

Fuel Subsidy Removal and Mind Control Game In Nigeria: A Critical Discourse Analysis Perspective

Chris Uchenna Agbedo¹, Samuel S. Akaan²

¹*Department of Linguistics, Igbo & Nigerian Languages, University of Nigeria Nsukka- Nigeria*

²*Department of English, College of Education, Oju Benue State, Nigeria*

Abstract: *This paper addresses the arguments for and against fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria as a political discourse in the Nigerian media. We examine the political discourse from the theoretical and methodological perspectives of discourse structure, linguistic function, and ideological bearing to determine how the groups on both sides of the divide exploit their social power to control the public discourse and by extension control the mind and actions of one another. The results of the analysis tend to show that the more powerful group represented by the Federal Government struggles to redefine the discursive structure of those properties of the social situation that are relevant for the production and comprehension of the fuel subsidy discourse to change the personal/social cognition and mental representations of fuel subsidy by Nigerians as one sure way of achieving the ultimate aim of reproducing dominance (power abuse) and hegemony. The less powerful group led by the organized labour combats this mind control onslaught by enlisting discursive strategies that provide information from which derive alternative knowledge and beliefs needed by the Nigerian masses to challenge the discourses and information about fuel subsidy, which they are exposed to by the Federal Government.*

Keywords: *CDA, fuel subsidy, mind control, Nigeria, power.*

I. Introduction

On 4 October, 2011, President Goodluck Jonathan informed the National Assembly about his government's plan to begin the removal of fuel subsidy in 2012. According to the 2012-2015 Medium Term Fiscal Framework (MTFF) and the Fiscal Strategy Paper (FSP) which the President sent to the National Assembly, "A major component of the policy fiscal consolidation is government's intent to phase out fuel subsidy, beginning from the 2012 fiscal year. That, the President noted, "will free up to about N1.2 trillion in savings, part of which can be deployed into providing safety nets for poor segment of the society to ameliorate the effects of subsidy removal." In throwing her weight behind the fiscal policy, the Minister of Finance and the Coordinating Minister of the Economy, Dr (Mrs.) Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, averred that it was only the removal of fuel subsidy that would guarantee the success of the Medium Term Fiscal Framework (MTFF). With the claim that the subsidy would have risen to N1.2trillion by the end of 2011, the federal government insisted that there was no going back on the removal.

This proposed fiscal policy met with stiff opposition from a wide segment of the Nigerian society. Apart from the organised labour that vowed to shut down the country should the government go ahead to implement the policy, a good number of discerning Nigerians saw the removal of fuel subsidy as the brainchild of the Bretton Woods Institutions intended as a neocolonial stratagem to teeter the Nigerian economy irredeemably to the enslaving apron-strings of the Euroamerican imperialism. The Bretton Woods Institutions are the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) set up at a meeting of 43 countries in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, USA in July 1944 to help rebuild the shattered postwar economy and promote international economic cooperation. But critics claim the Institutions were going beyond their original mandate especially in the Third World countries such as Nigeria, where members of President Jonathan's economic management team were fingered as arrowheads of this economic re-colonization by the western powers. This provided the basis of the ideological divide on the contentious issue of fuel subsidy between President Jonathan's government and the opposition.

This ideological difference predisposed both parties to take refuge in the manipulative use of language, which provided the enablement to control the other party against its best interests, the control being aimed at the recipients' verbal contribution to the interaction and cognitive processes of comprehension and interpretation of fuel subsidy removal. The foregoing harks back to an abuse of ideological power, as outlined in Fairclough's classification differentiating between economic, state and ideological power, (Fairclough 1991; 1992; 1995a). While economic power deals with the relationship between social classes in the process of economic production, state power is exercised by the government, army, police and various social institutions, ideological power considerably complements the first two, being exercised in discourse and defined as the power to project one's practices as universal and 'common sense'.

In examining the abuse of ideological power from the positions of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), we shall seek to characterize the mind control strategies employed by the two groups to advance their sectarian positions based on implicit assumptions which are taken for granted and eventually come to be seen not as arbitrary but natural. The value of this line of inquiry derives from the fact that among many other resources that define the power base of a group or institution, control over public discourse and communication and by extension mind control, is an overriding symbolic resource for consolidating social power. This is because the group who controls most influential discourse is equally eminently predisposed to control the minds and actions of others.

II. Framework

CDA does not have a unitary theoretical framework, perhaps, because it is not a specific direction of research, (Dijk, 1996). All the same, given the commonality of perspectives and uniformity of the aims, most kinds of CDA will ask questions about the way specific discourse structures are deployed in the reproduction of social dominance, whether they are part of a conversation or a news report or other genres and contexts. Thus, the typical vocabulary of many scholars in CDA will feature such notions as "power," "dominance," "hegemony," "ideology," "class," "gender," "race," "discrimination," "interests," "reproduction," "institutions," "social structure," and "social order," besides the more familiar discourse analytical notions. Nonetheless, our primary preoccupation here is with the theoretical aspect of CDA that relates discourse, cognition, and society. Specifically, we focus on personal and social cognition, that is, how both types of cognition influence interaction and discourse of individual members, as well as the ways shared "social representations" govern the collective actions of a group.

Dijk posits that a central notion in most critical work on discourse is that of power, and more specifically the *social power* of groups or institutions. Groups have power if they are able to control the acts and minds of (members of) other groups. This ability presupposes a *power base* of privileged access to scarce social resources, such as force, money, status, fame, knowledge, information, "culture," or indeed various forms of public discourse and communication. With regard to the fundamental issue of discursive power, CDA seeks answers to how powerful groups control public discourse; how such discourse control mind and action of (less) powerful groups, and what are the social consequences of such control, such as social inequality? Members of more powerful social groups and institutions, and especially their leaders (the elites), have more or less exclusive access to, and control over, one or more types of public discourse. For instance, professors, teachers, journalists, lawyers, politicians control scholarly, educational, media, legal, political discourses respectively. By implication, those who have more control over more — and more influential — discourse (and more discourse properties) are also more powerful.

