yakubu II, government declared a censorship regime. As discussed earlier in this paper, the Information Ministry was to vet news stories from Dagbon before the media could broadcast them [15]. Government also declared the Gbewah palace area a restricted area. It also declared a State of Emergency accompanied by a dusk to dawn curfew in Yendi and the entire Dagbon area. Journalists who covered the

conflict complained about wide reaching proscriptions against them that constituted suppression of dissent. A *Ghana News Agency* reporter from Accra had this to say about what government officials told them at the main precinct of the mauled Gbewah palace in Yendi:

They instructed us not to take pictures and those who took (them) had them deleted and warned. They said the pictures would offend the sensibilities of the believed family so we should understand and cooperate... they warned that those who did not comply will face the wrath of the military [interview, February 8, 2022].

Views expressed by the above reporter concurred with views of many other journalists that were spoken to. Suppression of dissent as censorship technique has variously been used against the media in war or conflict times across the world. During World War I, military officers vetted reports of war correspondents before they were dispatched. A case in point is the experience of Frederick Palmer of the *New York Herald* who complained about how reporters handed over their reports to their conducting officers for censorship [23].

Another technique of censorship used against the media during the Dagbon conflict was the use of regulation to deny access to the media at the prime crime scene. The Gbewah palace area was declared a restricted area immediately after the king was murdered on March 27, 2002. This technique was deployed in the 1970s by the Zimbabwean government during the Matabeleland conflict to ban journalists from reporting the conflict [41] and during the Gulf Wars (1990-91, 2003) journalists were barred from certain places and warned against violation [44]. Again during the Afghanistan war, the U.S requested a restraining order from the Emir of Qatar in connection with the broadcast of a Bin Laden tape on Aljazeera T.V. [26, 40].

The fear factor is another propaganda technique that was used against the media to deny access in its reportage of Naa Yakubu II's regicide. As indicated above, a *Ghana News Agency* reporter talked about how government officials warned them of severe consequences if they failed to adhere to instructions to stop taking pictures. This technique of the fear factor was arguably inspired by the U.S. warning to journalists not to take pictures during the Iraqi war of 2003 or face the firing squad [18]) Fear factor occurs when an audience is cautioned of penalties if they refuse to follow a precise line of action [30].

5. How Lies as Media Propaganda Tool Contributed to the Escalation of the Dagbon Chieftaincy Conflict and the Regicide of Naa Yakubu II

The lies told by government officials led to the escalation of the Dagbon conflict and the regicide of Naa Yakubu II and his retinue. Arguably, if government had responded to media reports of attack on the Gbewah palace by beefing-up security in Yendi promptly, the slain king could have been saved. Instead the Interior Minister, Malik Alhassan Yakubu claimed that Yendi was calm at a time fighting was going on. With very limited security presence in Yendi, far from the Gbewah palace, the Abudu fighters were emboldened to sustain their attack on the palace for three days, leading to the regicide. As discussed elsewhere in this paper, the lies by the NPP-led government officials partly fit into lies told by Hutu-led government officials during the Rwandan

conflict. In the Rwandan case, Hutu-led government officials encouraged the participation of violence by the Hutus against the Tutsis whom they accused of planning to exterminate the Hutus. In the Ghana Dagbon chieftaincy case, the lies prevented the security from taking over control over the Gbewah palace in Yendi to prevent the escalation of the conflict. In both cases the lies led to the exacerbation of the conflicts, leading to fatalities. 800,000 people reportedly died in the Rwandan case [36], while in the Dagbon case the Wuaku Commission reported only 23 deaths [12].

6. Propaganda and Government's Shielding of the Murder Suspects

Soon after Yaa Naa's murder, government declared a State of Emergency and a dusk to dawn curfew in Yendi and other areas of Dagbon. The Gbewah palace area was also declared a restricted area with heavy security presence. These measures notwithstanding, the severed head and one of the arms of Naa Yakubu II that were taken away by the killers were spotted at the same place that they were severed. Despite the massive security presence, the severed parts of the king were returned unnoticed raising doubts and leading to suggestions that government was sheltering the perpetrators. While recounting events leading to the murder of Naa Yakubu II and its immediate aftermath, the slain king's attorney, Alhaji Ibrahim Mahama wrote:

...the day of decapitation up to the seventh day when the head was found 'sitting' or lying exactly where it had been severed..., soldiers and police were on guard duty 24 hours. Further curfew had been in place from 6pm to 6am during the seven days...Government and security services certainly know how the head and arm of the Ya-na got to the Gbewah palace. [11 p.134].

