

LYING HONESTLY FOR GOVERNMENT: LINGUISTIC MANIPULATION AS DISINFORMATION STRATEGY IN NIGERIA

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Received: 14 May 2014, Revised and Accepted: 26 Aug. 2014

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the state hallowed art of disinformation and its implications for good governance in Nigeria. It focuses on the practised art of telling lies honestly by government spokespersons and media aides in the course of discharging their public relations duties for their principals. The database is the issue of disinformation surrounding the health challenges of Dame Patience Jonathan (wife of President Goodluck Jonathan) and Sullivan Chime (Governor of Enugu State) elicited from the Nigerian media. The result of the data analysis reveals deliberate efforts by government spokespersons to engage the reverse gear of disinformation willfully intended to manipulate the Nigerian audience at the rational level by either discrediting conflicting information or supporting false conclusions. A common disinformation thread that ran through this 'statutory' practice was the tendency to mix some truth and observations with false conclusions and 'honest' lies or to reveal part of the truth while presenting it to the discerning public as the whole. Contrary to the dictates of this war of disinformation into which the media relations managers conscripted themselves to dictate the very form and existence of the truth and allow it to drift, obscured in a thick fog of contrivance, Mrs. Jonathan and Governor Chime returned from their long medical sojourn to spill the beans about their health challenges. It hardly occurred to the spin doctors that lies have slender and fragile frames that break too soon and therefore require constant attentiveness to keep them alive. The exposure of a single truth about their medical tourism ripped through a web of lies dexterously woven by the public relations handlers, pulverizing it instantly and thus, investing government with the inglorious toga of integrity deficit. The implication for governance is that the people no longer believe the government or the President because they have come to understand that the government does not tell the truth. The ignoble badge of credibility problem and integrity deficit, which the disinformation gamble of government's spokespersons has foisted on the federal government, is akin to the official deception over the war in Vietnam that caused a major erosion of confidence of the American people in their government. The disclosures of Mrs. Jonathan and Mr. Chime did demonstrate how easy it is for government officials to take recourse to disinformation to culture a system of institutionalized lying. The result of such institutionalized lying and official deception has been to shred the fabric of trust between people and government.

Keywords: This paper examines the state hallowed art of disinformation and its implications for good governance in Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, the government appears passionate about conducting its business of governance in the most transparent manner, and devoid of misinformation or disinformation. Perhaps, it was in line with this mindset that the office of the Special Assistant to President Goodluck Jonathan on Public Affairs organised a one-day workshop on "Effective Information Management and Public Communication" in Abuja on Tuesday, 30 April, 2013. According to Umoru (2013), the Special Assistant, Dr. Doyin Okupe noted that the workshop was organized for media managers in government, adding that "as government functionaries saddled with the responsibility of communicating with the public, they must understand the role they are supposed to play." In his remarks at the workshop, Secretary to Government of the Federation (SGF), Senator Anyim Pius Anyim noted that in spite of deliberate efforts by the opposition to misinform the public, President Jonathan would not be distracted from fulfilling his obligation to the people. While urging the participants to "make deliberate efforts to debunk the misinformation and campaigns of calumny against government," he stressed that the present administration remained committed to its duties and pledges to the Nigerian people as well as its international obligations. "It is for this reason that the present administration under President Goodluck Jonathan has taken a number of steps aimed at ensuring that as much as possible, the conduct of government business is made transparent and members of the public wishing to know what government is doing on their behalf are furnished with necessary information." Senator Anyim further observed that the signing of the Freedom of Information (FoI) Act into law by the president was borne out of the need to remove the veil of secrecy that had for several years in the country shrouded governance.

Be that as it may, the whirlwind of events surrounding the disappearance and appearance of the First Lady, Dame Patience Jonathan (between August and September, 2012), and the official secrecy and deception, which the First Lady's health challenges elicited from her Aso Rock's public relations managers, provide auspicious grounds for questioning the SGF's claims about the opposition's deliberate efforts to misinform the public and efforts of the federal government to stem the resonating tide of disinformation. Also, the perplexing contrast between the nation's economic statistics on rapid economic growth as adroitly painted in the President's mid-term report and minimal welfare improvement for much of the population as noted by World Bank's May, 2013 'Nigeria Economic Report, tends to put a lie to its avowed commitment to transparency in the conduct of government affairs. As a corollary, the black propaganda, crowd manipulation, and outright disinformation mounted by media relations managers in Enugu State Government House to mislead the public on the ill-health and hospitalisation of Governor Sullivan Chime of Enugu State Southeast Nigeria represent another classic case of disinformation as a hallowed art of (mis)governance in Nigeria.

Judging from their historical antecedents, media relations handlers in government circles have tended to imbibe the public manipulation tactics espoused by Edward Bernays and Saul Alinsky. Edward Bernays, the acclaimed 'Father of Public Relations,' believed that public manipulation was not only moral, but a necessity. He argued that "a small, invisible government who understands the mental processes and social patterns of the masses, rules public opinion by consent. This is necessary for the division of labor and to prevent chaos and confusion." "The voice of the people expresses the

mind of the people, and that mind is made up for it by the group leaders in whom it believes and by those persons who understand the manipulation of public opinion...We are governed, our minds are moulded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. This is a logical result of the way in which our democratic society is organized," wrote Bernays. Government media relations managers distinguish themselves in what are commonly called 'Alinsky Tactics'. Saul Alinsky was a moral relativist, and a champion of the lie as a tool for the 'greater good'; essentially, a modern-day Machiavelli. His 'Rules for Radicals,' were supposedly meant for grassroots activists, who opposed the establishment and emphasized the use of any means to defeat one's political opposition. His strategy: 'Win at any cost, even if you have to lie' is the perfect format for corrupt institutions and governments to dissuade dissent from the masses, which is used more often by establishment than by its opposition.

In this paper, we examine the issues surrounding the health challenges of First Lady, Mrs. Patience Jonathan and Governor Sullivan Chime and determine the extent to which their media relations managers have appropriated the Alinskian strategy to culture a seedbed of lies, plotted more subtle ways of obfuscating the truth, wrapped the truth in a Gordian Knot of misdirection and fabrication, the intention of which was not to destroy the truth but hide it in plain sight. The implications of dressing bare-faced lies in the borrowed garb of truth for Nigeria's evolving democracy are everything but salutary. The foregoing calls for a renewed kind of paradigm shift in information management and public communication in Nigeria.

Data

On 2 September, 2012, an online portal *Saharareporters* reported that the wife of President Jonathan, Dame Patience Jonathan was being treated for "food poisoning" which she contracted during a visit to Dubai, United Arab Emirate. Sometime in late August, 2012 Mrs. Jonathan was flown to Germany for medical treatment for an undisclosed ailment. In its report, *Saharareporters* had, according to an Agency Reporter (*Punch* 4 September, 2012) revealed that an air ambulance airlifted the President's wife to Wiesbaden in Germany for emergency medical attention. It added that Patience had been undergoing treatment for about four days. The United States-based Nigerian news portal quoted an unnamed source in the Presidency as saying that Mrs. Jonathan travelled to Dubai after the African First Ladies Summit in Abuja. It also quoted sources in the Presidency as saying that the "emergency airlift departed for Wiesbaden, Germany" but could not confirm if "her treatment was being undertaken in that city."

Several weeks after, Mrs. Jonathan returned to the country on 16 October, 2012. On her arrival at the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja the First Lady denied being admitted at Horst Schmidt Klinik in Wiesbaden, Germany, saying that she did not have any terminal disease or in the hospital for tummy tuck or cosmetic surgery. Her words:

Thank God Almighty for bringing me back safely to Nigeria. Wherever there are good people, there are also bad ones. There are a few Nigerians that are saying whatever they like, not what God planned because God has a plan for all of us. And God has said it all that when two or three are gathered in His name, that He will be with them. And Nigerians gathered and prayed for me and God listened and heard their prayers. So, I thank God for that. God is wonderful and His mercy is forever. At the same time, I read in the media where they said I was in the hospital. "God Almighty knows I have never been to that hospital. I don't even know the hospital they mentioned. I have to explain what God has done for me. I do not have terminal illness, or any cosmetic surgery much less tummy tuck. My husband loves me as I am and I am pleased with how God created me. I cannot add anything. But at the same time, I will use this opportunity to thank my beloved husband and my children and my staff in general and all Nigerians for standing by me during my trial time. God has given me a second chance to come and work with women of Nigeria, children and the less privileged. I have come to save Nigeria. I have come to work with Nigerians. I am there for

them. Once more, I am pleased to be back. I love Nigerians. They are my family.



