

Journal of **Communication** (JCOMM)

**Military Propaganda and Disinformation: How Issah Mobila's
Murder was Spun in the Media**



**CARI
Journals**

Military Propaganda and Disinformation: How Issah Mobila's Murder was Spun in the Media

Mahama Seth Sayibu

University for Development Studies, Nyankpala

Smahama@uds.edu.gh, mahamaseth10@yahoo.com

Accepted: 2nd Apr 2023 Received in Revised Form: 14th Apr 2023 Published: 15th Apr 2023

Abstract

Purpose: The study investigates the use of propaganda in the media by Ghana's military in the media coverage of the murder of Issah Mobila in military custody in Ghana's northern town of Tamale. Mobila was murdered in 2004 by the military after his arrest by the civil police with an allegation of possession of arms that he intended to use to cause post-election violence in Tamale. Even though the military earlier denied the murder, an autopsy report confirmed that the deceased was murdered in military custody. A military inquiry report indicted some seven soldiers, two of whom were later jailed by a Fast Track High Court in Accra.

Methodology: The study employed qualitative research design to generate data through interviews. Internet sources and published works on military brutalities of civilians in Africa were also used. Local media coverage of the event was extensive and radio phone-in programmes witnessed condemnation and anger from the people regarding the manner Mobila was tortured and killed in military custody.

Findings: The study found that the military command in Tamale deployed propaganda techniques in order to evade responsibility for the death of Mobila in its custody. It also found that local media coverage of the event was biased and did not conform with the tenets of objectivity.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: The study which is the first on propaganda and military murder of a civilian in military custody in Ghana recommended the training of journalists in detecting propaganda frames in reporting so as to obviate biased reportage in conflict situations.

Keywords: *Media, Military, Mobila, Murder, Propaganda*

Background to the Study

December 9, 2004 will remain a dark day in the history of the people of Tamale, the Northern Regional capital of Ghana because of the murder in military custody of one of its illustrious sons and chairman of the opposition Convention Peoples' Party (CPP) in the region, Issah Mobila. He was murdered in cold blood by some soldiers' hours after he was seized from the police, where he was held in connection with an allegation of possession of arms that he intended to use to cause violence after the 2004 presidential elections. His party lost the election which was won by the New Patriotic Party (NPP)'s candidate, John Kufour. *Joy FM*, a private radio station in the nation's capital, Accra was the first to report the news of his death in military custody sending shivers down the spines of residents and creating panic and immeasurable pandemonium. In a country with history of several military coups and brutalities, coupled with some abductions and killings during the period, scores of opposition political bigwigs in Tamale got alarmed by the development and embarked on self-imposed exile to the southern part of the country, notably Kumasi and Accra, in the Ashanti and greater Accra regions respectively. They included Alhaji Sumani Zakari, (d.2010), Mark Swala and Mohammed Namadeena Aboagye. Scores of the youth also fled Tamale, fearing abduction and killing. Government through the Northern Regional Security Council (NRSC) issued a statement in the media, claiming that Issah Mobila died as a result of stomach pains after he drunk water. The statement said 'Issah Mobila sipped water, complained of stomach pains, collapsed and died while being hurried to the hospital' (Mahama, 2020). This was disputed by the public that suspected that the deceased died as a result of maltreatment in the hands of the military. They therefore requested that an autopsy be performed to establish the cause of death of Mobila. The NRSC tried to convince the family of the deceased to inter his remains but that was rejected by the masses. The burial took place only after the autopsy report established that he died of violent causes (Mahama, 2020).

As a consequence of his murder in military custody, soldiers in whose custody Mobila died were arrested and arraigned on charges of conspiracy to murder and causing murder (Graphic Online, 2013). To determine the real cause of death, government sanctioned an inquest into the matter. The Military Command also set up a team to enquire into the matter (The Ghanaian Chronicle, 2012). The two enquiries confirmed the long held public suspicion that Mobila died a forceful death through unnatural circumstances. The coroner's report indicated that Issah Mobila had 'multiple abrasions all over his body and fractured ribs' and died due to 'collapse in the left lung, fractured ribs and multiple abrasions'. (Ghana News Agency, 2010). The military enquiry report uncovered that he died in the hands of the military at the Kamina barracks three hours after he was taken into custody in a healthy condition. Member Secretary of the military enquiry, Lt. Col. Antony Eshun told the Fast Track High Court, in Accra that Corporal Yaw Appiah and Private Seth Goka connived with two other persons to beat up the deceased who hitherto was in a healthy state (The Ghanaian Chronicle, 2012).