He argued that government knew those in possession of the severed parts but failed to apprehend them [ibid].

In its final report, the Wuaku Commission found some Abudus liable for the murder and conspiracy to murder the Yaa Naa [13]. Authors of Dagbon conflict, such as authors in [7, 1, 4, and 11] have variously established an alliance between the Abudus and the NPP. An Abudu secretary who did not want to be named acknowledged the position of the above authors:

...it was an understanding that a government that was favourable to us (Abudus) was in power then we expect that justice would be done because we do know that the Supreme Court recognized him as a king. So if a government loyal to us is in power ... then we expect them to use the legal instrument to grant the funeral... [11, p.185].

His responses were supported by another Abudu spokesperson who claimed that many Abudus support the NPP mainly to protect the Abudu clan's interest in the conflict. He claimed that the Andanis also support the NDC because of their clan's interest:

Long before the event (murder of the king) we believed that one day justice will be done to our late king. We could not perform Yaa Naa Mahamdu's (Abdulai IV) funeral because we were in opposition for a long time...We knew that with the coming into force of the 1992 constitution...a Busia-Dankwah party would ensure justice. Some of us did not like the killing. We wanted the Andanis out of the palace so we could perform the funeral...the Andanis also support the NDC because of chieftaincy [interview, February 6, 2022].

All the Abudus I spoke to, were passionate about justice for Abdulai IV. In their view justice for Abdulai IV meant performing his funeral at the Gbewah palace which the Andanis were opposed to. An Andani spokesperson said:

The Andanis were opposed to the funeral of Abdulai IV at the Gbewah palace because he did not die a Yaa Naa. In our custom if you are deskinned as Yaa Naa, you cannot be buried at the palace. If you are buried there, your funeral cannot be performed there...there is precedence in the case of Kulkaljee who was chased away by the Germans...his funeral was not performed at the Gbewah palace... [Interview, February 20, 2022].

Another Andani who declined to be mentioned was however sad that after defending the custom for three decades and Naa Yakubu II dying because of that, the Andanis had to give in for the funeral of Abdulai IV to be performed at the Gbewah palace.

It's sad that the Abudus were allowed access to the Gbewah palace after we defended it for three decades. Naa Yakubu II was killed because of that...this is injustice to the late Yaa Naa...and those responsible have not been punished [interview, February 22, 2020].

The political alliance between the Abudus and the NPP might have influenced President Kufour to hand down top security positions to the Abudus. A respondent said:

...the government of the NPP handed sensitive security positions to the Abudus when they knew there has been a long standing conflict between the Andanis and the Abudus. The position of security advisor, Regional Minister who is head of security in the region, District Chief Executive who is also heading the security in Yendi district and above all the positions of Interior minister and Vice President were just too costly to be handed to one side of a conflict...many Ghanaians felt it was orchestrated, especially when the attacks were publicly denied in the media...[interview June 4, 2020].

Government's political proximity to the Abudus as argued above, renders its denial of knowing who returned the body parts, a suspicion amongst many I spoke to, who argued that government was protecting the criminals given that the palace area was declared a restricted area and guarded by soldiers 24/7. Government's posture in the Naa Yakubu II's 'body parts' saga brings into focus the issue of plausible deniability, a warfare propaganda strategy used by the United States to deny responsibility for operations coming from them [45]. Even though in the Dagbon conflict case there is no evidence that government launched the attack on the Gbewah palace, it is this author's argument that government refused to disclose the identities of those who returned the body parts because they were Abudus and political allies of the government. Doing so could arguably have led to a massive disclosure about who were involved in the murder and possibly how it was planned. With the available evidence that the NPP promised the Abudus admittance to the Gbewah palace in the 2000 electioneering campaign and the disclosure by Elizabeth Ohene that the king would have had to vacate the palace for that to happen, government's culpability in the regicide would have been even more evident.