Mrs. Jonathan acknowledging cheers on arrival at Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja

Surprisingly, Dame Patience Jonathan spilled the beans on her health challenges at Aso Rock Villa Chapel on Sunday, 17 February, 2013 during a thanksgiving service to mark her successful return from medical sojourn abroad. According to Usigbe (2013), the First Lady, Dame Patience Jonathan relived her controversial health ordeal over which she was flown out of the country last year, revealing for the first time that she passed out for about a week and was taken for dead by some of her close aides. She told the congregation that she had had up to nine surgeries in one month, as she was ferried to the operating theatre almost on a daily basis. The disclosure was contrary to her earlier claim that she did not undergo any surgery or tummy tuck at Horst Schmidt Klinik in Wiesbaden, Germany. The wife of the President recalled the death of Chief Stella Obasanjo, spouse of former president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo who died while in office and how the incident had left a painful memory with her in view of her close friendship with the late former First Lady. Her words:

I remember when, Chief Obasanjo was the president of the country; I was close to his late wife, Stella. We worshipped together in this chapel. It was a painful moment for me that time when she died and her corpse was brought here. That was how my corpse would have been brought here. It was not an easy experience for me. I actually died, I passed out for more than a week. My intestine and tummy were opened. I am not Lazarus but my experience was similar to his. My doctors said all hope was lost. A black doctor in London who is with us in this service was flown in when the situation became critical. It was God himself in His infinite mercy that said I will return to Nigeria. God woke me up after seven days.



Reception for the First Lady at the Banquet Hall, State House, Abuja Nigeria

The First Lady blamed her close aides for leaking information on her state of health to the media and even went ahead to sell her personal affects as they assumed that she had died. Her words:

I know that some people, somehow, leaked the information that I was dead. They are people that I trusted and relied on. To them, I was dead and I would never return to the country alive. Some of them even sold my things off. I won't say everything here. It is the Lord's doing that I returned alive. When God says yes, nobody can

say no... People are always afraid of operation but in my own case, while my travails lasted, I was begging for it after the third operation because I was going to the theatre everyday. It was God who saw me through. I did eight or nine operations within one month. It was not an easy one. The day I came back, I said God, I have nothing to say, I offer myself to you. I will be doing things that will touch the lives of the underprivileged. God gave me a second chance because I reached there (sic). He knew I have not completed the assignments he gave me. That was why I was sent back.

About the same time that Dame Patience's disappearance from the public was stirring up unending speculations about her health status, Governor Sullivan Chime of Enugu State equally disappeared from the Lion Building (Enugu State Seat of Government) and remained incommunicado to the people of Enugu State for several months. According to Olaleye (2012), Governor Chime reportedly left the shores of the country on 19 September, 2012 after transmitting a letter to the state House of Assembly through the Speaker, Eugene Odoh, wherein he properly handed over power to his deputy, Mr. Sunday Onyebuchi, as required of him by the 1999 Constitution as amended. Although the Governor duly transmitted a letter to the state House of Assembly for a consolidated leave which commenced on September 19, the cause of his elongated leave was shrouded in mystery, thus leading to various speculations. His prolonged stay abroad attracted public angst even as many believed the governor's health had failed. The rumour of his death, which circulated across the country, added a new dimension to the boiling anger, which his long absence and the attendant official secrecy and disinformation generated. On Thursday 7 February, 2013, Governor Chime returned to Nigeria after 140 days sojourn abroad where he reportedly attended to his failing health. He broke his silence on why he was absent from the state for about five months, declaring that he had to take the opportunity of his "accumulated leave" to undergo treatment for an ailment later discovered to be cancer of the nose.

The wrong information dished out for public consumption intended to manipulate opinion about the health challenges of Mrs. Jonathan and Governor Chime represents a classical case of disinformation, which is considered synonymous with the art of governance in all ages and climes, forms the thrust of discussion in the subsequent sections.

Lying ideology and linguistic manipulation as disinformation strategy

Ideology, notes Luke (1998), refers to the systems of ideas, beliefs and practices, and representations, which operate in the interests of an identifiable social class or cultural group. According to Rozina & Karapetjana (2009), ideology in linguistic theories has been viewed from the perspectives of descriptive linguistics, sociolinguistics, systemic linguistics, and the ethnography of communication. On a theoretical level, Mey (1986) typifies a descriptive linguistic approach, which investigates language for politics as a 'synchronic object of study'. This approach views ideology as an object that has a material social existence in language, text and discourse. Some theories of sociolinguistics refer to language for politics as the source of speech, discourse and text. In most models as represented by Therbon (1980), sociolinguistics examines 'the ideological role of discourse in the formation of the speaking subject. From the perspective of Halliday (1978), systemic linguistics views language as a social semiotic system and stresses the relationship existing between social structure and language, on the one hand, and the relationship between language development and its use, on the other hand. Pecheux (1982) analysed the direct relationship existing among the ideology, discourse and language. Kress (1989) aligns with the view of Fairclough (1989) that political discourse is 'mediated by institutions which, in turn, position readers and writers, speakers and listeners in different positions of power and knowledge'. In essence, it seems reasonable to assume that politicians are essentially interested in the communicative import of language in order to reach out to their target audience as they make political speeches intended to inform (or misinform), bamboozle, inveigle, persuade, wheedle, dissuade, cajole the electorate or advertise their programmes during political campaigns, etc

The nexus between language and politics has been subject of various analyses in discourses wherein language is seen as the universal capacity of humans in all societies to communicate, and politics, the art of governance. In this regard, language is construed as an instrument to interact or transact in various situations and/or in different organizations being conventionally recognized as political environment. This line of inquiry views linguistic strategy as the strategy that one group of people takes to make the other group of people do what it intends to be done. This strategy involves manipulative deployment of the language. This forms the basis for Fairclough's (1989: 9) definition of linguistic manipulation as the 'conscious use of language in a devious way to control the others'.

In pragmatic terms, linguistic manipulation derives from the deliberate use of indirect speech acts, which are focused on perlocutionary effects of what is said. Also, linguistic manipulation is seen as an influential instrument of political rhetoric given that political discourse is primarily focused on persuading people to take specified political actions or to make crucial political decisions. To convince the potential electorate in present time societies, politics basically dominates in the mass media, which leads to creating new forms of linguistic manipulation, e. g. modified forms of press conferences and press statements, updated texts in slogans, application of catch phrases, phrasal allusions, the connotative meanings of words, a combination of language and visual imagery. To put it differently, language plays a significant ideological role because it is an instrument by means of which the manipulative intents of politicians become apparent.

Disinformation and governance: Global overview

Here, we examine the concept of disinformation from historical and contemporary perspectives, media disinformation methods, and its application in contemporary governance.

The concept of disinformation

Before the advent of anti-feudalism and American Revolution, governments and the groups of elites that controlled them hardly felt the need to conscript themselves into wars of disinformation. Propaganda was relatively straightforward and lies were much simpler. The control of information flow was easily directed. The elites had the monopoly of information. All these changed following the advent of democracy as a system of government. The elites' vice grip on information sagged irredeemably. The establishment of Republics, driven by the populist philosophy of people-oriented government compelled Aristocratic minorities to plot more subtle ways of obstructing the truth and thus maintaining their grip on the world without exposing their stinking underbelly. The foregoing precipitated the birth of the complex art of disinformation. As the technique took root, the magic of the lie was refined and perfected; the mechanics of the human mind and soul became an endless obsession for the establishment.

In terms of conceptual explication, disinformation is deliberately false or inaccurate information that is spread intentionally. As a result, disinformation is synonymous with and sometimes called black propaganda. It is an act of deception and false statements meant to convince someone of untruth. Black propaganda is said to be false information and material that purports to be from a source on one side of a conflict, but is actually from the opposing side. According to Leonard (1950), it is typically used to vilify, embarrass or misrepresent the enemy. Black propaganda contrasts with grey propaganda, the source of which is not identified, and white propaganda, in which the real source is declared and usually more accurate information is given, albeit slanted, distorted and ommissive. Black propaganda is covert in nature in that its aims, identity, significance, and sources are hidden. The whole essence of disinformation is to achieve crowd manipulation, which is the intentional use of techniques based on the principles of crowd psychology to engage, control, or influence the desires of a crowd in order to direct its behavior toward a specific action.

Disinformation types and domains of application

Disinformation manifests in a number of subtle ways in different domains. In espionage or military intelligence for example,

disinformation is the deliberate spreading of false information to mislead an enemy as to one's position or course of action. In politics, disinformation is the deliberate attempt to deflect voter support of an opponent, disseminating false statements of innuendo based on the candidates vulnerabilities as revealed by opposition research. The common thread that runs through in both cases is the distortion of true information in such a way as to render it useless. Disinformation may include distribution of forged documents, manuscripts, and photographs, or spreading of malicious rumours and fabricated intelligence or simulated computer images.

World War II and Cold War present classical cases of disinformation in history. One clear case of disinformation occurred during World War II, preceding the Normandy landings, in what would be known as Operation Fortitude. British intelligence convinced the German Armed Forces that a much larger invasion force was about to cross the English Channel from Kent, England. But in reality, the Normandy landings were the main attempt at establishing a beachhead, made easier by the German Command's reluctance to commit its armies. Operation Mincemeat was another act of World War II-era disinformation, when British intelligence dressed up a corpse, equipped it with fake invasion plans, and floated it out to sea where Axis troops would eventually recover it.

The Cold War appreciated disinformation as a recognized military and political tactic. According to senior SVR officer Sergei Tretyakov, the Russian intelligence Agency, the KGB was responsible for creating the entire nuclear winter story to stop the Pershing missiles. Tretyakov says that from 1979 the KGB wanted to prevent the United States from deploying the missiles in Western Europe and that, directed by Yuri Andropov, they distributed disinformation, based on a faked "doomsday report" by the Soviet Academy of Sciences about the effect of nuclear war on climate, to peace groups, the environmental movement and the journal AMBIO. Another successful example of Soviet disinformation was the publication in 1968 of *Who's Who in the CIA* which was quoted as authoritative in the West until the early 1990s. Also, Iran's Department of Disinformation is believed to be largest department in the Ministry of Intelligence and National Security (MOIS) as an intelligence and security agency. Its function is to create faulty information about Iranian opponents and organizations such as the People's Mujahedin of Iran.