The military later held seven military officers responsible for the death of Mobila, including, Lieutenant Colonel W. Omane Agyekum who was commanding the 6th Infantry Battalion (The Ghanaian Chronicle, 2012).

In a response to the military enquiry report, Lieutenant Colonel W. Omane Agyekum, said Mobila's death was purely accidental, having tumbled from the guard room and had his ribs broken. He said as a supporter of the Andani family in the Dagbon Chieftaincy dispute, Mobila's enemies could have wreaked damage on his body before he was arrested by the police and argued that no member of the military should be held responsible, and added that there was no evidence to the effect that the deceased died as a result of molestation by the military (The Insight Newspaper, 2010). He said Mobila had stacked weapons to allocate to people to cause violence after the 2004 elections (Ibid). Later in 2013, Private Seth Goka, and Corporal Yaw Appiah, two of the seven soldiers indicted by the military faced justice when they were convicted by an Accra Fast Track High court for the murder of Mobila (Graphic Online, 2013).

Media coverage of the event was detailed and concentrated on the murder, public outcry and condemnation, the bereaved family responses, burial of the deceased, the arrest of the soldiers and the court proceedings as well as the sentencing of the culprits. It was observed that local media coverage was varied. The variation was influenced by the political ideology of the radio stations. *North Star* radio that is owned by an NPP former Vice President (d. 2012) stayed away from public frames connected to the murder, the burial, public outcry and condemnation as well as reactions from the bereaved family. Instead they concentrated on mostly military and government sources that spoke on the murder issue. As discussed elsewhere in this article, *Radio Justice* and *Diamond FM* that were sympathetic to the opposition National Democratic Congress explored several angles to the story and arguably set the agenda for public discussion on the matter. *Diamond FM* and *Radio Justice* devoted much of their news time and Talk-Show programmes to discuss proceedings connected to the story. Phone-in programmes had people calling in and expressing anger and sympathy for the manner Mobila was murdered.

Data for this study was gathered from online sources, scholarly works, observation and interviews. The qualitative research design guided the study. Adopting a purposive sampling approach, twenty (20) stories were selected from a total of thirty-two (32) news stories gathered on the Mobila murder case that covered the murder, the public outcry, the burial, bereaved family responses and the court sittings. These were selected because they generated the concepts of objectivity or lack of it, as well as propaganda and disinformation that were relevant for the study. The interviews were conducted on five journalists who covered the murder and followed developments in the reportage of the story. The choice of the respondents reflected the proposition that sought to scrutinise objectivity-or lack of it- and the use of propaganda and disinformation by the military in the reportage of the Mobila murder. In coding, the data was categorised into objectivity, disinformation and propaganda and sub categorised into different types of propaganda, including

lies, deception through omission, and the use of plausible deniability. These categories were used for the analysis through thematic and textual analysis approaches.

Literature Review: Military Brutalities of Civilians in Africa

Military brutalities of civilians in Africa has attracted enormous literature in the academic field largely because a significant portion of Africa's political history has been influenced by military rule. Relations between the military and the civilian populations in Africa continue to suffer due largely to military brutalities of civilians (Agyeman-Duah, 2002). Military coups may have dropped significantly in African countries but molestation of the civilian population by the military continues, rendering relations between the two challenging (Ngoma, 2010). In the few African states where the military have again taken over the reigns of government, civilians continue to suffer brutalities, some leading to death. In the case of Guinea, 200 people were reportedly killed and about a thousand injured in 2008 while witnesses feared being targeted by security forces who attempted to undermine possible future investigations into crime against humanity (Matlosa and Zounmenou, n d). In Mali armed Islamist groups and the military killed 71 people as soldiers attempted to counter armed Islamist groups in the county (Reuters, 2022). In constitutional regime of Nigeria the Council on Foreign Relations reported that in 2017, soldiers in search of Boko Haram insurgence invaded a village and killed majority of its male population and in 2021 Nigerian soldiers again killed 11 civilians after they opened fire at demonstrators in Lagos (Human Rights Watch, 2021). The situation is not different in Cameroon as nearly 2000 civilians were killed and hundreds of houses destroyed in 2016 by the army and separatist groups (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