Given that the real culprits evaded arrest and prosecution, the helping hand of government could be said to manifest. For instance, government's decision to appoint Abudus to security positions created the environment for the minsters and other government officials sympathetic to the Abudu Royal cause, to influence the events that would lead to the carnage. As demonstrated in this study, Abdulai IV's funeral was performed through the Committee of Eminent Chiefs set up by the NPP, which, by that, realized its outstanding campaign promise to the Abudus.

The above together with government's decision not to transfer Alhaji Habib Tijani, the Yendi Municipal Chief Executive as recommended by the Wuaku Commission fueled perception among the Andanis of government shielding the culprits. Again government's decision to pack the security outfit with only Abudus with the full knowledge of the existing conflict between them and the Andanis added to the argument that government was siding with the Abudus and shielding the culprits.

7. Concluding Comments

This study has demonstrated that government propaganda played a huge role in the regicide of Naa Yakubu II and the evasion of justice by the culprits and reveals interesting insight into the Dagbon conflict literature.

Firstly, it shows how a judicial pronouncement that disputed the dictates of custom and tradition, powered the crisis. Had the Andanis who for over three decades opposed the funeral performance of Abdulai IV at the Royal mausoleum allowed the Abudus' access to the palace, the latter would probably not have attacked Naa Yakubu II. The Andanis action was based on their belief in Dagbon tradition that, once Abdulai IV did not die as a Yaa Naa, his funeral could not be performed there. This was notwithstanding the Supreme Court ruling of 1986 that recognized him as 'former Yaa Naa'. Having upheld Abdulai IV's deskinment by the Ollenu Commission of 1974, had the Supreme Court not pronounced him 'former Yaa Naa' or its pronouncement had gone further to determine how the funeral of an 'ousted former Yaa Naa' should be performed after his demise, the factions would not have exploited the 'ambiguity' in the ruling to feud over his funeral at the Gbewah palace. That feud eventually accounted for the murder of Naa Yakubu II.

Probably, fate ensured that Naa Abdulai IV get a royal burial, for the Supreme Court's decision that preceded his death, provided the legal instrument that made his burial at the Royal mausoleum possible. This is because Dagbon tradition does not contemplate the existence of a 'living former Yaa Naa' with the rights and privileges of a sitting Yaa Naa.

Again, if government had admitted media reports of attacks on the Yaa Naa's palace and the security had intervened quickly, the carnage could have been avoided. Government's action provokes interesting debate for historians of the Dagbon conflict and media and propaganda scholars. JOY FM's reports of attacks on the Yaa Naa that were dismissed by the NPP administration contrast the Rwandan situation. In Rwanda, the Hutus used radio as a tool to lie against the Tutsis and galvanised support against them. They demonised the Tutsis using outright lies and half-truths that occasioned the genocide [33]. In the Ghana Dagbon case, accurate radio reportage of events that preceded the slaying of Naa Yakubu II, arguably served as a tool to avert the imminent regicide.

Debatably, the regicide of Naa Yakubu II could have been avoided if government had heeded to the media reports and acted on intelligence and not denied the tensions in Yendi. It is difficult to assert, except for informed speculation, what the government knew and what they did not know— and what informed government's decision to feign ignorance of happening that led to the murder of Naa Yakubu II, and in the 21st century too. *Like the Rwandan case that continues to feature in discussions in academic circles on the irresponsible use of the media and its consequences (especially in Africa), JOY F.M. news reportage about the Gbewah palace attack should also stimulate debate in academia about how government's failure to act on intelligence in the media led to the carnage in Ghana's northern town of Yendi.*

Given the enduring nature of the Dagbon conflict, it is recommended that successive governments deal with the appointments of security capos in the country with tact to ensure a balance of power between the Andani and the Abudu Royal clans so as to obviate a situation where only members of one gate or their sympathizers dominate in the appointment of security chiefs in the country. The Andanis perception that government sided with the Abudus in the conflict and unwilling to prosecute the killers of Naa Yakubu II is partly attributable to the top security positions given to the Abudus by the NPP government under the Kufour administration.

This study is limited in terms of the propaganda role played by social media as data for the study concentrated only on traditional media.

This limitation notwithstanding, the study could serve as reference point for further studies into propaganda and the media in the Dagbon conflict.