The social power, which a more powerful group has to control public discourse, equally confers on it the power to control the mind and action of the less powerful group. Within a CDA framework, Dijk notes further that mind control involves even more than just acquiring beliefs about the world through discourse and communication. Drawing from Nesler et. al. (1993), Giroux (1981), Downing (1984), and Wodak (1987), Dijk (1993) outlines four ways through which power and dominance are involved in mind control. First, recipients tend to accept beliefs, knowledge, and opinions (unless they are inconsistent with their personal beliefs and experiences) through discourse from what they see as authoritative, trustworthy, or credible sources, such as scholars, experts, professionals, or reliable media. Second, in some situations, participants are obliged to be recipients of discourse, which may need to be attended to, interpreted, and learned as intended by institutional or organizational authors. Third, in many situations, there are no public discourses or media that may provide information from which alternative beliefs may be derived. Fourth, recipients may not have the knowledge and beliefs needed to challenge the discourses or information they are exposed to. Whereas these conditions of mind control are largely *contextual* (they say something about the participants of a communicative event), other conditions are *discursive*, that is, a function of the structures and strategies of text or talk itself.

Contextually based control derives from the fact that people understand and represent not only text and talk, but also the whole communicative situation. Also, Martin Rojo and van Dijk (1997) have shown how context features (such as the properties of language users of powerful groups) influence the ways members of dominated groups define the communicative situation in "preferred context models". Part of CDA preoccupation is with how *discourse structures* influence mental representations. Such studies as Duin et al. (1988); van Dijk (1991), Wodak and van Dijk (2000) present empirical evidence of how various types of discourse structure may influence the formation and change of mental models and social representations. It follows then that if dominant groups largely control public discourse and its structures, they thus also have more control over the minds of the public at large. Nonetheless, such control is not without its limits. This informs Dijk's observation that "the complexity of comprehension, and the formation and change of beliefs, are such that one cannot always predict which features of a specific text or talk will have which effects on the minds of specific recipients."

In the next section, we subject the festering 'tug of war' between the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Nigerian masses on the fuel subsidy removal to analysis and determine the extent to which the mind control game is exploited by the more powerful group to reproduce dominance and social inequality in Nigeria.

III. Discussions

3.1 Federal Government's coercive persuasion as mind-control strategy

'Mind control' (also referred to as 'brainwashing,' 'coercive persuasion,' 'thought reform,' and the 'systematic manipulation of psychological and social influence') refers to a process in which a group or individual systematically uses unethically manipulative methods to persuade others to conform to the wishes of the manipulator(s), often to the detriment of the person being manipulated," (Langone in Ofshe, 2003). Citing Schein (1961) and Lifton (1961), Ofshe (2003) observes that "coercive persuasion and thought reform are alternate names for programmes of social influence capable of producing substantial behavior and attitude change through the use of coercive tactics, persuasion, and/or interpersonal and group-based influence manipulations." In his opinion, Zimbardo (1971) in Ofshe (2003) sees mind control as the process by which individual or collective freedom of choice and action is compromised by agents or agencies that modify or distort perception, motivation, affect, cognition and/or behavioral outcomes.

A combination of staple social influence ingredients - conformity, compliance, persuasion, dissonance, reactance, guilt, fear arousal, modeling, identification - tends to create a powerful crucible of extreme mental and behavioural manipulation when synthesized with several other real-world factors, such as charismatic, authoritarian leaders, dominant ideologies, social isolation, physical debilitation, induced phobias, and extreme threats or promised rewards that are typically deceptively orchestrated, over an extended time period in settings where they are applied intensively.

In her technical overview of mind control tactics, Singer in Ofshe (2003) notes that a coercive persuasion programme is a behavioural change technology applied to cause the "learning" and "adoption" of a set of behaviors or an ideology under certain conditions. It is distinguished from other forms of benign social learning or peaceful persuasion by the conditions under which it is conducted and by the techniques of environmental and interpersonal manipulation employed to suppress particular behaviors and to train others. With coercive persuasion, one can change people's attitudes without their knowledge and volition. One can create new "attitudes" where they will do things willingly which they formerly may have detested, things which previously only torture, physical pain, or drugs could have coerced them to do.

Coercive persuasion or thought reform is best understood as a coordinated system of graduated coercive influence and behavior control designed to deceptively and surreptitiously manipulate and influence individuals, usually in a group setting, in order for the originators of the programme to profit in some way, normally financially or politically. Hunter (1951) in Ofshe (2003) referred to such programmes as "brainwashing". Singer identified about seven main tactic types found in various combinations in a typical coercive persuasion programme. Also, Robert Jay Lifton in Ofshe (2003) articulated an 8-point model of thought reform. We sift through these models and determine the extent to which they fit into the mind control stratagem of government on the issue of fuel subsidy removal.

3.1.1. Thought reform through increased suggestibility and/or "softening up" and demand for purity.

In this regard, the less powerful group is prepared for thought reform and made receptive to demand for purity by the more powerful group. The explicit goal of the dominant group is to bring about some kind of change, whether it is on a global, social, or personal level. Solution to an existing problem is only possible if one stays with the group and is committed. The mindset of the Federal Government on the fuel subsidy removal seems to be driven by the aforementioned thought reform stratagems as can be gleaned from Texts 1 – 19 (See Appendix). President Jonathan set in motion the thought reform and demand for purity when he sent the 2012-2015 Medium Term Fiscal Frameworks (MTFF) and the Fiscal Strategy Paper (FSP) memo to the National Assembly on 4 October, 2011. As the President noted, "A major component of the policy fiscal consolidation is government's intent to phase out fuel subsidy, beginning from the 2012 fiscal year." Discontinuing with the subsidy remained the only responsible way of harnessing revenue for capital stock formation, among others. His words: "There are proposals to phase out petroleum subsidies in a deliberate and responsible way that will harness revenues for capital stock formation and leverage on private sector investments in public-private partnerships (PPPs)."

Government defended its decision to deregulate the industry based on the its conviction that "the huge subsidy being paid on petroleum products has constrained government spending on the development of adequate infrastructural facilities and depletion of national revenue profile; that it encourages inefficient utilization of resources and product smuggling across the borders; that the consumers of kerosene for instance do not buy the product at a regulated/subsidized price set by the government due to distribution bottlenecks, multiple handling

and malpractices by marketers; and that fuel subsidy does not encourage healthy competitions among operators as the regulatory environment is controlled by the government.”