In Ghana, despite widespread condemnation of military brutalities, the military continue to violate the rights of civilians ranging from arbitrary arrests of teens for alleged theft in 2018, to beating of people for demonstrating in 2022 and killing of voters at election collation centre in 2020 (Alhassan and Mahama, 2023). Soldiers again arrested and molested 186 civilians at Ashiaman in Accra after their colleague was killed in the community.

Notwithstanding the huge discussions on military molestation of civilians in Africa, including Ghana, literature on the molestation and killing of civilians in military custody in Ghana is scanty. The only noticeable study on the killing of a civilian in military custody in Ghana is the study conducted by Alhassan and Mahama (2023) that discussed psychological impact of the murder of Issah Mobila in military custody and media censorship in the coverage of the event. Titled *Media and Murder in Military Barracks: Sociological Analysis of the Murder of Isaah Mobila in the Northern Region of Ghana*, the study did not discuss objectivity in the media reportage of military murders of civilian in Africa, including Mobila's murder in military custody in Ghana. It did not also discuss propaganda and disinformation in the media reportage of military murders of civilians in Africa, including the murder of Mobila in military custody in Ghana. This therefore leaves a gap in research on propaganda disinformation and objectivity of the media in the coverage of

military murders of civilians in military custody in Africa, including the murder of Mobila in military custody in Ghana. This study, that fills that gap, interrogates the use of disinformation and propaganda techniques employed by Lieutenant Colonel W. Omane Agyekum, and the Military High Command in their reactions and pronouncements in the media. It also investigates objectivity-or lack of it-in the local media coverage of the murder of Mobila in military custody in Ghana.

Theoretical Framework

Propaganda and the Media

Scholars differ on when exactly propaganda emerged. According to Ellul (1967) propaganda emerged from the Catholic Church and was used in reference to a committee of church officials who worked to propagate the Catholic faith during the time of Pope Gregory VIII from 1572-1585, cited in (Walton, 1997). It is even being suggested that propaganda had its roots 2,400 years ago in 'The Art of War' by Sun-tzu (Knightley, 2004). There is however some uniformity amongst some propaganda scholars in terms of its organised and scientific usage during World War 1 where enemy opinion-forming activities were referred to as propaganda and full of lies (Knightley, 2004, Walton 1997, Taylor, 2003). Walton (1997) presumes that the term propaganda did not connote negativity by (one of its early inventors), the Catholic Church. However, propaganda has with time been associated with negativity because of its historical function of fuelling fear, hypocrisy and ignorance (Taylor, 2003). Jowett and O'Donnell (2012) argue that propaganda is a communication that attempts to achieve a response to further the preferred intention of the sender of the message. The military has made heavy use of propaganda against the media throughout bloody wars and conflicts like World Wars I & II, the Vietnam War in the mid-50s, and the Gulf Wars of 1991 and 2003 as attested to by scholars, including (Hallin 1989, Carruthers 1996, Carruthers & Stewart, 1996, Taylor, 2003, Knightley 2004, Hammond 2007 and Simpson 2015). In the on-going war in Ukraine, the Council of the European Union claims that the Russian government and its military have been applying methodical manipulation and disinformation as an operational instrument in its assault on Ukraine (2022).

Propaganda includes lies (Knightley 2004, Bakir et al. 2018) and to lie is to say something you believe is untrue with a resolve to deceive (Fallen, 2009). Propaganda includes disinformation, Wardle and Derakhshan (2017). In a conceptual framework for the examination of propaganda which they label as information disorder, they identify disinformation as one of three techniques of propaganda which is giving false information to cause harm (ibid). A key attribute of disinformation is that it fabricates information with intent to cause harm. Disinformation has variously been employed by the military during conflict times to secure favourable coverage in the media in order to go to war. One of the catalysts for a successful disinformation strategy is dehumanisation which has been variously exploited by the West against its enemies. When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990, the Pentagon in an attempt to provoke instant terror