Global journalism media and conflict studies stand to benefit from the application of universal propaganda theories-some as old as a century-to explain the techniques and patterns of propaganda used in the early 2000s by the Ghana government against the media in its reportage of the regicide of Naa Yakubu II in this tiny northern town of Yendi.

End

References

- [1] P. Ladouceur. *The Yendi Chieftaincy Dispute and Ghanaian Politics*. Canadian Journal of African Studies, 1969.
- [2] S. S. Mahama. *Propaganda Censorship and the Media: An Ethnographic study of Ghana Dagbon Chieftaincy Crisis: 2002-2019*. PhD Thesis, Bangor University Press, Bangor, United Kingdom, 2020.
- [3] I. O. Albert. *From Owo Crisis to Dagbon Dispute: Lessons in the Politicisation of Chieftaincy*, Taylor and Francis, 2008.
- [4] E. O. Asiedu. *Examining the State's capacity in the management of crime in Ghana: is there a role for ECOWAS?* Africa Leadership Centre: Kings College London, 2008.
- [5] K. Ahorsu, & B. Y. Gebe. *Governance and Security in Ghana: The Dagbon Chieftaincy Crisis*, Accra, Ghana: WACSI, 2011.
- [6] A. K. Issifu. *An Analysis of Conflicts in Ghana: The Case of Dagbon Chieftaincy*: Journal of Pan African Studies, online, 2015
- [7] D. Tsikata and W. Seini. *Identities, inequalities and conflicts in Ghana*: CRISE working paper. Oxford: CRISE. 2004.
- [8] D. Tsikata and W. Seini. *Identities, inequalities and conflicts in Ghana*: CRISE working paper. Oxford: CRISE. 2004.
- [9] E. C. Osuala. *Introduction to Research Methodology*, Africana-Fep Publishers Ltd, 2001.
- [10] S. Tonah. *The politicization of a chieftaincy conflict: The case of Dagbon'*: Northern Ghana: Nordic Journal of African Studies, 21(1), 1–20, 2012.
- [11] I. Mahama, I. *Murder of an African King: Ya-Na Yakubu II*: VANTAGE PRESS: New York, USA, 2009.
- [12] Wuaku-Commission Report. *Report of the commission of inquiry (Yendi Events)*: Ghana Publishing Company, Accra, 2003.
- [13] A. I. Olawale. *'From Owo Crisis to Dagbon Dispute: Lessons in the Politicisation of Chieftaincy Disputes in Modern Nigeria and Ghana': The Round Table* 97 (394): 47–60. Taylor and Francis Online, 2008.
- [14] Ghana News Agency (in) Ghanareview.com. *Slow response contributed to violence in Yendi-Gov't* <http://www.ghanareview.com/int/yendi.html#i3> (April 1, 2002). Accessed March 17 2022.

- [15] Daily Graphic. *Clear all reports on Yendi conflict-says Information minister*. Graphic Communications Group Limited: Accra Ghana, April 1, 2002.
- [16] *Government White paper on Wuaku Commission Report, Accra Ghana, 2003.*
- https://www.google.com/search?q=government+white+paper+on+wuaku+commission+&rlz=1C1BNSD_enGH972GH972&ei=W8S1Y83FDeSA9u8PjMGs4Aw&ved=0ahUKEwiN36PbxK78AhVkgP0HHYwgC8wQ4dUDCA8&uact=5&oq=government+white+paper+on+wuaku+commission+&gs_lcp=Mtd2l6LXNlcnAQAzIKCAAQRxDWBBCwAzIKCAAQRxDWBBCwAzIKCAAQRxDWBBCwAzIKCAAQRxDWBBCwAzIKCAAQRxDWBBCwAzIKCAAQRxDWBBCwAzIKCAAQRxDWBBCwAzIKCAAQRxDWBBCwA0oECEYYAEoECEYYAFcGBli1R2C3T2gBcAF4AIABrAiIAa47kgEHN S0yLjYuMZgBAKABAcbCMABAQ&sclient=gws-wiz-serp
- [17] Ghanaweb.com (January 8, 2003): *Andanis reject government white paper on Wuaku report*<https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Andanis-Reject-Govt-White-Paper-On-Wuaku-Report-31317> Accessed March 16, 2018.
- [18] P. Knightley. *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq*: Johns Hopkins University Press; 3rd edition, 2004.
- [19] O'Donnell G. Jowett & V. O'Donnell. *Propaganda and Persuasion*: SAGE, London, 2012
- [20] N. Snow. *Propaganda, Inc.: Selling America's Culture to the World*. Seven Stories Press. 3rd Ed edition, 2010.
- [21] P. M. Taylor. *Munitions of the mind: A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present day: 3rd edition*: Manchester University Press, 2003.
- [22] S. Carruthers. *The Media at War*: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000.
- [23] D. Hallin D. *The uncensored war*: Oxford University press: London, 1989.
- [24] G. S. Jowett & V. O'Donnell. *Propaganda and Persuasion*: SAGE, London, 2012
- [25] S. Carruthers. *Natural theories of consciousness* European Journal of Philosophy Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996.
- [26] P. Hammond. *Framing post-cold war conflict*: Manchester University Press, 2007.
- [27] C. Wardle & D. Derakhshan. With research support from Anne Burns and Nic Dias: *Information Disorder, toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policymaking*: Council of Europe, 2017.