Citing long term benefit as its main focus, the presidential memo said the gradual removal of subsidies is a step towards deregulating the sub-sector. Moreover, the level of investment in the sector is inadequate, as the four refineries in the country are over-aged and are only able to produce about 50 per cent of their installed capacity and meet only about 40 per cent of the daily 30 million litres domestic demand for refined petroleum products. The drive was to woo investors who could establish refineries in the country and would be encouraged to do so, since they would get returns on their investments. The removal of subsidy in the 2012 fiscal year would enable it to release funds for infrastructure and to create jobs, while overall expenditure next year is likely to rise. As a further justification of the policy, the memo noted that subsidizing the cost of fuel, mainly diesel, petrol and kerosene, costs the government, N1.2 trillion naira (\$7.5 billion) in lost revenues.

Having set the ball rolling, it was only expected that other members of the powerful group provided the choric refrain. In order to maintain the new attitudes or "decisions," sustain the rationalization, and continue to unduly influence a group's behaviour over time, coercive tactics must be more or less continuously applied. In this mind control game, Mr. President needed such choric refrains to constitute the "necessary chords and orchestration" of a sequenced, continuous, coordinated, and carefully selected stratagem of surreptitious coercion, "coercive persuasion." Governor Abdul'aziz Abubakar Yari (Zamfara State), Governor Peter Obi (Anambra State), CBN Governor, Sule Lamido, Finance Minister, Dr. Okonjo-Iweala, Petroleum Minister, Mrs. Diezani Allison-Madueke, PDP leadership, NNPC, organized private sector, European Union among others provided the mellifluous synchrony, suggesting that there is no alternative to fuel subsidy removal if Nigeria must put an end to the enrichment of a few people through the N1.2 trillion huge sum deducted by the NNPC as subsidy and avert the looming catastrophe.

The President and members of his powerful group have been unrelenting in reminding the less powerful group of Nigerians that the fiscal policy “will free up to about N1.2 trillion in savings, part of which can be deployed into providing safety nets for poor segment of the society to ameliorate the effects of subsidy removal.” For Diezani-Allison Madueke, “it has become pertinent that we find other ways to utilize the vast resources that are being channeled into the subsidy which are not reaching the masses... There are major benefits that will cut across all major sectors of the economy. Some of them involve road work, major public maintenance work, on going mass transportation, schemes for skilled and unskilled youths and of course there will be areas for maternity and child care...”

From the foregoing, it is evident that by using rewards and punishments, efforts are made by the more powerful group to establish considerable control over the less powerful group's social environment, time, and sources of social support. Frequent and intense attempts are made to cause the group to re-evaluate the most central aspects of its existence. Efforts are designed to destabilize and undermine the group's basic consciousness, reality awareness, world view, emotional control, and defense mechanisms as well as getting its members to reinterpret their life's history, and adopt a new version of causality. Desperate and renewed efforts are intensified to undermine the group's confidence in itself and judgment, creating a sense of powerlessness. Certain secular psychological threats (force) are freely deployed. For instance, failure to adopt the approved attitude, belief, or consequent behaviour will lead to severe punishment or dire consequence such as economic collapse. For President Jonathan, if the fuel subsidy is not withdrawn, Nigeria will be importing fuel from neighbouring Ghana and Cameroon in the next 10 to 15 years. His threat overreached itself when he averred that the country will crash if subsidy on petroleum products was not removed, a remark which the CNPP faulted as lacking merit. (See Text 40).

Also, in its unrelenting push for subsidy removal, the more powerful group demand for ‘purity’ and ‘sacred science’. In this regard, the government's perspective is absolutely true and completely adequate to explain EVERYTHING about fuel subsidy removal. The doctrine is not subject to amendments or question. The logic goes thus: importers bring in products at high cost due to a variety of factors which include cost of production in the respective foreign countries and transportation of finished products from those countries to Nigeria. By the time a typical petroleum product lands on the Nigerian shore, it is so expensive that the Federal Government had to mercifully and magnanimously subsidize it for local consumption. The implicit assumption is that solution to the specific challenge of getting refined petroleum products for local use is one-dimensional – that is, Nigeria must import, and once we import, we must either subsidize or not. This kind of fossilized fixation is reflected in Mr. President's seeming regimented firm resolve: “Fuel subsidy must go; no going back on oil sector deregulation.” By implication, Mr. President is saying that subsidy payment by successive Nigerian governments as a penalty paid for unending absence of creative solutions to a basic national challenge is no longer sustainable. He is saying that subsidy is simply a dubious coinage to explain the costs we pay for the inefficiency and slothfulness of the Nigerian system. It is the cost ordinary, weather beaten Nigerians pay for the gargantuan corruption complex that has hobbled almost all facets of governance in Nigeria. Such is the framing of the oil subsidy that has no place in President Jonathan's Transformation Agenda.

Given that absolute conformity to the doctrine is required, a novel brand of vocabulary, popular more for its ludicrous ingenuity, emerges within the context of the group. Thereafter, group members begin to "think" within the very abstract and narrow parameters of the group's unquestionable doctrine. The homogenizing terminology effectively stymies any form of critical thinking by suffusing members with a "black and white" mentality. This explains the seamless ease with which group members buy into the logic of fuel subsidy removal. Failure to key into this noble vision of the group is an open invitation to Mr. President's allegation of 'treasonable felony' as amply demonstrated in Text 4. Not many members of this group would be disposed to taking the high risk of failing to profess absolute conformity to the doctrine. For instance, Chief Emeka Wogu, the Minister of Labour and Productivity, dutifully re-jigged the group's acquired 'black and white' syndrome when he remarked that the Federal Government would save about 6 billion dollars by removing fuel subsidy, noting that the issue of subsidy was not "an evil deal," rather it would stimulate the country's economic growth. The Group General Manager, Public Affairs Division of the NNPC, Dr Levi Ajuonuma crowned the more powerful group's coercive persuasion with the finishing clincher: "As a people, we must learn to open our eyes to current realities and embrace the opportunities that a deregulated downstream sector of the oil industry has on offer for us all. "Removal of subsidy means that government would have more funds to channel into the provision of some identified vital infrastructure and social welfare packages for some vulnerable groups like pregnant women, children, as well as unemployed youths. "All these are captured in the post-deregulation Social Safety Net scheme."