The term, Information Warfare (IW) is primarily an American concept involving the use and management of information technology in pursuit of a competitive advantage over an opponent. Information warfare may involve collection of tactical information, assurance(s) that one's own information is valid, spreading of propaganda or disinformation to demoralize or manipulate the enemy and the public, undermining the quality of opposing force information and denial of information-collection opportunities to opposing forces.

Media disinformation methods: The Alinsky strategy and Internet trolls

In an article, entitled 'Disinformation: How it works,' Brandon Smith examined the methods used to fertilize and promote the growth of disinformation. He identified the mainstream media, which was once tasked with the job of investigating government corruption and keeping elites in line but had since become nothing more than a mere public relations firm for corrupt officials and their globalist handlers. In discussing media disinformation methods, he observed that it was the acclaimed newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst, who believed that the truth was 'subjective' and open to personal interpretation, that midwifed the birth and growth of media disinformation. Among the tactics used by the mainstream media to mislead the masses are: (i) Lie big, retract quietly; (ii) Unconfirmed or uncontrolled sources as facts; (iii) Calculated omission; (iv) Distraction and manufacture of relevance; (v) Dishonest debate tactics. The last tactic is anchored on what TV pundits call 'Alinsky Tactics' named after Saul Alinsky who was a champion of the lie as a tool for the 'greater good'.

Alinsky's tactics have been adopted by governments and disinformation specialists across the world. While Alinsky

sermonized about the need for confrontation in society, his debate tactics were actually designed to circumvent real and honest confrontation of opposing ideas with slippery tricks and diversions. His tactics and their modern usage are summarized as follows: (i) Power is not only what you have, but what the enemy thinks you have; (ii) Never go outside the experience of your people, and wherever possible, go outside of the experience of the enemy; (iii) Make the enemy live up to their own book of rules; (iv) Ridicule is man's most potent weapon; (v) A good tactic is one that your people enjoy; (vi) A tactic that drags on too long becomes a drag; (vii) Keep the pressure on with different tactics and actions, and utilize all events of the period for your purpose; (viii) Keep the pressure on with different tactics and actions, and utilize all events of the period for your purpose; (ix) The threat is usually more terrifying than the thing itself; (x) The major premise for tactics is the development of operations that will maintain a constant pressure upon the opposition; (xi) If you push a negative hard and deep enough, it will pull through into its counterside; (xii) The price of a successful attack is a constructive alternative; (xiii) Pick the target, freeze it, personalize it.

In this day of computer-mediated information technology, internet disinformation methods have evolved. Internet trolls, also known as 'paid posters' or paid bloggers' are increasingly being employed by private corporation and governments for marketing and public relations purposes. Trolls use a variety of internet-based strategies: (i) Make outrageous comments designed to distract or frustrate; (ii) Pose as a supporter of the truth, then make comments that discredit the movement; (iii) Dominate discussions; (iv) Prewritten responses; (v) False association; (vi) Straw man arguments.

Lying ideology as a direct principle of state policy in contemporary governance

Lying as an attitude, which lies at the heart of disinformation, has been part of the intrinsic nature of man and which has been adroitly integrated into the contemporary art of governance. One time President of United States of America, Thomas Jefferson captured this much in his statement: "Governments constantly choose between telling lies and fighting wars, with the end result always being the same. One will always lead to the other." In the intricate art of governance, Napoleon underlined the indispensability of lies as an inescapable option when he asserted: "Absolute power has no necessity to lie, it may be silent." On the other hand, he added, "responsible governments obliged to speak, not only disguise the truth, but lie with effrontery." In contemporary times, national governments are sandwiched somewhere between being 'absolute' and 'responsible' as Napoleon had espoused. The legendary Nazi propagandist, Josef Goebbels said: "It would not be impossible to prove with sufficient repetition and psychological understanding of the people concerned that a square is in fact a circle. They are mere words, and words can be moulded until they clothe ideas and disguise." Adolf Hitler was once quoted as saying: "The great masses will more easily fall victim to a big lie than to a small one." The 'Big Lie' is a propaganda technique, an expression coined by Hitler when he dictated his 1925 book, *Mein Kampf*, about the use of a lie so 'colossal' that no one would believe that someone 'could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously'. Hitler asserted that the technique was used by Jews to unfairly blame Germany's loss in World War I on German Army officer, Erich Ludendorff. Later, Joseph Goebbels put forth a slightly different theory, which has come to be more associated with the expression 'big lie'. Jeffrey Herf maintains that Goebbels and the Nazis used the Big Lie to turn long-standing anti-semitism into mass murder.

Jane McGrath compiled 10 of the biggest lies in history that influenced politics, science and even art as a result of which lives were lost, life-savings destroyed, legitimate research hampered and most of all, faith in our fellow man shattered - The Greek Trojan Horse grand deception, Han van Meegeren's Vermeer Forgeries, Bernie Madoff's Ponzi Scheme, Anna Anderson, Alias Anastasia, Titus Oates and the Plot to kill Charles II, Piltdown Man, The Dreyfus Affair, Clinton/Lewinsky Affair, Watergate, The Big Lie: Nazi Propaganda.

Janet Daley captured the lying propensity of the political class. Writing for the British tabloid, *Telegraph* (22 December, 2012) in an article entitled, "The truth is that politicians are telling lies," Janet Daley surmised: "In the UK, the US, and (above all) the countries of the EU, democratic politics is being conducted on false premises..." because "the promises that governments are making to their electorates are not just misleading: they are unforgivably dishonest..." thus leading to the assumption that "no party that speaks the truth about the economic future has a chance of winning power in a national election..." Daley's piece ended on a dismal note: "The process of campaigning and voting will be an irrelevance: all parties will tell pretty much the same lies. Whichever one is marginally more credible than the others will gain power (probably in coalition with another bunch of liars), and then have to do what needs to be done in whatever desperate, underhand ways it can devise. Nobody will feel that he got what he voted for, because what he voted for was impossible."

Also, in an article, entitled 'Tell me lies, sweet little lies,' published in *The Nation* (30 August, 2012 1:00 am), Pornpimol Kanchanalak averred that it is an absolute irony that people condemned the Finance Minister of Thailand for telling the truth that sometimes, often, or rather most of the time, the government tells 'whites lies'. Telling lies, 'black' or 'white,' has become so ingrained in the human psyche and behaviour. Human beings are prone to lying to themselves, and at times have need to do so, consciously or unconsciously as a survival or coping mechanism. To many people, telling a lie is easier than telling the truth. In many instances, the consequences of the lies are thought of as 'harmless' compared to those of the truth. Then, there are truths that are told with bad intent that William Blake says beat all the lies we can invent. The legendary rock group, Fleetwood Mac begged for lies in the song 'Little lies'.

When it comes to government, any government, lies are always part of its composite; the euphemism is 'spin'. Governments lie to citizen regularly, consistently, systematically and daily. Governments' lies do have a life of their own; they breed more lies to substantiate or cover up the original lies. The foregoing calls to mind, a joke made famous in the Ronald Reagan camp during the 1980 US presidential campaign (against the incumbent President Jimmy Carter) which goes thus: George Washington, Richard Nixon, and Jimmy Carter die and go to heaven. In order to explain how they got there, Washington says, 'I never told a lie'. Nixon countered, 'I never told the truth'. Carter in his characteristic bluntness retorted, 'I never knew the difference'. Richard Dolan (www.keyholepublishing.com) noted that we live in a society that is so filled with lies emanating from the top of our power structure; I now think that most of us simply no longer notice. Lying itself has become the norm. It's what people expect of their government.

The conspiracy of lie, which appears to have provided the propitious bond of unity among contemporary national governments, has tended to conscript Americans into the most lied-to people on earth. In an article, entitled 'The Three Biggest Lies the Government is Telling You,' Charles Goyette observed that (American) Government lies are legion, adding that so many are its lies, that narrowing them down to three of the most important is a demanding task. He chose to focus on lies about each: the Federal Reserve, the U.S. budget, the accounting of government fiscal policy; and a few of the Empire's war lies. On the war lies, he noted:

Governments and politicians lies incessantly about war. They lie about the cause of war. They lie about the threat of war. They lie about the cost of war. And they lie about their lies about war. Governments lie relentlessly about war. Just in the last fifty years the people have been lied to about U.S. government wars from Vietnam to Iraq.

Of course, lies, as Dolan observed, are nothing new. American Presidents and military leaders have been doing this all along: John F. Kennedy and the Bay of Pigs in 1961; Lyndon Johnson and the Gulf of Tonkin resolution of 1965; the invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1966 allegedly to "save American lives"; Richard Nixon and Watergate during 1972-74; the 1983 invasion of Grenada, supposedly to save the lives of American medical students on the

island (an excuse proven false by the fact that when General Norman Schwarzkopf's troops hit the beaches in Grenada, no one had told them the location of the students they were supposed to rescue); the Iran-Contra affair of 1986-87; the 1989 invasion of Panama, known to (American) history as Operation Just Cause, when President George Bush told the world that American nationals were being attacked by the Panamanian military (at best, a major distortion of the facts); then came the crap and crock about Saddam Hussien's weapons of mass destruction and 9/11 suicide bombings. The truth was that President Bush and his men wanted a pretext to invade Iraq, and WMD seemed the most plausible argument that the public would accept.