images connected to Hitler, smeared Saddam as second Hitler, compared the invasion to the Nazi bombardment in Europe in the 1930s and portrayed him as insane, hated by his own people and despised in the Arab world. Saddam was also accused of having powerful artillery and ‘vast stock of chemical and biological weapons’ (Knightley, 2001), (Hammond, 2007, p.66), (Carruthers, 2011, p.29). In Britain, Tony Blair’s claim that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction was later found to have been ‘sexed up’ to win public support to go to war as facts about Saddam’s deadly weapons were manufactured with dubious legality, (Danchev, 2010). While the U.S Defence Secretary, William Cohen later revealed that Saddam had no weapons of mass destruction, Stewart and Carruthers (1996) found that, the Pentagon misled the media about Iraq’s military might (McLaughlin, 2005).

The examples above also fit into Bakir et al. (2018) examination of propaganda through Organised Persuasive Communication, including deception through omission which comprises concealment of information to make the promoted viewpoint more persuasive. Promoters of deception through omission understand that people are less likely to be swayed if they have the full facts. It can be argued that if the Western public was aware that Saddam did not possess weapons of mass destruction, and/or that his invasion of Kuwait was nowhere comparable to Hitler’s bombardment in Europe in the 1930s, support for the war would have waned. It can again be argued that support for the war was successful not only because Pentagon and its allies lied to the western public through the demonization of Saddam but also through the forgeries and staged-managed events as can be contended in the fake testimony of Nayirah in the Kuwaiti baby incubators story (see Knightley, 2001, 2004). Bakir et al. (2018) aver that to support lies, disinformation could be employed by forging and stage-managing events.

During the Kosovo crisis of 1998, the West portrayed the Serbs as Nazi thugs who were bent on causing genocide and during the war on terror in 2001, they again referred to the Taliban as cruel and fanatical Muslims who tortured their own people (Knightley, 2001). In these few instances of dehumanisation and disinformation against the enemy, the media was misled and used by the western militaries and their governments to mobilise public support and prepare the west for war. Propaganda also includes the use of plausible deniability which is a psychological Warfare mostly used by the United States government to deny responsibility for military operations coming from them (Simpson, 2015). Plausible deniability could be traced to as far back as 1948 and synonymous with the U. S. Cold War traditions when the U. S government defined covert operations as ‘so planned and executed that any U. S government responsibility for them is not evident to unauthorized persons and that if uncovered the U S government can plausible disclaim any responsibility for them’ (Cormac and Aldrich, 2018). Scholars differ on how it functions; while some see it as functioning at the international level to allow a state to deny involvement in an

act, others see it as domestic tool to allow senior state officials to deny responsibility for an action and instead punish so-called rogue-elements for transgressing, if the action is discovered (Ibid).

The concept of plausible deniability has been used by the military to manipulate the media in war times. A clear example is the 1999 Kosovo conflict when the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) bombed a refugee convoy at Djacovica but Pentagon's spokesperson Ken Bacon denied any civilian fatalities. Even though NATO later admitted the facts, they blamed the Serbs for the fatalities (Knightley, 2004).

Objectivity and the Media

Scholars of media and political communication vary on what exactly constitutes the exact definition of objectivity in media coverage. Ward, (2010) defines objectivity as a web of standards and rules that govern practice with the view to jettisoning biases from media coverage. This is achieved through factuality, balance, fairness, non-bias, independence, non-interpretation and neutrality. Objectivity lays emphasis on verifiable facts, balanced and impartiality in reporting and reflecting accurate events, factual arrangement of the news, exercising professional detachment and impersonal point of view and the separation of news and editorial functions of the news organization (Schudson, 2001).

Entman (1989) proposes that there are two primary requirements to achieving objectivity, namely depersonalisation and balance. Entman's definition concurs party with Schudson (2001)'s treatise on objectivity, especially regarding the need for journalists to detach themselves professionally from the stories they cover and ensure balance on all sides of the story.