The foregoing constitutes the kernel of argument of advocates of subsidy removal led by the federal government and its coterie of mercantile supporters. In the next section, we present the flipside of the argument.

3.2. Combating the mind control strategy

We had earlier noted Dijk's observation that "the complexity of comprehension, and the formation and change of beliefs, are such that one cannot always predict which features of a specific text or talk will have which effects on the minds of specific recipients." In this regard, it seems pertinent to observe that the less powerful group combats this mind control onslaught by enlisting discursive strategies that provide information from which derive alternative knowledge and beliefs needed by the Nigerian masses to challenge the discourses and information about fuel subsidy, which they are exposed to by the Federal Government. Texts 20 – 40 reflect the robust onslaught unleashed by anti-subsidy removal to combat the mind control strategy of the more powerful group.

It takes the form of enlisting public support in the impending face-off between federal government and the Nigerian masses. The subsisting argument is that further removal of subsidy only feeds 'fat cats' at the expense of the poor and pays for gross inefficiencies down the fuel import value-chain. This line of reasoning seeks credible answers to such fundamental questions: Is this the right time? Who really benefits from fuel subsidy removal? How is a halt put to the vicious cycle of fuel price-hike and inflation? Does 'subsidy' like 'a mirage' – disappear and relocate ahead as one draws closer? What intervention would the government put in place to reduce the incidence of poverty resulting from imminent hyper inflation and how have similar schemes or projects worked in the past? Is it possible to identify projects, measure and evaluate individuals businesses that are the product of such intervention? What has been the specific impact of such projects on overall poverty level reductions? Would it not be sensible then to delay the removal of subsidy until the government delivers on the electricity supply required to service industries? Does deregulation imply NNPC will no longer operate a monopoly in importation of refined petroleum product or is this lobby a self-serving lifeline to continue its monopoly? Why should ordinary citizens bear the brunt of government inability to curb profiteering by a faceless bunkering cabal the NNPC referred to? Would it not be expedient to push for greater accountability and good governance to ensure a more transparent privatisation process that will respond to the market magic of enterprise and 'trickle down' effect? Would it not be more expedient to pressure government to service the refineries to full production capacity given the implications on overhead and competitiveness for local industries?

Honest answers to these questions would eminently predispose the Nigerian political authorities to wash their hands off fuel pricing-fixing and rethink the policy from the point of sustainability in the form of an in-built mechanism, which transfers the periodic swing in input price to pump price? The Nigerian economy is almost singularly hinged on crude oil export and therefore, highly sensitive to internal and external market shocks in the oil sector. The implication is that a fractional rise in cost of fuel has unmitigated ripple effects on the industrial sector and key components of basic need indicators such as food, housing and health. Moreover, the ripple effects are without boundary, as social liberties for instance, become less accessible to the average and less privileged Nigerians who constitute the vast majority of the over 150 million population. The private sector suffers the biggest reverses as small scale entrepreneurs' lose their businesses due to higher business overheads. When one business is lost, many dependent families are exposed not only to poverty but other forms of social

exclusion which include constrained access to justice system (determined by financial leverage) and constrained rights to electoral/political participation.

Given that price of crude oil is a key driver of fuel prices the world over, the issue is really not subsidy but having a proper pricing model in a world of powerful 'oligopolists,' Bello (2011). A fair price from the point of view of a consumer would be one that is affordable, reflects market realities and excludes inefficiencies. In essence, the Jonathan administration needs to go beyond the usual threadbare and worn-out pedestrian economic arguments for fuel-subsidy removal to remove all the market imperfections and institutionalise a credible pricing mechanism, which Nigerians would trust and smooth out the sludge of systemic inefficiencies clogging the wheel of economic development. Nonetheless, if the powerful group remains unrelenting in reciting the wonky and weather beaten arguments for removal of the so called fuel subsidy, then the less powerful group must take the adversary's disposition as the last battle it must fight for its survival and approach it with all the seriousness it demands.

The foregoing represents the efforts of the presumably less-powerful group to control the fuel subsidy discourse and by extension control the minds of Nigerians. It reveals the ideological leanings in the discourse of socioeconomic developments in Nigeria as constructed by the different social groups.

3.3 The 'Different Angles of Telling'

The 'different angles of telling,' (Salami & Ayoola, 2010: 52), harks back to van Dijk (2006: 379) position about media-political discourse as one that is replete with manipulative strategies which include "emphasizing one's own power and moral superiority, discrediting one's opponents, polarization between Us and Them, negative Other-presentation, ideological alignment, and emotional appeals." From the tenor of the argument, it shows how the federal government backed by its ardent supporters rides on the crest of World Bank and IMF-driven economic logic to goad Nigerians into accepting the economic policy. In this regard, the group's logical fabric of subsidy removal is woven around the presumed existence of a faceless cabal that is carting away hundreds of millions of dollars from the government in the name of fuel subsidy. In other words, the subsidy meant to benefit the poor Nigerian masses only ends up enriching the very few Nigerians in the oil supply chain. The only sensible to do is to remove the subsidy and channel the proceeds into 'providing safety nets' for the poor.

The Senate President, David Mark, who blamed the controversy on the cabals in the petroleum industry, vowed that the Senate would uncover those that short-changed Nigerians in the process. His words: "My belief is that there is a cartel within the petroleum industry and whatever they do is just exclusive to them. Ninety per cent of people outside do not know. We must find out how much is spent on subsidy, who are the beneficiaries? Has subsidy benefited us? These are salient points and we cannot run away from them." The other group in this mind control duel maximises its access to the media to puncture government's argument on the grounds that the economic policy not only lacks proper definition but that it is inimical to the general well-being of Nigerians.