Goyette (2012) noted further that lying is so intrinsic to the nature of government, that even the truth about old lies is concealed to protect new lies. In 2001, a National Security Agency study found that officials had actually doctored documents in covering up the truth about the Tonkin Gulf incident. But the new report of that old cover-up was itself delayed for years for fear that its release would cast doubt on the intelligence that the Bush administrations was using to justify an invasion of Iraq. In the case of the Iraq war, not only did defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld lie about knowing where the non-existent weapons of mass destruction were in Iraq ("We know where they are. They're in the area around Tikrit and Baghdad and east, west, south and north somewhat."), in a later exchange with former CIA senior analyst Ray McGovern, Rumsfeld even denied he had made such a claim. "Simply stated," Dick Cheney said of the mythical WMDs in August of 2002, "there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction." "We know for a fact," said White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer in January of 2003, "that there are weapons there." "We know that Saddam Hussein is determined to keep his weapons of mass destruction," said Colin Powell in February of 2003, "and he is determined to make more."

Also, Goyette noted the government's lies about the case of Jessica Lynch, and about the way the government lied about the killing of Pat Tillman and even lied about lying about its lies about his death. Private Lynch was a 19-year-old clerk when her company was ambushed in Iraq after taking a wrong turn. She suffered injuries when her Humvee overturned and was taken by Iraqi soldiers to a nearby hospital. Although she suffered injuries when her Humvee overturned, "U.S. officials" reported that Lynch had gone down fighting and had been both shot and stabbed in action. The truth is she had no such wounds. She had never fired her weapon. Although the Iraqi doctor who had cared for her tried himself to turn her over to the Americans, the Pentagon, with a propaganda campaign in mind and camera's rolling, staged a dramatic raid from helicopters to "rescue" Lynch. The video was edited up in no time and released by a Pentagon anxious to have a heroic feel-good war narrative to relate. While the Pentagon is perfectly capable of lying on its own initiative, members of congress pressured the Pentagon to award Lynch the Medal of Honour, even before an investigation was complete, saying it would be "good for women in the military."

Pat Tillman, killed in action in Afghanistan, was posthumously awarded the Silver Star, a combat honour given for valour in action against an enemy. But there was no encounter with the enemy. Tillman was shot to death by his fellow soldiers. This was carefully concealed with fraudulent accounts of the incident. Senior commanders' prints were all over the cover-up about Tillman's death. General John Abizaid approved the Silver Star despite knowing within days of Tillman's death that he had been shot by "friendly fire." Lieutenant General Stanley McChrystal cited Tillman for actions "in the line of devastating enemy fire," but the very next day sent a confidential memo about the fratricide to senior government officials including Abizaid warning them to protect themselves and President Bush from embarrassment in the episode.

In the opinion of Richard Dolan, the lies of American governments are so blatant in contemporary times that it is obvious their leaders just don't care whether or not the people know that they are lying. He recalled how Americans were told by their leaders that: (i) Prior to 9/11, America's national security leaders had no suspicion of an impending terrorist attack. (ii) America invaded Iraq because it

believed Iraq possessed "weapons of mass destruction." (iii) That neither the President nor Secretary of Defense had any idea that American soldiers were practicing torture (e.g. "prisoner abuse") against Iraqi prisoners. But contrary to such posturing, a little probing beyond the surface would unearth the following concealed facts:

The U.S. intelligence community issued 12 separate warnings of a forthcoming terrorist attack, including a 1999 warning saying that "suicide bomber(s) belonging to al Qaeda's Martyrdom Battalion could crash-land an aircraft ... into the Pentagon, the headquarters of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), or the White House."¹ Also, blaming the success of Al-Qaeda's 9/11 attack on 'intelligence failures' was a crass ruse. An intelligence failure is when something is happening that one does not know about. It is either that one missed the evidence or misinterpreted the evidence at one's disposal. But with regards to the claims about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, there was no evidence to miss or misinterpret. There could not be, given that there were no weapons to leave traces of evidence with. The mere existence of Tony Blair's dossier, plagiarized from a student thesis, is proof not only that the claims of Iraq WMDs were lies, but were known and conscious lies. The American public was offered mislabeled and blurry photos, made up dossiers, and balloon inflators misidentified as mobile biological weapons laboratories (which the British government knew about since they had sold the balloon inflators to Iraq in the first place). In essence, there was no 'intelligence failure' because there was no intelligence with which to fail. The story about weapons of mass destruction was just made up, and fraudulently manufactured 'proof' created to support that lie.

Immediately after 9/11, President Bush and Defense Secretary Rumsfeld began planning an invasion of Iraq, even before the U.S. invaded Afghanistan, with no knowledge of so-called weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Indeed, on September 16, 2001, just 5 days after the 9/11 attacks, according to CBS News, "Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was telling his aides to come up with plans for striking Iraq." The following day, according to the Washington Post, President Bush signed a directive ordering the Pentagon to begin drawing up Iraq invasion plans. Then, on September 20, according to a report in the new edition of Vanity Fair, President Bush told British Prime Minister Tony Blair that he wanted an invasion of Iraq. These reports dovetail with accounts by former Bush counterterrorism Chief Richard Clarke and former Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill.

Despite official denials of any knowledge of prison torture, there is strong reason to believe that not only did the President and his associates know about what we euphemistically refer to as "prisoner abuse," but that they encouraged it. As reported by *Newsweek*, Bush, Rumsfeld, and Attorney General John Ashcroft signed off on "a secret system of detention and interrogation that opened the door" to what happened at Abu Ghraim prison. In the words of the article, this was a deliberate attempt to "sidestep the historical safeguards of the Geneva Conventions, which protect the rights of detainees and prisoners of war." The three men "left underlings to sweat the details of what actually happened to prisoners in these lawless places." The system they created ensured that brutality would be the result, what the Red Cross concluded was 'tantamount to torture.'

The foregoing expose on the American government's heritage of lies, which some American Presidents and military leaders have signed on to as an act of national will, does not invest Americans with the inglorious toga of 'sole lie patent'. In other words, all people, small and big, commoners and lords, the leaders and the led, all nations-developed, developing, underdeveloped, under-developing- carry with them this universal homogenizing predilection, the atavistic propensity or a kind of genetic inheritance to lie. In *Caring for words in a culture of lies*, Marilyn Chandler McEntyre notes that our culture is indeed rife with lies and half-truths. 'We like to be lied to. We lie to ourselves all the time.' Dijkema (2012) believes McEntyre has a point. So much of our public conversations are rife with half-truths, shading, and outright lies. As Pamela Myer notes in a TED talk, lying is a cooperative activity. The cooperative venture starts from a very young age. By the time you are 12 years old, you are swimming in a vast spoiled sea of lies, told to you by not only the bad

government, but by your mum and dad, your friends and your colleagues.

In terms of intensity, blatancy, and regularity of lying, USA and Nigeria tend to have comparative advantage over one another. In the United States for instance, government officials may not have the licence to indulge in telling straightforward lies, neither is the option open to them to be overtly parsimonious with information about how the lives of the ordinary American citizens and affairs of their country are run. Nonetheless, when caught up in tricky and slippery situations in the business of governance, where telling the plain, unmitigated truth provides no easy option, the government official looks up to euphemisms for lying as a leeway. "Because he cannot be seen to be lying outright to the American people, because he fears consequences, an American government official," notes Adesamni (2012), "has options such as 'spinning, misspeaking, misstating, mis-recalling, telling an untruth, having an unstable relationship with facts'....and when a misstatement, misspeaking or mis-recollection has been exposed, the American official scrambles to 'walk back' the fib."

In Nigeria, lying as an ideology jells perfectly with mythomania as a direct principle of state policy. Linguistic manipulation, which draws freely from lying ideology, forms the core of disinformation strategy. In fact, it is the exclusive preserve, the prerogative right of government officials to use the alchemy of power to manufacture lies and brew synthetic truths as tools for reconfiguring the Nigerians' perception of events to fit predetermined policies. In the opinion of Adesamni, the difference between the American and Nigerian lying officials lies in the domain of consequences. The political costs, he contends, are enormous when an American official is caught lying but in Nigeria, the lying and corrupt official is often on his way to the national honours list. Given obvious lack of political consequences, Nigerian officials hurry to hug the slithery frames of outright bare-faced lies in full public glare. Worse still, there is no such 'silly' thing as respecting the people's sensibilities enough to walk back one's lies when caught. Instead, the public official doubles down on the lies when caught. In America, there is an underlying civic culture, which makes you respect the citizen so much that you do not look straight into the camera and lie to them. When you flat out lie to the citizen, you are doing more than insulting his intelligence. In this circumstance, the public official, who like Paul Ryan, makes a habit of telling outright, straightforward lies, becomes an oddity, an exception to a political culture, Adesamni notes. But in Nigeria, the practised art of lying in governance and public life is not exception to the rule. Instead, it is the rule as will be evident in the next section.