However, the concept of objectivity in news reporting has been heavily criticized by both practitioners and scholars of the media. Martin Bell, formally of the BBC, and a heavy critic of the 'by-stander journalism' offers a treatise that challenges the notion of objectivity in news reportage, especially during conflict situations. He calls it 'Journalism of Attachment', '...a journalism that cares as well as knows' (Bell, 1998, pp.16-18) where reporters are encouraged to not stand 'neutrally between good and evil' 'right or wrong' or 'the victim and the oppressed' (ibid). He calls for a journalism that will expose the human and material costs of conflicts and wars to create opportunity for governments and the international community to intervene. Bell's concept was informed by situations where *third-party reporters* from developed countries arrive in conflict zones and report with little emotional attachment in the midst of sufferings of the oppressed and vulnerable.

Bell's expose' has however been criticized by many media scholars, including Ward (2010) who describes it as too narrow a notion that ignores the possibly bad effects of attachment. Zelizer and Allan (2004) argue that journalists who are affected by traumatic events report under the weight

of the trauma. In their model dubbed ‘Patriotic Journalism’, they contend that in such situations, journalists abandon objective and neutral reporting and concentrate on government and military framing of events. They do not provide the public with alternative frames in their stories.

Patriotic Journalism as explained by Zelizer and Allan (2004) concurs with Hallin’s *Sphere of Consensus* in which he argues that there is implied arrangement amongst journalists that the official line should be the only point of view while disregarding opposing views or alternative narratives. In another sphere- ‘Sphere of Deviance’, Hallin explained that the media often ridicule views considered too fundamental, reckless or perilous and does not give such views any fair hearing (Hallin, 1986).

The above thoughts on propaganda and objectivity will constitute the framework for this discussion on military propaganda and the media in the coverage of the murder of Mobila in Ghana’s military barracks.

Discussions and Findings

Lies and Disinformation as Propaganda Tools in Murder of Issah Mobila

The use of lies and disinformation as a technique of propaganda in the murder of Issah Mobila in military custody at the Kamina Barracks in Tamale was apparent. Security agencies lied and forged evidence against Issah Mobila when they accused him of harbouring deadly weapons which he intended to use to cause post-election violence. Indeed, from the search on his vehicle and house to the entire process of his murder trial, no evidence was adduced to that effect. This act of lies and disinformation lays claim to Bakir et al. (2018) treatise on lies and disinformation that argue that to support lies, disinformation could be employed through the use of forgery and staged-managed events.

Lieutenant Colonel W. Omane Agyekum, the then Commanding Officer of the Kamina Barracks also employed the technique of lies and disinformation to secure favourable coverage in the media. He told the media, in response to the military enquiry report that indicted him that the deceased died when he fell from the guardroom and broke his ribs. This was a barefaced lie since the autopsy report revealed that the deceased died from collapse in the left lung, fractured ribs and multiple abrasions. He also claimed that as a supporter of one of the factions in the Dagbon chieftaincy crisis, he might have been injured by his enemies who might have inflicted marks on his body ahead of his arrest. Again, this was a blatant lie since the military enquiry report found that the deceased arrived at the military Barracks a ‘healthy man’.

The element of disinformation is that as a key suspect, having been indicted by the military, he gave false information about the cause of death of Mobilla to the media arguably in anticipation of muddying the investigation processes, thereby causing harm to the delivery of justice.

Military, Murder and Plausible Deniability

Lieutenant Colonel W. Omane Agyekum claimed that no soldier should be blamed for the harm caused to Mobila since there was no evidence to that effect and concluded that Mobila's death was 'purely accidental'. Given the evidence of torture of Mobila by the military as found elsewhere in this paper, he lied and this lie is grounded in the technique of plausible deniability where state actors deny responsibility for acts committed by them or by their organisations. The technique of plausible deniability is even more evident in the lie told by the Northern Regional Security Council that 'Issah Mobila sipped water, complained of stomach pains, collapsed and died while being hurried to the hospital. These lies were in dispute with the autopsy report and the military enquiry report that suggested torture as cause of death of the deceased. As state organisation, the Northern Regional Security Council plausibly denied responsibility for the act that was committed by some members of that organisation.