The deafening chatter about petroleum subsidy does not explain who erected the ubiquitous and amorphous cabal in the first place neither does it bother to offer a precise definition of what exactly constitute this 'strange animal' called fuel subsidy. This is the crux of Chidi Amuta's worry:

Is the subsidy a cult secret? Why is it unknowable? Is it the opportunity cost of selling imported fuel instead of refining here? Is it the penalty ordinary people have to pay in aid of those who have serially sabotaged our refineries? Is it the differential between what poor Nigerians mostly on \$1 a day pay for a litre of petrol to power their smoky bikes and what affluent Europeans and Americans on a minimum N200, 000 a month pay for the same commodity? What is the relationship between the projected pump price of petrol and the purchasing power of an average Nigerian in a nation with one of the highest unemployment rates in the world? Going forward, by what percentage do we adjust petrol pump prices to compensate for international oil price increases that we have absolutely no control over? Are we going to leave the field open again so that the next administration that comes along can burst the budget and take easy recourse to petrol tax under the guise of subsidy removal? (www.thisdaylive.com 15 November 2011)

The failure to provide plausible answers to these and other pertinent questions derive mainly from the communication deficit of the Jonathan fuel subsidy campaign, which in the opinion of Amuta, is fast becoming part of the overall basket of perception liabilities of the administration that continues to mount. What it costs Nigeria in terms of facts and figures to sustain the subsidy is a matter of convoluted conjectural postulations for advocates of subsidy removal, who churn out conflicting figures to justify government's desperation to compel poor hapless Nigerians to pay more for petroleum products so that it can get more money to carry on with business as usual. For reasons that are as diverse as they are self-serving, the State Governors have a different set of figures from the Federal Government just as the NNPC has a completely different set of figures on the basis of which it is alleged to cream off homologous sums of petrodollars with clinical efficiency from the federation account every month.

This formed the kernel of Senator Saraki's argument, while moving the motion for investigation into the management of subsidy in 2011, (Amanze-Nwachukwu, 2011; Kolawale, 2012). His words: In furtherance of the implementation of the fuel subsidy in 2011 appropriation, the sum of N240 billion (N20 billion monthly) is budgeted. Of the N20 billion monthly allocated, N11.2 billion was allocated for domestic fuel subsidy (NNPC) and N8.8 billion for domestic subsidy (market) as stated in the Appropriation Act 2011. Although, N20 billion was set aside for subsidy on a monthly basis in the Appropriation Act 2011, in August 2011, the total figure expended was N165bn of which the NNPC was N88 billion and Independent Marketers was N77.7 billion. In the first three months of the year, both the NNPC and the Independent Marketers did not exceed N62 billion monthly but within the last three months, figures have ranged between N150 billion and N186 billion. With this trend, by the year-end, we will have a fuel subsidy bill of over N1.2 trillion as against the N240 billion budgeted in the Appropriation Act. The implementation of 2011 Appropriation Act will surely be in troubled waters if a variation of N1.2 trillion arises as a result of the level of expenditure incurred on fuel subsidy so far.

Worse still, the blissful ignorance of government about the exact amount it spends annually to sustain the so-called subsidy came to light when the chairman of Revenue Mobilisation Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC), Mr Elias Mbam disclosed that both the NNPC and the oil marketers under the Petroleum Products Pricing Regulatory Agency (PPPRA) had illegally deducted the sum of N1.079 trillion for fuel subsidy between January and September this year. Mr Mbam said that while the NNPC deducted N615.670 billion from January to September as against N81.720 billion payable to it as contained in the 2011 Appropriation Act with a difference of over N5333.950 billion, the PPPRA deducted the sum of N647.660 billion as against the approved N102.753 billion in the 2011 appropriation within the same period with a difference of over N544.907 billion. Mbam made the shocking revelation at the House of Representatives joint committees on Finance, Petroleum Resources (Downstream and Upstream) and Gas Resources investigating the alleged non-remittance of about N450 billion by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) between 2005 and 2008 to the Federation Account, (Olatunji & Daniel, 2011).

On the strength of the unfolding realities of the fuel subsidy imbroglio, this group of Nigerians has coalesced into a formidable opposition that summons all manners of verbal resources from its linguistic arsenal to delineate the insensitive, callous, and uncaring disposition of the Nigerian government. Perhaps, the frightening prospects of an Armageddon, which the opposition promises government should it go ahead with its planned subsidy removal, might have informed government's gradual shifting of ground on the January 2012 implementation date. President Jonathan said it was necessary because of the plot by his critics to bring his government down, noting that the critics had given him their consent only to turn around to oppose it. The government, Mr. President further noted, had to soft-pedal on the implementation date to ensure that all stakeholders were carried along through mass education and logical reasoning, Okoroanyanwu et. al. (2011).

All in all, the foregoing analysis only goes to show that the mind control battle is one conflagration that is set to roar and soar to the proverbial 'high horrendous heavens.' The outcome of this duel is a matter of which group blinks first - the government or the Nigerian public.

IV. Conclusion

The focus of this paper has been with the conflicting perspectives that tend to characterise the discourses of oil subsidy removal as a fundamental component of economic reforms in Nigeria. While the dominant group represented by the federal government canvasses capitalist-driven free 'marketization' of the economy, the dominated group represented by the labour unions, civil society groups, and other advocates of neo-liberalism draws attention to its attendant negative effects on the poor masses of Nigerians. The analysis reveals the extent to which the dominant groups in our contemporary society use all shades and hues of coercive tactics, persuasion, and/or interpersonal and group-based influence manipulations to control public discourse and ram unpopular policies down the throat of the silent majority, and how the latter equally appropriates the evocative powers of discourse and access to the media to resist the systemic class domination and oppression. By implication, the theoretical and methodological perspectives of CDA that offer useful insights into the workings of society have proved quite invaluable for objective interpretation of the meanings and proper distillation of the two-sided ideological polarities underlying those texts under review.

Perhaps, one outstanding value of this line of academic inquiry is the explicit recognition by critical discourse analysts of their crucial role in the society. Of course, it goes without saying that this line of reasoning is born out of their conviction that scholarly discourses generally are inherently part of and influenced by social structure, and produced in social interaction, (Dijk, 1998; 2003). Moreover, given that the fundamental theoretical and methodological perspectives of CDA are 'socio-politically situated,' occasional reflections on the role of scholars in society and the polity thus becomes an inherent and integral part of the discourse analytical enterprise. Accordingly, such enterprise embarks on empirically adequate critical analysis of social problems, thus explaining discourse structures in terms of properties of social interaction (especially social

structure) and how they enact, confirm, legitimatise, reproduce, or challenge relations of *power* and *dominance* in society. In the case of this study, the analyses reveal, *inter alia*, how CDA can address the social problem of power relations and dominance in the Nigerian society as demonstrated by the festering ‘verbal warfare’ between the Jonathan administration and the discerning Nigerian public on the vexed issue of oil subsidy.