Lying honestly for government: The cases of Mrs. Jonathan and Governor Chime

In this section, we examine this atavistic propensity to tell bare-faced lies as evident in the information management of health challenges of Mrs. Patience Jonathan and Governor Sullivan Chime. In this regard, we recall Augustine's taxonomy of lying. Augustine of Hippo wrote two books about lying: *On Lying (De Mendacio)* and *Against Lying (Contra Mendacio)*. St. Augustine divided lies into eight categories, listed in order of descending severity thus: (i) lies in religious teaching, (ii) lies that harm others and help no one, (iii) lies that harm others and help someone, (iv) lies told for the pleasure of lying, (v) lies told to 'please others in smooth discourse', (vi) lies that harm no one and that help someone materially, (vii) lies that harm no one and that help someone spiritually, (viii) lies that harm no one and that protect someone from 'bodily defilement'. We set out to examine the honest lies and ascertain the extent to which they fall within the broad spectrum of descending severity as outlined by St. Augustine.

Lying honestly for First Lady, Dame Patience Jonathan

The immediate official reaction to the news about the First Lady's illness came from the Presidency, which denied that Mrs. Jonathan had been hospitalised for food poisoning. Her media aide, Mr. Ayo Osinlu had said that the President's wife had not gone for medical treatment in Germany but was only on vacation abroad. "If you look at her itinerary in August, you would be wondering how she was

able to accomplish that. In the course of this week, she will be back home. But remember, it all depends on her plans," he said. Osinlu said she had traveled to rest after the fatigue of hosting a meeting of African First Ladies in Abuja. According to Ndibe (2013), the irony of the claim did not strike the fibbing spokesman. If the wife of the President could not find Aso Rock – the most palatial residence in Nigeria – conducive enough for her 'moment of rest,' then the country her husband runs must be pure hell for other less-fortunate Nigerians. The Special Adviser to the President on Media and Publicity, Reuben Abati, who also spoke on the matter, dismissed Mrs. Jonathan's widely reported illness as a rumour. Abati insisted that the story "was a rumour and there is nothing like that". Such blatant lies compelled Adesamni to posit that more than any other President before him, Goodluck Jonathan and his wife has assembled some of Nigeria's most incompetent liars in their harem of aides.

Ayo Osinlu's (mis)management of information concerning Mrs. Jonathan's health crisis represents a classical example of the abysmally low esteem at which this 'harem of presidential aides' hold the Nigerian people. Unlike their American counterparts, there was not even a feeble attempt at 'spinning, misspeaking, misstating, or misrecollecting' the facts. Perhaps, that would be tantamount to granting undue deference to the sensibilities of the Nigerian people. Mr. Osinlu simply lied emphatically that his boss had gone to Germany for a 'moment's rest'. The *Punch* newspaper reported it in its 4 September, 2012 issue under the caption: "Mrs. Jonathan is not ill; she is resting abroad – Presidency". Not unexpectedly, Reuben Abati took full headlong plunge into the lying obsession of a fellow bona fide citizen of phantasmagoria to double-down on Ayo's mythomania. He blatantly lied when he said that the news of Mrs. Jonathan's sickness was a 'mere rumour' and for which the collective disgruntled offspring of despondency and frustration were probably responsible. Even when a visibly penitent Mrs. Jonathan was nudged on by a deeply wounded conscience to spill the bean on her health challenges, neither Osinlu nor Abati pretended to have the decency to walk things back. No, it is not in the character of statutorily licensed Nigerian mythomaniacs to confess their lies. The only reasonable thing was to synthesize more lies and spin cock and bull 'yarns'.

When it became apparent that the "resting in Germany" alibi was lame as it was perfidious, as Onumah (2013) observes, we were told that President Goodluck Jonathan, accompanied by the chaplain of Aso Villa Chapel, Ven. Obioma Onwuzurumba, paid a visit to the First Lady in Germany. The result of the secret visit, according to reports, "was a short news item aired on the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) at 9pm and accompanied by a short video clip (shot and sent to NTA by the Presidency) showing the President and a gorgeously dressed First Lady who was heard saying, 'Let me take picture with my husband'". According to Reuben Abati, the Special Adviser to the President on Media and Publicity, "the video clip aired by NTA was a confirmation that the President's wife was hale and hearty contrary to what some people wanted Nigerians to believe. The video has put paid to all the lies that people who play politics with almost everything have been spreading. It was clear from that video that the scene was not a hospital scene". He went on to say that "government had been quiet since because it could not afford to be 'jumping into the fray' with everybody".

Apparently, Abati acted true to the propaganda script as brilliantly espoused by Robert Cirino in his book, entitled *Don't blame the people*, which gives an account of how news media use bias, distortion and censorship to manipulate public opinion. Some sections of the Nigerian media carried reports about government's moves to deceive Nigerians on First Lady's hospitalisation. For instance, *Nigerian Dailynews* reported: "President Goodluck Jonathan moved on Sunday to extend the deception of Nigerians concerning his wife's sickness, releasing a few seconds video clip showing the couple together during his visit to her in Germany." (www.nigeriandailynews.com 8 October, 2012). The same paper had earlier reported that President Goodluck Jonathan was said to be angry about the leakage of information concerning the sickness of his wife, Patience, adding that the President and those close to him had planned to keep Mrs. Jonathan's trip a 'top secret' (www.nigeriannewsdaily.com 05 September, 2012).

According to Wise (1973: 18), "the press' failure to question government information more vigorously, the willingness to accept official 'handouts' as fact, the tendency toward passive reporting – what Tom Wicker has called 'the press box mentality' – has made it easier for government to mislead the public." The ignoble role of the NTA in giving wings to such farting lies of Aso Rock Villa to fly lends credence to Wise's claims: "Where government controls access to both events and documents, information becomes a commodity, a tool of policy. It is shaped and packaged by the government, and sold to the public through the media...Television has not only increased the impact of news and the speed of communication, it has also increased the ease and effectiveness of information distortion by the government."

Wise's treatise equally touched on the nexus between information and power and how the ability to distort and control information suffices in the hands of public relations managers of political leaders as an instrument of power preservation and perpetuation. This brings to focus the centrality of Abati and Osinlu to the disinformation saga. As Wise surmised, the public relations managers of our political leaders are frequently men and women of considerable intellectual abilities who have gone to the right schools. They pride themselves not only on their social graces, but on their rationality and morality. For such calibre of human beings, the preservation of partisan political power would not be a seemingly rationale for official deception (although it might be entirely sufficient for the President whom they serve). Personal interests of their paymaster (often dressed up in the borrowed garb of national interests) provide the acceptable alternative, the end that justifies the means, the end that permits men who pondered the good, the true and beautiful as undergraduates at the nation's foremost universities and other citadels of learning across the global village to sit in air-conditioned rooms in Abuja and capital cities some years later and make decisions that result in deliberation misleading of the Nigerian public. It is the rationale that permits decent men to make indecent decisions.

Of course, it goes without saying that the lying propensity of Osinlu and Abati incurred the ire of a good number of discerning and well-meaning Nigerians. The Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), through its National Publicity Secretary, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, challenged the Federal Government to tell Nigerians the truth about the illness of the First Lady, saying the people deserved to know. The ruling PDP, Mohammed insisted, has never been truthful to Nigerians on any national issue, citing the "many lies the PDP government churned out to Nigerians on the illness of the late President Umaru Yar'Adua".

In his reaction to Abati's lies, Chidi Onumah (www.chatafrik.com) notes: "...Of course, if you believe Abati's tales by moonlight, you might as well believe that tooth fairies exist...One would think that after what the country went through in the hands of erstwhile First Lady, Turai Yar'Adua and her cabal, our so-called leaders would have learnt a lesson or two. How mistaken we were! It seems the more things change in Nigeria, the more they remain the same. Governance has become a huge joke. Nigerian rulers take Nigerians for granted because they are convinced they are not accountable to the citizens." Reporting for *Vanguard* newspaper (www.vanguardngr.com 18 February, 2013) under the caption, 'Patience Jonathan: ACN, CPC, SNG, others slam Presidency,' Aziken, et. al. (2013) "the disclosure by First Lady, Mrs. Patience Jonathan of the critical nature of her health, Monday, aroused scathing criticisms from opposition political parties and some of the country's leading civic society groups. The opposition parties and civil society advocates slammed Federal Government for projecting a government of deceit with several saying the administration officials had presented the government as one that cannot be trusted."

In a statement issued by the National Publicity Secretary of Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), Alhaji Lai Mohammed, the party said the revelation by the First Lady on the extent of her illness, especially the fact that she passed out for seven days was a cause for concern to Nigerians wondering why government chose to lie to them on the issue. His words:

While we felicitate with the First Lady of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on her recovery from whatever illness it was that afflicted her, we will be remiss if we fail to recollect how the presidency denied 'rumours' of the First Lady's illness and poured scorn on the media and the imaginary enemies of the government for fuelling the 'satanic rumours. We will also like to remind the presidency that its denial, instead of full disclosure that would have elicited nothing more than fervent prayers from Nigerians, fuelled the rumours that the First Lady suffered from sundry afflictions or the consequences of tummy tuck'. Like we have said time and again, any government needs to be credible to win the trust of the citizens, without which it cannot govern effectively. With the revelation by our back-from-the-dead First Lady, it is clear that the Jonathan Presidency has egg on its face, and must apologise to Nigerians for lying to them. Also, the spokesmen for this government have lost total credibility, hence their words will henceforth be taken with a pinch of salt. It is sad that despite what we and many Nigerian groups and individuals have said on this issue, the Jonathan Administration took its script directly from the Yar'Adua group's book of deceit when the late President was ill and flown abroad. Now, Governors Sullivan Chime of Enugu, Danbaba Suntai of Taraba and Liyel Imoke of Cross River are all playing according to the Jonathan script.