Deception and the Military

The military engaged in deception through omission and this is evident in the denial by Lt. Col. Agyekum that Mobila was tortured. He omitted the fact that Mobila was tortured and held on to a viewpoint that the deceased could have been injured by his enemies. Deception through omission is withholding information to make the promoted viewpoint more persuasive. As commander of the battlion where Mobila was tortured to death, it is highly unlikely that Lt. Col. Agyekun was unaware of what transpired at the guardroom. It is argued that his viewpoint was intended to persuade the nation into believing that Mobila was not hurt by the military. This is because advocates of such viewpoint appreciate that the public is less likely to be swayed with a full illustration of the facts.

Objectivity and the Local Media Reportage

As discussed earlier on in this article, local media reportage on the Mobila murder story was influenced by the political ideology of journalists and their radio stations. Journalists reporting for *North Star* FM that supported the ruling NPP stayed away from alternative views from the public on the Mobila murder issue and rather concentrated their reportage on government and military frames on the issue.

A retired broadcaster who worked with *North Star Radio* said:

...due to the sensitive nature of the case, our editorial policy dictated we ignored comments that would create further tensions. The way people were condemning the military and the government, we did not want to report that. We played safe by reporting official correspondences and the court proceeding that did not contain angry comments. This was because some people tried to take political advantage of the unfortunate situation and we did not want to be part of that...(001).

Another former *North Star* reporter said:

Given our political orientation and our audience, we did not want to report on any issue that would antagonise our listeners as the issue was highly polarised along NDC-NPP lines so we concentrated on stories that our audience would identify with...(002)

A former news editor at *Radio Justice* who resigned over the reportage of the murder case said:

It was a human rights issue so pathetic that we tried to use the station to put pressure on government to act. Right from the beginning of the murder, it was clear the military was responsible but did not want to admit. This called for the intervention of the media and as a local station closed to the conflict; we owed our listeners the duty to explore all angles and unearth every valuable information to help in identifying the culprits and pushing government to act...(003)

A former reporter at *Diamond FM* (owned by an NDC former minister of state) denied they were making political capital out of the situation and said:

We saw it as a human rights issue and needed to push government to act. We gave the family and their sympathisers the voice to tell the world how it happened and how they were feeling. It was also a pathetic and big story that needed to be covered at all angles so we devoted a lot of time to it...(004)

Depending on where they worked, respondents' comments reflected the above quotations confirming our observations that the local media was polarised in their reportage of the murder.

Their comments reveal interesting insights into the notion of objectivity-or lack of it- as held by Hallin (1986), Martin Bell (1998) and Zelizer and Allan, (2004). A retired reporter of *North Star* radio as quoted in (001) above claimed the radio station did not report alternative views from the public in order to stay safe but instead reported on official correspondences. This position of *North Star* radio in the reportage of the murder is epitomised in the treatise on *Patriotic Journalism* by Zelizer and Allan (2004) who content that in situations of conflict, journalists abandon objective and neutrality and concentrate on government and military framing of events and do not provide the public with alternative frames in their stories. *North Star's* position is even more evident in the concept of the *Sphere of Consensus* as proposed by Hallin (1986) in which there is implied arrangement amongst journalists that the official line should be the only point of view while opposing views or alternative narratives are played down. *North Star's* reportage of the murder also lays claim to Hallin's *Sphere of Deviance* as the station considered public views on the matter dangerous since they constituted a risk of inflaming passions and thus ignored them.

Radio Justice and *Diamond FM* that sympathised with the opposition NDC at the time, gave much publicity to members of the public in their reportage of the murder. Describing the murder as pathetic and a big story, *Diamond FM* gave much publicity to the family and sympathisers of