References

- [1] N. Fairclough, *Language and power*, (London: Longman, 1991)
- [2] N. Fairclough, *Discourse and social change*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992)
- [3] N. Fairclough, *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*, (Harlow, UK: Longman, 1995)
- [4] T. A. van Dijk, Discourse, power and access. In R. C. Caldas-Coulthard and M. Coulthard (Eds.), *Texts and practices: Readings in critical discourse analysis*, (pp. 84-104), (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1996).
- [5] M. S. Nesler, H. Aguinis, B. M. Quigley, and J. T. Tedeschi, The effect of credibility on perceived power, *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 23(17), 1993, 1407-25.
- [6] H. Giroux, *Ideology, culture, and the process of schooling*, (London: Palmer Press, 1981).
- [7] J. Downing, *Radical media: The political experience of alternative communication*, (Boston: South End Press, 1984).
- [8] R. Wodak, "And where is the Lebanon?" A socio-psycholinguistic investigation of comprehension and intelligibility of news, *Text*, 7(4), 1987, 377-410.
- [9] T. A. van Dijk, Principles of critical discourse analysis. *Discourse and Society* 4(2), 1993, 249-83.
- [10] L. Martin Rojo, and T. A. van Dijk, "There was a problem, and it was solved!" Legitimizing the expulsion of "illegal" immigrants in Spanish parliamentary discourse. *Discourse and society*, 8(4), 1997, 523-67.
- [11] A. H. Duin, D. H. Roen, and M. F. Graves, Excellence or malpractice: the effects of headlines on readers' recall and biases, National Reading Conference, 1987, St Petersburg, Florida, *National Reading Conference Yearbook*, 37, 1988, 245-50.
- [12] T. A. van Dijk, *Racism and the press* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1991).
- [13] R. Wodak, and T. A. van Dijk, (Eds.), *Racism at the top* (Klagenfurt: Drava Verlag, 2000).
- [14] J. R. Ofshe, Coercive persuasion and attitudinal change. *Encyclopedia of Sociology Vol. 1* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 2003). Retrieved from: <http://www.rickcross.com> Accessed: 18 December, 2011.
- [15] O. Bello, Nigeria: Rethinking fuel subsidy removal, Retrieved from: <http://www.businessdayonline.com> Thursday, 15 September, 2011, Accessed: 29 October, 2011.
- [16] O. Salami & A. K. Ayoola, (2010). The 'War' of Appropriate Pricing of Petroleum Products: The Discourse of Nigeria's Reform Agenda, *Linguistik online* 42: (2), 2010, 41-52
- [17] T. A. van Dijk, Discourse and Manipulation, *Discourse & Society* 17: (2), 2006, 359–383.
- [18] C. Amuta, Pox on fuel subsidy, Retrieved from: <http://www.thisdaylive.com> 15 November, 2011. Accessed: 18 November, 2011.
- [19] C. Amanze-Nwachukwu, Fuel import Cabals're Govt.'s Political Agents, Allies. Retrieved from: <http://www.thisdaylive.com> 24 January, 2012. Accessed: 25 January, 2012.
- [20] S. Kolawole, Reflections on the Subsidy Struggle, Retrieved from: <http://www.thisdaylive.com> 22 January, 2012. Accessed: 23 January, 2012.
- [21] J. S. Olatunji & K. Daniel, NNPC, PPPRA overshoot subsidy by N1.079trn in 9 months •Revenue commission reveals at probe panel •Says NNPC's account shrouded in secrecy, Retrieved from: <http://www.tribune.com> Wednesday, 02 November, 2011. Accessed: 18 November, 2011.
- [22] E. Okoroanyanwu, D. Mernyi, I. Anumihe, and F. Onuoha, Fuel subsidy: FG shifts ground; Removal may not take-off in January...As Jonathan cries out over critics' plot. Retrieved from: <http://www.sunnewsonline.com> Friday, 11 November, 2011. Accessed: 15 November 2011.
- [23] T. A. van Dijk, Towards a theory of context and experience models in discourse processing. In H. van Oostendorp and S. Goldman, (Eds.), *The construction of mental models during reading*, (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1998).
- [24] T. A. van Dijk, Critical Discourse Analysis, In D. T. Schiffrin, D. Hamilton, & E. Heidi (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 352–371.

Appendix

Text 1

“A major component of the policy fiscal consolidation (2012-2015 Medium Term Fiscal Framework (MTFF) and the Fiscal Strategy Paper (FSP) is government’s intent to phase out fuel subsidy, beginning from the 2012 fiscal year..” (Source: Fuel subsidy removal: In whose interest? Taiwo Olanrewaju and Tunde Ogunesan www.trbune.com 19/10/2011)

Text 2

President Goodluck Jonathan yesterday justified the impending removal of fuel subsidy and highlighted the gains to the economy, saying it would unlock capital that would be used for critical infrastructural development. (Source: “Jonathan: Why Fuel Subsidy Must Go” Ahamefula Ogbu www.thisdaylive.com 14/10/2011.)