The Congress for Progressive Change, CPC, on its part said that if the presidency could lie over the health of the First Lady, it then showed the capacity of the administration to lie on anything:

What is undoubtedly plausible is: If the administration could show such dishonesty in an innocuous matter as the disclosure of the true state of the first lady's health, it revealed, without doubt, that this presidency is irredeemably sold to casting deceptive veil on the minds of Nigerians! Indeed, this administration is a continuing story in indulgent opacity and metaphor of a rudder less ship.

Also, the Save Nigeria Group, SNG also slammed the presidency for lying to the citizenry on the state of health of the first lady. Speaking through its spokesperson, Mr. Yinka Odumakin, the SNG said: "As a human being, one empathises with her on all she has gone through in her moment of trials. We are happy for her that she has recovered. But it shows a degenerate government with many that are totally bereft of honour and integrity to be lying to the whole nation that she was holidaying abroad and that all was well." A civic right activist, Mr. Bamidele Aturu on his part said: "Once again this has shown that many Nigerians shouldn't even believe government officials and that is a very tragic thing. This hoarding of information about the health status of people who are in government is characteristic of primitive societies and this cannot bring about development. Now it is clear to Nigerians that the aides to the president were engaged in barefaced lies when they said that the wife of the president went on a vacation when in fact the woman was going through surgeries. Nigerians will find it difficult to believe such aides and take them seriously whenever they come to tell them anything, even when they are not lying and that is the danger about lying"

The official disinformation about Mrs. Jonathan's health challenges merely represents one of the many lies, which according to Japhet Omojuwa (www.ynaija.com), are in line with the transformation agenda of Mr. President. The lying propensity of Jonathan-led administration came to light in October, 2010 when the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger-Delta, MEND masterminded the bomb blasts that marred the 2010 Independence anniversary at Abuja. Quoting President's reaction to the bombing incident, the *Leadership Sunday* newspaper (03 October, 2010) reported under a banner headline: 'Bomb blasts - Terrorists, not MEND responsible - Jonathan' saying, "We know the persons behind the terrorist attacks on the nation. We know they used an organization that operates in the Niger Delta called MEND as a front, but we are aware that MEND is not a terrorist organization...What happened yesterday was a terrorist act and MEND was just used as a straw; MEND is not a terrorist organization..." On its own, MEND issued a statement claiming responsibility for the bomb blasts: The MEND deeply regrets the avoidable loss of lives during our bomb attack in Abuja on Friday October 1, 2010..The irresponsible attitude of the government security forces is to blame for the loss of lives. They

were given 5 days prior notice which led to the harassment of Henry Okah on Thursday, September 30 in South Africa. The security forces were also warned one full hour to the first bomb blast ahead of the general alert sent to the media and told to steer the public from all parked cars which was not done..."

President Jonathan's CNN interview claim of improved electricity supply in Nigeria equally spoke volumes of the lying predilection. Speaking from Davos in Switzerland where he was attending the 2013 World Economic Forum, the President told Ms. Christianne Amanpour that power was one area "Nigerians were really impressed with my administration". "I would have loved you ask the ordinary Nigerian on the street of Lagos, Abuja or any other city this question about power. That is one area Nigerians are quite pleased with the government that our commitment to improving power is working... That is one area civil society leaders agree that government is keeping faith with its promise..." In her reaction, Amanpour said: "President Goodluck Jonathan's comments to me about power probes sparked so many tweets that CNN set up an Open Mic in Lagos. Our OPEN MIC report has everyday Nigerians telling us about the power situation in their country."s Later, she aired the reactions from the streets of Lagos, which the President spoke about, again repudiating the President's position. "It's a lie," one man said. "Power is not improving at all."

During his 3rd Presidential media chat in November 2012, President Jonathan claimed that the combined average power generation capacity from all the power plants in the country moved from less than 3,000 MW in 2007 to a new peak capacity above 5,000 MW. The President had listed the 5,000 MW power generation capacity as one of his administration's major achievements under the Power Sector Reform Agenda: "Power is one area Nigerians appreciated we are moving. We are yet to get 24 hours of light in our cities, but you would agree with me the difference is clear. We moved in 2007, from about a little below 3,000 MW production average. Now, we are generating more than 5,000 MW (of electricity). But because of weak transmission infrastructure, we cannot evacuate..." As at the time President made the claim, TCN, the Power Holding Company of Nigeria, successor company in charge of monitoring electricity in the country, had given 4,321.3 MW as the country's power generation capacity as at 31 August, 2012. Assistant General Manager Public Affairs of TCN, Dave Ifabiyi told *Premium Time*: "There was never a time like that (5,000 MW generation capacity), never. The highest peak generation of 4,517.6 MW was achieved on December 23, 2012."

In his 2012 Independence Day broadcast, President Jonathan made a spurious claim on Transparency International's rating of Nigeria: "In its 2011 report, Transparency International (TI) noted that Nigeria is the second most improved country in the effort to curb corruption." In reaction to the presidential claim, TI said: "It does not have a recent rating or report that places Nigeria as the second most improved country in the fight against corruption." Its most recent indexing of Nigeria's corruption activities was the 2011 Corruption Perception Index, which measured perceived level of public sector corruption in the country. In that index, Nigeria scored 2.4 on a scale where 0 means highly corrupt and 10 means very clean. It was ranked 143 out of 183 countries. That rating was actually a dip in performance for Nigeria as the country was rated 134 out of 183 countries the previous year, 2010."

The Mid-Term Report of President Jonathan in May 2013 has been described by Japhet Omojuwa (www.ynaija.com) as one of such "lies, which are in line with President Jonathan's Transformation Agenda". The writer urged Mr. President to stop lying about an imaginary transformation agenda when of a truth things are only getting worse. The *Vanguard* newspaper editorial (www.vanguardngr.com 4 June, 2013) observed that the manner in which the President and his acolytes at a May 29 event that exalted sycophancy awarded himself high marks, egged on by Ministers made Nigerians wonder if their President, his men and women were talking about a country other than Nigeria. If things were as bright as the statistics painted, why the more glittering doom and gloom? Why were Nigerians unable to relate to the gains? The presentation of the mid-term report lacked the modesty that would have earned the President sympathy. If he

thinks he has done so well, we would be left pondering what standards he uses, the editorial concluded.

In October, 2012, Governor Danbaba Suntai of Taraba State crashed a small CESSNA plane he was piloting as he attempted to land in Yola Adamawa State. The injured governor was taken to National Hospital Abuja for treatment where President Jonathan went to see him. Afterwards, Mr. Jonathan pronounced the Governor's condition stable. "We are quite happy that the governor is stable. I have seen him. Doctors are working very hard on him. I believe that God willing, he will come out of it. But he is still in hospital." Two days after Mr. President spoke those words, Governor Suntai was airlifted to an undisclosed hospital in Germany for proper treatment. The President could not tell the difference between crisis and stability. Maybe he borrowed a leaf from his wife's spokesman who called an obviously sick 'First Lady' merely resting or was he out to mislead the Nigerian public? Either way, the lying antecedents of the Presidency hardly make the job of absolving Mr. President of such sundry accusations an easy one.

Lying honestly for Governor Chime

When it became clear that Governor Chime's 'disappearance' was stretching almost interminably, a good number of people of Enugu State began to seek urgent explanations to ascertain the true state of affairs. The first 'explanation' came from the State Commissioner for Information, Mr. Chuks Ugwuoke: "Governor Chime is enjoying his first vacation since he became the governor over five years ago and will return to his duty post at the end of it to carry on with the delivery of quality services to the people of Enugu state." Ironically, this 'explanation' only elicited more probing questions: 'Why must a governor take his accumulated leave of five years at once? And how long is the leave?' In response, Mr. Ugwuoke countered: "The focus on Governor Sullivan Chime's first vacation in five years is, to say the least, quite misplaced. We need to ask some pertinent questions in order to be able to properly expose its inherent flaws. One, is he entitled to vacation after five years on the saddle? Two, has he offended any provision of the Nigerian constitution by proceeding on leave? Again, is there any vacuum in the governance of Enugu State? Have activities of government been crippled by his absence? To put the records straight, before proceeding on his leave, Governor Chime, in strict compliance with the prescription of the Nigerian constitution, duly handed over the reins of power to his Deputy, His Excellency, Sunday Onyebuchi who is, today, the Acting Governor." Mr. Ugwuoke capped the stout defence of his boss with a conspiracy theory: "Government wants to alert unsuspecting Nigerians to disregard similar smear campaign being hatched against the government and in particular, Governor Sullivan Iheanacho Chime by this electoral loser and his co-conspirators. Their plot is to use the media and the internet to spread lies."