Mobila to air their views while *Radio Justice* ‘explored all angles to the story to put pressure on government to act’. This position of *Radio Justice and Diamond FM* is arguably exemplified in the concept of *journalism of attachment* coined by Martin Bell who calls on reporters not to stand neutral between good and evil, right and wrong, victim and the oppressed but show emotional attachment in reporting issues involving the vulnerable and the oppressed. Arguments that the brutal murder of Mobila was pathetic and that they explored all angles to the story to aid government to identify and punish the culprits suggest that reporters at *Radio Justice* reported under the weight of the trauma and this is also exemplified in the concept of *Patriotic Journalism* by Zelizer and Allan (2004) who argue that journalists who are affected by traumatic events report under the weight of the trauma. Their action is akin to the behaviour of American journalists during the September 9, 11 attacks where they acted like ordinary American citizens rather than professional journalists (Ibid).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Evidence abounds in this discussion that the local media in Tamale were biased in their coverage of the murder of Mobila in military custody. The Military High Command, Lieutenant Colonel W. Omane Agyekum and the government through the Northern Regional Security Council employed the techniques of disinformation and propaganda in their dealings with the media in an attempt to secure favour in media coverage. Military propaganda has long been used against the media dating back to as far as WWI where it was used in an organised and scientific manner (Knightley, 2004). As found in this study, techniques of propaganda, including plausible deniability, lies and disinformation were evident in the Mobila murder story coverage. Bakir et. al (2018) treatise on deception through omission was also evidently applicable. Equally apparent in this study are concepts like Hallin’s (1986) *Spheres of Deviance and Consensus* as well as Martin Bell’s (1998) concept of *Journalism of Attachment* and Zelizer and Allan (2004)’s *Patriotic Journalism*. Evidences of these concepts in this study support the preposition that local media coverage of the murder of Mobila was biased and did not conform to the tenets of objectivity as proposed by Ward (2010) who defines objectivity as a web of standards and rules that govern practice to jettison biases from media coverage. Local media coverage of Mobila murder did not also adapt to objectivity as argued by Entman (1989) and Schudson (2001), who hold the view that balance and professional detachment are the necessary ingredients for achieving objectivity in news reportage. Arguably, objectivity as proposed by Schudson (2001), Ward (2010) and Entman (1989) was not evidently relevant in this study.

The negative perception of propaganda due to its historical function of fear and ignorance seems to have unending boundaries even in local conflict settings like in this Mobila murder case. The northern sector of Ghana is saddled with chieftaincy and tribal conflicts, including the Dagbon conflict, the Konkomba-Basari conflict and the Bawku conflict. These conflicts have affected the peace and security of the area. Given the deployment of conflict propaganda in the media reportage

of conflicts in Ghana as found in earlier studies, including (Mahama, 2020) and in this study, frantic efforts should be made to dissuade the media from continuing on this trajectory. Failure to do so can only perpetuate this propaganda driven reportage in the local media's coverage of conflicts.

One sure way is that journalists should be trained on discourse in propaganda and the media so as to detect propaganda frames and abstain from churning them out in reporting issues of conflicts.

References

- Agyeman-Duah, B. (2002). *Civil-military relations in Ghana's Fourth Republic*. Accra: Centre for Democratic Development
- Alhassan, A. and Mahama. S. S. (2023). *Media and Murder in Military Barracks: Sociological Analysis of the Murder of Issah Mobila in Northern Region of Ghana*. Journal of Advanced Sociology
- Allan S. and Zelizer (2004). *Reporting War: Journalism and War Time*: Routledge, London
- Asante, R. (2020). *Democratic Civil Military Bargain: Examining the Ghanaian Experience, Civil Wars*. Sage.
- Bakir, V. Herring, E. Miller, D. (2018). *Organised Persuasive Communication: A new conceptual framework for research on public relations, propaganda and promotional culture: SAGE Journals*
- Bell, M. (1998). *The Journalism of Attachment*: (In) M. Kieran (ed.) *Media Ethics*, London: Routledge
- Human Rights Watch (2022). World Report 2022, Cameroon <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/cameroon>
- Carruthers, S. (1996). *Natural theories of consciousness*. European Journal of philosophy Blackwell Publishers Ltd
- Carruthers, S. & Stewart, I. (1996). *War Culture and the Media, Representations of the military in the 20th century Britain*: Flicks Books, London
- Carruthers, S. (2011). *The Media at War: Palgrave Macmillan 2nd edition*
- Cormac, R. and Aldrich R. J. (2018). *Grey is the new black: covert action and implausible deniability*, International Affairs, Wiley.
- Council of European Union (2020). *Disinformation and Russia's War of Aggression against Ukraine*. <https://www.oecd.org/ukraine-hub/policy-responses/disinformation-and-russia-s-war-of-aggression-against-ukraine-37186bde/>

Council of Foreign Relations (2017). *Nigerian Army Abuse of Citizens*

<https://www.cfr.org/blog/nigerian-army-abuse-civilians>

Danchev, A. (2010). *The reckoning: official inquiries and the Iraq war*, Routledge