Text 3

Fuel “subsidy” must go, President Goodluck Jonathan insisted yesterday... He spoke at the 17th Nigerian Economic Summit (NSE) in Abuja. (Source: www.thenationonline.net 11 November 2011)

Text 4

PRESIDENT Goodluck Jonathan has lamented the alleged high politicisation of the Federal Government’s proposed fuel subsidy removal, saying that those against the policy wanted to bring down his government. (Source: “Fuel subsidy: Opponents want to topple my govt - Jonathan •Says no going back on oil sector deregulation” Gbola Subair and Leon Usigbe www.tribune.com Friday, 11 November 2011)

Text 5

Participants at a summit organised for the private sector by the Presidency in Abuja last night endorsed the plan by the Federal Government to remove fuel subsidy... (Source: “Jonathan’s summit endorses proposed fuel subsidy removal”. Vincent Ikuomola www.thenationonline.net 15/10/2011)

Fuel Subsidy Removal And Mind Control Game In Nigeria: A Critical Discourse Analysis Perspective

Text 6

The G. G. M., Public Affairs Division of the NNPC), Dr Levi Ajuonuma, said that the planned removal of fuel subsidy on petrol would enable the government to plough back the huge annual subsidy on provision of basic infrastructure... (Source: "Deregulation'll create more investment, job opportunities — Ajuonuma" www.tribune.com Monday, 31 October 2011)

Text 7

Senator Jibril Aminu, threw his weight behind President Goodluck Jonathan's move to remove the contentious fuel subsidy. (Source: "Aminu backs fuel subsidy removal." Idinor Daniel www.tribune.com October 31, 2011)

Text 8

For former Commonwealth Secretary-General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, removal of fuel subsidy would correct distortions in the economy. (Source: "Fuel subsidy must go, say Anyaoku, Jibril Aminu." Geoffrey Anyanwu, Adetutu Folasade-Koyi, Aidoghie Paulinus And Juliana Taiwo-Obalonye, and Oye Ogunwale www.sunnewsonline.com 31/10/2011 Monday)

Text 9

The Nigerian Youth Leadership Advocacy Group (NYLAG) says the planned removal of fuel subsidy would be a blessing for Nigeria. (Source: "Group endorses removal of fuel subsidy." Emmanuel Okubenji www.dailytimes.com 19/10/2011)

Text 10

Ikwerre Traditional Rulers Council in Rivers State has called on Nigerians to support the removal of oil subsidy being considered by President Goodluck Jonathan. (Source: "Monarchs back Jonathan on subsidy removal." George Onah www.vanguardngr.com October 26, 2011)

Text 11

The leadership of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has described the planned removal of subsidy on petroleum products as the surest way to economic prosperity. (Source: "PDP: planned removal is surest way to economic prosperity." Gbade Ogunwale www.thenationonline.net)

Text 12

Major marketers and operators in the oil and gas industry, yesterday, expressed their support for Federal government's plan to remove fuel subsidy... Oscarline Onwuemenyi www.vanguardngr.com November 4, 2011)

Text 13

The EU Chief backed subsidy removal yesterday in Abuja during a courtesy visit to the Minister of Labour and Productivity, Chief Emeka Wogu. (Source: "Opposition mounts against removal of fuel subsidy." Clifford Ndujihe, Okey Ndiribe, Providence Obuh, Monsur Olowooepeo & Oamen Areguamen www.vanguardngr.com October 25, 2011)

Text 14

Governor Abdul'aziz Abubakar Yari of Zamfara State said the removal would put an end to the enrichment of a few people through the huge sum deducted by the NNPC, which he put at N1.3trillion in 2011. (Source: Fuel subsidy removal: In whose interest? www.trbune.com Wednesday, 19 October 2011)

Text 15

The Special Adviser to the President on Political Matters, Alhaji Ahmed Ali Gulak, defended the move to remove fuel subsidy... (Ref: "We're compiling oil cartel's names for publication – Presidency." Christian Okeke, www.tribune.com Wednesday, 16 November 2011)

Text 16

Participants at a summit organised for the private sector by the Presidency in Abuja endorsed the plan by the Federal Government to remove fuel subsidy. (Ref: "Jonathan's summit endorses proposed fuel subsidy removal." Vincent Ikuomola, www.thenationonline.net 15/10/2011)

Text 17

THE World Bank may have washed its hands off the proposal by the Federal Government to remove fuel subsidy, saying that the decision could not be externally influenced. "What is going on in the world with subsidies? That is the question you have to ask yourselves." According to him, the idea of giving subsidies has been focalised adding that the idea of also giving subsidies to the rich has been left behind. (Ref: "Fuel subsidy removal is a Nigerian affair, says World Bank." Roseline Okere www.nrguardiannews.com Monday, 21 November 2011)

Text 18

Federal Government declared yesterday that the plan is not yet a done deal as talks with various stakeholders were ongoing, even as it stated that no date has been fixed for take-off of the removal of the subsidy. (Ref: Fuel Subsidy Removal: Our Offer – FG Emma Ujah, Daniel Idonor, Ola Ajayi, Victor Ahiuma-Young & Yemie Adeoye www.vanguardngr.com October 26, 2011)

Text 19

THE United States Ambassador to Nigeria, Terence Mc-Culley, has said the government of the US is in support of the planned removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria. (Ref: "US supports FG on oil subsidy removal." www.tribune.com Wednesday, 30 November 2011)

Text 20

The Nigerian Labour Congress, NLC has demonstrated what the government would likely face if the subsidy is eventually removed. (Ref: Fuel subsidy removal: In whose interest? www.tribune.com Wednesday, 19 October 2011)

Text 21

EFFORTS to break Labour's ranks in its opposition to the planned fuel subsidy removal may have failed, it was learnt yesterday... Besides, opponents of subsidy removal, who insist that it will further impoverish the poor, are not giving up. Ref: Opposition stands firm against subsidy removal Dupe Olaoye-Osinkolu, Miriam Ndikanwu and Khadijat Saidu)

Fuel Subsidy Removal And Mind Control Game In Nigeria: A Critical Discourse Analysis Perspective

Text 22

With the removal of fuel subsidy would come a number of ripple effects, which, according to many people who had spoken with the Nigerian Tribune, would be far from being palatable to the common man. (Ref: Fuel subsidy removal: In whose interest? www.tribune.com Wednesday, 19 October 2011)

Text 23

Kinsmen of President Goodluck Jonathan have called for caution in the implementation of the planned removal of fuel subsidy by the Federal Government. (Ref: Fuel subsidy removal: kinsmen call for caution Isaac Ombe, www.thenationonline.net)