Adolf Hitler appreciated the efficacy of high frequency of telling lies when he said: "Make the lie big; make it simple; keep saying it and eventually, they will believe you. If you tell a big enough lie and tell it frequently enough, it will be believed." Chukwudi Achife, Chief Press Secretary to the Governor keyed into the lying vision of Hitler to rev up the frequency of Mr. Ugwuoke's honest lying propensity. He dismissed the rumour making the rounds that Governor Chime had not only traveled out of the country on medical grounds but also relocated from London to India because his health was degenerating, and insisted that his boss only took a leave to take a rest. Achife claimed that he spoke with the governor on telephone on a daily basis to brief him about the activities of the government and that he had been in London since he travelled out. "He is the only person who can determine when he would like to come back; the most important thing is that the government is up and running even in his absence and he has been in touch with us since he travelled to London. You know that this is the first time he is going on leave since the past five years".

A sectarian group – Save Enugu Group (SEG) – which sprang up in the wake of Governor Chime's protracted absence from office tacitly punctured the government spokespersons' grandstanding. In a letter dated 7 January 2013, sent to the Acting Governor Sunday Onyebuchi through the Secretary to the State Government (SSG), SEG expressed worries about the 'prolonged and unexplained

absence of Governor Sullivan Chime' urging the state government to make a 'categorical explanation on the whereabouts and status of Chime'. The letter observed that the two conflicting official statements of the Commissioner for Information, Chuks Ugwuoke on the status of Governor Chime, claiming first that Governor Chime 'was quietly enjoying his accumulated leave' and later that 'the Governor would back in office shortly' merely served to exacerbate the thriving mill of idle gossipers who speculate on his whereabouts and state of health. The group demanded answers to the following questions: Can the Governor hand over and create an acting administration in perpetuity? What is the duration of the annual leave of the Governor? Could the Constitution and government holidays regulations have given His Excellency a *carte blanche* to make a break for 100 days?

For answers, a terse statement issued by Mr. Achife dismissed SEG's inquisition as 'a non-issue'. "Government does not intend to join issues with these habitual attention-seekers. This is, at best, the coming together of men whose views on the incumbent government are well-known and always predictable. It is obvious that having realized, perhaps most painfully, that their media attacks have not achieved their pre-determined goal, they have now chosen to issue a statement as a group. We urge our people to ignore the hollow argument and baseless call by the group which merely exposes the narrow mindedness of their pay-masters because the people of Enugu State know the real men behind the mask." The lying duo of Ugwuoke and Achife persevered in their disinformation obsession even when the controversy surrounding Governor Chime's health condition prompted some of his colleagues at the Nigeria Governors' Forum (NGF), who were desirous to clear the air, to visit him at the hospital. The governors - Rotimi Amaechi (Rivers), Gabriel Suswam (Benue), and Godswill Akpabio (Akwa Ibom) - on their return to the country announced that the governor was in good condition and would soon be back. They assured Nigerians and Enugu state indigenes that there was no cause for alarm, stressing that the governor would come to continue from where he stopped before his long absence.

On 7 February 2013, Governor Chime returned to the country after over four months of medical sojourn abroad. Again, Mr. Ugwuoke was on hand to confirm the Governor's return but insisted that his boss was just on vacation against the groundswell of belief that he was treated for cancer and went ahead to defend the governor's disappearance from the country, saying the 1999 Constitution does not indicate the number of days a governor could spend on vacation. Unfortunately for Ugwuoke and Achife, Governor Chime opened up on his health status some days after his return from his medical sojourn abroad. According to him, he traveled to London where an oncologist carried out biopsy diagnoses on him and discovered that he had nasopharyngeal cancer, that is, cancer of the nose. His words:

I told my EXCO members that I was proceeding on long vacation which I wouldn't know how long it would last to treat myself. That was the information they got and of course I told them to cooperate with the acting governor. I got to London and settled in and the following day Friday went to see the Oncologist who had already made arrangements for treatments to begin and on Monday, I started treatment. I don't think any of you has had an experience. Cancer is a deadly disease and the cure is also deadly, the cure for cancer is not Panadol, the cure for cancer is not these drugs you buy off the counter. By the time you go through Chemotherapy and radiotherapy, you will be a changed person. So I started treatment, the treatment altogether lasted for 12 weeks, throughout the period of my treatment, I was an outpatient. I was never admitted in any hospital, all my treatments, I took as an outpatient. During the period of treatment, I personally had challenges with the treatment because like I said, except you see somebody that has taken that kind of treatment, it is not easy to imagine... The treatment officially ended on 10th of December and of course when treatment ends, that is when the real thing starts. When I had commenced treatment, what my doctors said was that I should stay off office for six months, that was their recommendation, but by first week of January when we went to review my state, they were shocked at the recovery rate, they were happy with the recovery, the scan they did showed that the tumour and nose fluid had disappeared completely, not even a

scar was left behind... Coming to my staff, all attacks on them that they were hoarding information and all that was an unfair attack. First and foremost, they didn't have all the information, all they knew was that I was going on vacation and I didn't know it was the business of people to know what my activities will be when I am going on vacation. So I decided to use the period of my vacation to take care of myself I don't see how it should concern anybody, I don't see why we should owe anybody any apologies. The important thing is complying with the law, making sure that as governor of the state, you ensured that the ship of governance remained on course and not abandoning your people. So, all those unfair attacks I found a little bit mischievous and actually exposed ignorance of some of our people. I was officially discharged [not on admission] and I am still in the process of recovering, you won't expect to see me tomorrow running but I am fitter now to resume duties, I am fit enough to ensure that government is on course with the assistance of my co-pilots.



Governor Chime

The Save Enugu Group that sprung up in the wake of Chime's 'disappearance' was one of the many groups that reacted to the governor's return. The group in a statement condemned the lying antics of the Governor's information managers. "We wish to state that Chime did not deserve being hustled out of 'gainful stay' in good health institutions if the right things were done first and before questions arose. In that respect, we, as other good people of Enugu State stand to hold responsible the primitive liars in Government House." The Save Enugu Group was referring to Chuks Ugwuoke and Chukwudi Achife (Information Commissioner and Governor's media aide respectively) as 'primitive liars' for coming out with conflicting official statements that His Excellency was quietly enjoying his holiday and accumulated leave or that he would be in office shortly. Surprisingly, Mr. Achife felt it was his turn to return the brickbat and feed the SEG with its own medicine, in spite of Governor Chime's expose, (Achife, 2013). His diatribe:

Governor Sullivan Chime has returned to his home front and not in a casket or stretcher as some, from their vocalized thoughts, would have wished, but on his two feet and fit as a fiddle. Quite strangely, the nation was compelled by forces that could only have been wishing ill of Chime, to be gripped by the riddle of whether the governor was dead or dying and whether he would ever visit the shores of this country again...It was really appalling to see serious newspapers running cover stories and editorials that were based purely on the blatant falsehood and unfounded rumours generated by anonymous fellows on the social media networks and by opposition elements in Enugu State without as much as checking out the facts with the state government. The result was that the public was treated to a fest of innuendoes and outright falsehood and degenerate conjectures. Even when a picture of an obviously healthy Governor Chime, in the company of three of his colleagues, was published, some writers apparently at the behest of their sponsors, tried rather pathetically to question the authenticity of the picture. Cornered by the truth, they tried, albeit in vain, to explain their misadventure with the argument that the public should have been told that the Governor had left the country to attend to his health instead of saying that he went on vacation. But that is defeatist as it is tenuous.

It is quite interesting to observe that the pot found it convenient to call the kettle black. The duo of Ugwuoke and Achife who lied through their teeth about the health challenges of their principal had turned full circle to accuse the concerned members of the public, who raised pertinent questions about their Governor, of peddling 'blatant falsehood and degenerate conjectures'. It only goes to prove the point that lying is so intrinsic to the nature of government, that even the truth about old lies is concealed to protect new lies. Don't steal; don't lie; don't cheat; government hates competition. Government has unfettered monopoly of telling lies and remains unfazed about the ignoble badge of integrity deficit it invests on itself.

From the foregoing, it seems pertinent to aver that lying, which is at the root of disinformation strategy of government spokespersons fall within the second category in order of descending severity as presented by St. Augustine, that is, lies that harm others and help no one.

Official lies and integrity deficit of government

In October 1962, the world was on the brink of nuclear conflagration as the Cuban missile crisis raged between United States and Soviet Union. The US President, John F. Kennedy reached out to the leaders of the key nations that were members of the UN Security Council to get their support for American position at the UN. The Russians discountenanced all claims of Americans and the global community was steadily approaching the threshold of monumental nuclear confrontation. It was difficult at that point to tell who was telling the truth; Russia or America. So it was simply a game of whose report to believe. The French President, Charles de Gaulle received a call from President Kennedy asking for the support of France in the impending UN vote on the matter. The French president offered his unconditional support for the American position. A French minister was to ask the President later why he supported the Americans when there was no conclusive evidence of their claim. de Gaulle responded boldly, "The word of the American President is good enough for me". That statement demonstrated that Trust is key to any meaningful relationship between governments and also between governments and the people.