- [28] S. Carruthers & I. Stewart. *War Culture and the Media, Representations of the military in the 20th century Britain*: Flicks Books, London, 1996.
- [29] E. S. Herman and N. Chomsky. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*: New York: Pantheon, 1988.
- [30] Jackall (1995) (Cited in) Z. Harb. *Resistance in Lebanon: Liberation Propaganda, Hezbollah and the Media*: Palgrave Macmillan: Google Scholar, 2011. https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=vi&lr=&id=p7FOdul0mbkC&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=doob+principles+of+propaganda&ots=Yf7WysA-dp&sig=Qk4gEYVfojEEAQ7TCOs5fjRcwfo&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=doob%20principles%20of%20propaganda&f=false
- [31] T. P. Carson. *Lying and Deception: Theory and Practice*, Oxford University Press. 2010.
- [32] D. Fallis. *What is lying?* Journal of Philosophy Inc. pp. 29-56 Vol. 106. No.1, 2009.
- [33] S. Carruthers. *The Media at War*: Palgrave Macmillan 2nd edition, 2011
- [34] A. Danchev. *The reckoning: official inquiries and the Iraq war*, Routledge, 2010.
- [35] G. MacLaughlin. *The War Correspondent*: Pluto Press, 2002
- [36] D.H. Yanagizawa-Drott. *Propaganda and Conflict: Evidence from the Rwandan Genocide*, the Quarterly Journal of Economics, 2014.
- [37] N. Moore, 'Censorship Is: Australian Humanities Review http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-May-2013/AHR54_3_Moore.pdf, 2013
- [38] K. Connelly and D. Welch. *War and the Media: Reportage and Propaganda 1900-2003*, Publisher I. B. Tauris, 2005.
- [39] W. Kempf & H. Luostarinen (Eds). *Journalism and the New World Order studying War and the Media*: NORDI, 2002
- [40] G. Wilesmith. *Reporting Afghanistan and Iraq: media, military and governments and how they influence each other*: Reuters Institute Fellowship Paper University of Oxford, Sponsor: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2011.
- [41] M. Sikosana. *The Media and Democratization Processes in Africa: A Case Study of Zimbabwe*: Kindle Edition: Amason.co.UK, 2011. https://www.amazon.co.uk/Media-Democratisation-Processes-Africa-Zimbabwe-ebook/dp/B0053TGL06/ref=sr_1_fkmr0_1?ie=UTF8&q

- [42] JOY News Correspondents in Ghanaweb.com. *The Dagbon Crisis: Ghana's Worst Nightmare*<https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/The-Dagbon-Clashes-Ghana-s-Worst-Nightmare-31122> January 1, 2003
- [43] Ghana News Agency (in) Ghanareview.com. *Slow response contributed to violence in Yendi-Gov't* <http://www.ghanareview.com/int/yendi.html#i3> April 1, 2002. Accessed March 17, 2022.
- [44] S. Allan and Zelizer. *Reporting War: Journalism and War Time*: Routledge, London, 2004.
- [45] C. Simpson. *Science of Coercion: Communication Research & Psychological Warfare, 1945–1960*: Google Books. 2015.