Text 24

"WE have been treated to this fuel subsidy story since 1999. It has been the same sing song: 'We will use the proceeds to provide amenities, build roads, provide healthcare, etc'. But none of the promises has been fulfilled. Rather, corruption has grown in leaps and bounds. More fuel price increase, more corruption." With these words eminent Nigerians and leaders of prominent pressure groups, ethnic nationality and religious groups, as well as the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), yesterday, resolved to fight to standstill, government's planned removal of fuel subsidy from next year. (Ref: Opposition mounts against removal of fuel subsidy *October 25, 2011* www.vanguardngr.com Clifford Ndujihe, Okey Ndiribe, Providence Obuh, Monsur Olowooepeo & Oamen Areguamen)

Text 25

From the responses received in the last one week, it is clear where Nigerians stand on this matter: Mr. President, don't do it. (Ref: Re: Fuel subsidy: Jonathan beware of darkness Dan Onwukwe www.sunnewsonline.com Tuesday, October 25, 2011)

Text 26

The citizens contend that further removal of subsidy only feeds 'fat cats' at the expense of the poor and pays for gross inefficiencies down the fuel import value-chain. (Ref: Nigeria: Rethinking fuel subsidy removal Thursday, 15 September 2011 Olusola Bello www.businessdayonline.com)

Text 27

The Conference of Nigerian Political Parties (CNPP), yesterday, warned President Goodluck Jonathan to, as a matter of urgency, desist from the idea to remove fuel subsidy come January next year or face the crisis and social unrest the would follow such action... (Ref: CNPP to Jonathan: Drop the idea of fuel subsidy removal now Thursday, 06 October 2011 www.nationalaccordnewspapers.com Taiye Agbaje)

Text 28

Former Head of State, General Muhammadu Buhari, yesterday disowned a suggestion by President Goodluck Jonathan that he had thrown his weight behind the Federal Government's plan to remove oil subsidy. (Ref: "Buhari replies Jonathan: I'm not for subsidy removal." www.thenationonline.net 11/11/11)

Text 29

PRESIDENT Goodluck Jonathan should look critically into how to rescue the economy instead of taking decisions such as the planned removal of fuel subsidy which would further impoverish Nigerians. (Ref: PDP Leader Cautions Jonathan Against Fuel Subsidy Removal Saturday, 29 October 2011 00:00 By Tunde Akinola)

Text 30

The claim about using the subsidy money to finance critical infrastructure is not only hollow, it is sheer bunkum. Today, the subsidy debate has become a huge distraction to the point of becoming an alibi for non-performance by the two tiers of governments. ("Removal of the so-called fuel subsidy is ill-digested and ill-timed" Editorial www.thenationonline.net)

Text 31

There was rage across the country on Wednesday as Nigerians, in groups and as individuals, reacted angrily to the planned removal of fuel subsidy beginning from January 2012. (Ref: Thursday, October 6, 2011 *Imo Herald* www.imostate.blogspot.com Fuel Subsidy Removal: Labour, civil groups vow to resist FG)

Text 32

The Arewa Students Forum, Bauchi State chapter has condemned the proposed plan to remove fuel subsidy by the federal government. (Ref: Students oppose fuel subsidy removal, warn Jonathan of impending danger PAUL ORUDE, Bauchi Wednesday, October 26, 2011)

Text 33

This is the highest form of haram: the worst manifestation of economic rascality," NLC's deputy president Promise Adewusi said. (Ref: Nigeria: Outrage Over Fuel Subsidy Removal Abdul-Rahman Abubakar, Abbas Jimoh, Turaki A. Hassan, Abdulwasiu Hassan and Nahimah Ajikanle Nurudeen www.allafrica.com 6 October 2011)

Text 34

The All Nigerian Peoples' Party, [ANPP] has warned the Federal Government not to go ahead with its proposed removal of fuel subsidy on petroleum products. (Ref: Don't remove fuel subsidy, ANPP warns Jonathan •Says Nigerians are already pauperized Taiwo Amodu Wednesday, October 26, 2011 www.sunnewsonline.com)

Text 35

JOINT committees of the House of Representatives mandated to study the proposals of the Federal Government, which contain removal of fuel subsidy from next year has recommended that subsidy removal is "pre-mature"... (Ref: Planned removal of fuel subsidy premature, say Repts panels Friday, 04 November 2011 John-Abba Ogbodo, Azimazi Momoh Jimoh and Terhemba Daka.)

Text 36

Fuel Subsidy Removal And Mind Control Game In Nigeria: A Critical Discourse Analysis Perspective

THE World Bank has admonished the Federal Government to handle the issue of oil subsidy removal with caution. (Ref: World Bank cautions FG on oil subsidy removal •Slams Nigeria over low MDGs record •FG raises advisory panel Written by Gbola Subair, Leon Usigbe, and Soji-Eze Fagbemi, www.tribune.com Wednesday, 26 October 2011)

Text 37

As the battle line appears drawn between advocates of the withdrawal of fuel subsidy and those opposed to it, the World Bank Vice President for African Region, Dr Oby Ezekwesili, has stressed the need for government to tackle the supply structure of fuel before implementing the policy... (Ref: Fuel subsidy removal: World Bank chief cautions Jonathan By Emma Amaize, Kingsley Omonobi, Demola Akinyemi , Peter Eguatu, Inalegwu Shaibu, Victor jeme & Akpokona Omafuaire *October 24, 2011* www.vanguardnews.com)

Text 38

Put bluntly, the removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria is a direct affront to the millennium development goal number 1 of halving the number of people living in poverty by 2015 and at odds with global concern for the low levels of economic growth and recently reported declining human development index in Nigeria. (Ref: Against removal of fuel subsidy and the argument for deregulated petroleum sub sector by Son Gyoh)

Text 39

Nigeria Labour Congress, NLC, yesterday, warned that the planned fuel subsidy removal, devaluation of the national currency and hike in electricity tariff would set the nation on fire, as the social consequences would be unbearable... (Ref Subsidy removal, devaluation of naira'll set the nation on fire – NLC *On November 3, 2011* www.vanguardngr.com VICTOR AHIUMA-YOUNG)

Text 40

CNPP faulted President Goodluck Jonathan's remarks that the country will crash if subsidy on petroleum products was not removed... CNPP asked Jonathan to read the lips of his countrymen, legislators, trade unions and clergy and shelve proposal to remove the subsidy. (Ref: CNPP to Jonathan: Nigeria won't crash with subsidy removal November 21, 2011 www.vanguardngr.com Chris Ochayi)