Entman, T. (1989). *How the Media Affect what People think: An Information Processing Approach*, The Journal of Politics

Fallis, D. (2009). *What is lying?* Journal of Philosophy Inc. pp. 29-56 Vol. 106. No.1

Ghanaian Chronicle in Modern Ghana.com (2010). *Mobila was tortured to death.*

<https://www.modernghana.com/news/356964/mobila-was-tortured-to-death.html>

Glock, C. Y. and Nicosia, F. M. (2003). *Sociology and the study of consumers*; Journal of Advertising Research

Ghanaweb (2023). *Military men go haywire in Ashaiman, brutalize residents over alleged murder of soldier* <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Military-men-go-haywire-in-Ashaiman-brutalise-residents-over-alleged-murder-of-soldier-1726196>

Graphic Online (2013). *Mobila murder trail-two to serve 30 years in Prison*

<https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/mobila-murder-trial-two-to-serve-30-years-in-prison.html>

Hallin D. (1989). *The uncensored war*: Oxford University press: London

Hammond, P. (2007). *Framing post-cold war conflict*: Manchester University press

Human Rights Watch (2021). *Nigeria: Officials Indicted in Abuses of Protesters*. Routledge.

[https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/19/nigeria-officials-indicted-abuses-protesters#:~:text=\(Abuja\)%20%E2%80%93%20A%20judicial%20panel,Human%20Rights%20Watch%20said%20today.](https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/19/nigeria-officials-indicted-abuses-protesters#:~:text=(Abuja)%20%E2%80%93%20A%20judicial%20panel,Human%20Rights%20Watch%20said%20today.)

Jowett, G. S. & O'Donnell, V. (2012). *Propaganda and Persuasion*: SAGE, London

Knightley, P. (2001). *The Disinformation Campaign: Western media follow a depressingly familiar formula when it comes to the preparation of a nation for conflict*. The Guardian, London

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2001/oct/04/socialsciences.highereducation>

Knightley, P. (2004). *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq*: Johns Hopkins University Press; 3rd edition

Mahama S. S. (2020). *Propaganda Censorship and the Media: An Ethnographic Study of Ghana Dagbon Chieftaincy Crisis-2002-2016*. PhD Thesis: Bangor University, United Kingdom.

Matlosa, K. and Zounmenou D. D. (year not cited). *The Tension between Militarisation and Democratisation in West Africa: A Comparative Analysis between Niger and Guinea*. Journal of Africa Elections.

Mclaughlin, G. (2002). *The War Correspondent*: Pluto press

Ngoma, N. (2006). *Civil Military Relations in Africa: Navigating the Unchartered Waters*.
Africa Security Review

Reuters (2022). *Mali's Military killed dozens of civilians in wave of violence, rights group says*
<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/malis-military-killed-dozens-civilians-wave-violence-rights-group-says-2022-03-15/>

Richard Asante (2020). *Democratic Civil-Military Bargain: Examining the Ghanaian Experience*, *Civil Wars*, 22:2-3, 333-352, DOI: 10.1080/13698249.2020.1730641 To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2020.1730641>

Schudson, M. (2001). *The objectivity norm in American journalism*: volume: 2 issue 2, 149-170

Simpson, C. (2015). *Science of Coercion: Communication Research & Psychological Warfare, 1945–1960: Google Books*

Taylor, P. M. (2003). *Munitions of the mind: A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present day: 3rd edition*: Manchester University Press.

The Insight Newspaper in Peaceffonline.com (2010), *Mobila's death; was there a cover up?*
<https://www.peacefmonline.com/pages/local/news/201002/38553.php>

Walton, D. (1997). 'What Is Propaganda, and What Exactly Is Wrong with It?', *Public Affairs Quarterly* 11(4): 383—413.

[Google Scholar](#)

Ward, S. J. (2010). *Inventing objectivity: New philosophical foundations*. In: Meyers C (ed.) *Journalism Ethics: A Philosophical Approach*. New York: Oxford University, pp. 137–

Wardle, C, & Derakhshan, D. *With research support from Anne Burns and Nic Dias (2017). Information Disorder, Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policymaking: Council of Europe*