In contemporary Nigeria, it is inconceivable for a Nigerian to say that the word of a typical Nigerian President is trustworthy enough for him. This is largely due to integrity deficit, which governments and political leaders have wittingly or unwittingly invested on themselves through institutionalised lying. According to Wise (1973:14), "large numbers of people no longer believe the government or the President. They no longer believe the government because they have come to understand that the government does not tell the truth." The result of age-long institutionalized lying and official deception has been to shred the fabric of trust between people and government. It is not only that people no longer believe what a President tells them; the mistrust has seeped outward. It has spread, and pervaded other institutions. The lying has an insidious effect, for in time, policy makers begin to believe their own lies. The deception designed for the public in the end becomes self-deception as the lesson of the health challenges of First Lady and Governor Chime illustrates. The powers-that-be would begin to believe their own memoranda, 'options' and 'scenarios' for them, reality had become the reflection in the fun-house mirror. One of the most damaging aspects of government lying is that even if the truth later emerges, it seldom does so in time to influence public opinion or public policy.

In essence, there is now a tendency to disbelieve the government even when it is telling the truth. For instance, in March 2013 the Nigerian media was awash with unconfirmed stories about the First Lady, Dame Patience who had fallen sick again and flown to Germany for treatment. The Presidency denied the media report through a statement issued by the Special Assistant on Media to the President, Office of the First Lady, Ayo Osinlu, who explained that Mrs. Jonathan traveled to Paris, France en route Dubai (the United Arab Emirate) before proceeding to Germany to see her mother, Mama Sisi who was receiving medical attention in a German hospital. According to Taiwo-Obaluonye (2013) Osinlu described as "unfortunate" media houses who allowed themselves to be used by

dedicated mischief makers against the basic tenet of professional journalism, which regards truth as sacred. Perhaps, Osinlu would have spared himself the inconvenience of issuing a rebuttal to dispel the curiosity and wild speculations about the movement of the First Lady had official lying and secrecy not been enthroned as a direct principle of state policy.

As Wise observed, the elite policy makers have thus found an easy justification for both deception and secrecy. They are the only ones who 'read the cables' and the intelligence reports and have the 'right information'. Ordinary citizens, they believe, cannot understand complex national issues. It is only the policy makers that have the right or so they think, to mislead the public for good. In its baldest terms, this philosophy has been stated as 'the right to lie.' Even if officials feel compelled to mislead the public – and it is unlikely that total virtue will ever find its way into the councils of government – to proclaim that right is to place an official imprimatur on a policy of deception and distrust. It was Walter Lippmann who noted that it is sophistry to pretend that in a free country a man has some sort of inalienable or constitutional right to deceive his fellow men. There is no more right to deceive than there is a right to swindle, to cheat, or to pick pockets. Perhaps, it can be argued that lying and secrecy are basic to any government; that it is only human nature for political leaders to tend to conceal the truth, hide their mistakes or wrongdoing, and mislead the public. Nonetheless, that easy rationale is not acceptable, however, in a democracy, which depends upon an informed public. The consent of the governed is basic to democracy as a system of government in all climes and ages. If the governed are misled, if they are not told the truth, or if through official secrecy and deception they lack information on which to base intelligent decisions, the system may go on – but not as a democracy. When information, which properly belongs to the public is systematically withheld by those in power, noted President Richard M. Nixon, the people soon become ignorant of their own affairs, distrustful of those who manage them, and eventually – incapable of determining their own destinies.

Given the colossal loss of confidence and goodwill of Nigeria deriving from President Jonathan's seeming clueless and *kindergarten approach to governance* (apologies to Chief Akande) the government's capacity to distort information in order to preserve its own political power is almost limitless. Given that information is power, the ability to distort and control information has been used more often than not to preserve and perpetuate that power. Increasingly, in recent times, it has used the alchemy of power to brew synthetic truths and to shape public perception of events to fit predetermined policies. This official act of serial lying can do no more than rubbish public trust in government and cast the latter in the mould of a licensed liar. When the government lies, it therefore acts unconstitutionally and illegally. A government that lies to the people breaks faith with the people, violates the contract between the government and the people under which the people consent to be governed. A government that lies to the people delegitimizes itself. To stem this ugly tide, we need to initiate a change process, which according to Wise must come through the political process. There is need to make the political cost of lying too high; to make political power rest, at least in some measures, on truth. If political leaders come to realise through mass opinion and election returns that deceiving the public carries greater political risks than telling the truth, political rhetoric forged on the anvil of blatant lying may gradually be replaced by the politics of truth.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have examined the adroit application of linguistic manipulation drawn from honest lying cheque as a disinformation strategy by media aides and government spokespersons in Nigeria and how such institutionalised lying and official deception had invested government with the ignoble badge of integrity deficit. Perhaps, it is pertinent to remind government spokespersons, who tread the path of lie and deception, of the ignoble end of the Dutch artist, Han van Meegeren, easily regarded as the most notorious and celebrated forger of the 20th century. In the early 20th century, scholars were locked in a fierce argument on whether the great Vermeer had painted a series of works depicting Biblical scenes. Van

Meegeren saw in that roiling polemic a window of opportunity to trick art pundits into acknowledging his genius as he set out to forge one such disputed work, 'The Disciples at Emmaus'. With tireless attention to detail, he faked the cracks and aged hardness of a centuries-old painting. He intentionally played on the confirmation bias of critics who wanted to believe that Vermeer painted these scenes. His gamble paid off as experts hailed the painting as authentic, and van Meegeren took off like a bandit producing and selling more fake works of Vermeer. Unfortunately, he committed one fatal 'heroic error'. van Meegeren sold a painting to one prominent member of the Nazi Party in Germany. After the war in 1945, Allies considered him a traitor for selling a 'national treasure' to the enemy. In a curious change of events, van Meegeren had an inescapable option of painting for his freedom. In order to help prove that the painting was no national treasure, he forged another in the presence of authorities. Although he escaped with a light sentence of one year in prison, van Meegeren died of a heart attack two months after his trial.

Government spokespersons should appreciate the enormity of deep shit, which the con artist found himself. Let the Pinocchios of our time, who gladly adorn the garb of bare-faced mendacity and ably armoured by their Machiavellian intelligence, realise that lies have a tender frame that breaks too soon. Let it dawn on them that there is life after their official duty of telling honest lies on behalf of their paymasters. In an earlier article (Agbedo, 2012), I recalled how Reuben Abati had in an article in the *Guardian* (2009) advocated the stoning of economists in official corridors for advancing outdated economic arguments to justify deregulation policy. He wrote thus:

The arguments being advanced to justify the proposed full deregulation do not make sense. All the arguments have a ring of *deja vu*. They are taken from the same textbooks that the economists have refused to update, the same ideas that led to the collapse of the global economy. Other countries are making a U-turn and subjecting textbook knowledge to the test of reality, Nigerian policy makers are still holding on to old paradigms. One of these days, we shall start stoning the economists in official corridors.

That was the old Reuben, the thoroughbred regular columnist in his fine journalistic elements. That was before he yanked off his thinking cap after abandoning his editorial desk at the *Guardian* to join the establishment, which he had spent a greater part of his journalism career years hauling constructive fires and brimstones at. One had wondered if the 'new improved' Reuben, the garrulous Presidential spokesman, would still summon enough liver to stone his 'fellow economists' at the Aso Rock bedroom of power. Of course, given his vociferous defence of all government policies including the controversial oil subsidy removal and serial honest lies for government, Dr. Abati had left nobody in doubt that his liver had only encouraged him 'to join them' since he could not 'beat them.' But as they 'join them,' it would be mindless for them to ignore the consequences of wounding their consciences. Conscience, according to Usman Dan Fodio, is an open wound; only truth can heal it.

Perhaps, the most important point to note is to acknowledge the greatest lie of all: when we tell ourselves this soup of lies in which we all swim will not really affect us at our core; that it will not shape our desires, our hearts. Like second-hand smoke, the more time we spend in the haze of untruths, the less likely we are to realize that it is really killing us. Truth cures us of what psychiatrists call *pseudologia fantastica* (behaviour of habitual or compulsive lying) and *mythomania* (excessive or abnormal propensity for lying). A culture of truth – a culture where the lies of states, businesses, and other spheres of life have no power – starts with a heart desirous of truth. How do we get there? From the perspective of Christianity, the Bible provides the Way. In John 14:6, Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Even in Zoroastrianism, Zoroaster teaches that there are two powers in the universe; *Asha*, which is truth, order and that which is real, and *Druj*, which is 'the Lie'. Later, the Lie became personified as *Angra Mainyu*, a figure similar to the Christian Devil, who was portrayed as the eternal opponent of *Ahura Mazda* (God). There is a reason why Satan is called the father of lies. In John 8:44, Jesus said: "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your

father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and father of lies. But thankfully, lying is not the native language of our government spokespersons.

Then, which way do we go from here? Perhaps a good place to start would be for the Abatis, Osinlus, Ugwuokes and Achifes of our time to appreciate the fact that there is a line – however circuitous – between the lies our culture tells, the lies we tell ourselves, and our desires. And there is a direct line between our desires and our characters and from there to our hearts. If the line between our hearts and our words can run in a negative direction, thankfully it can also run the other way. This is quite discernible by referring to the Old Testament and New Testament of the Bible, both of which contain statements that God cannot lie and that lying is immoral (Num. 23:19; Hab. 2:3; Heb. 6:13-18).

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