



Amethyst
08165486530

Journal of Media Practice and Research

Vol. 1 No. 1, 2015

Journal of Media Practice and Research

A publication of the Nigerian Society of Journalism Educators,
Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies, University of Port Harcourt.



Vol. 1 No. 1, 2015

Reportage of the 2012 Gubernatorial Election in Ondo State, Nigeria: A Conflict Sensitive or Conflict Inducing Press?

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Abstract

This study investigated how selected Nigerian newspapers reported the issues of conflict in respect of the 2012 governorship elections in Ondo State, Nigeria. The study is organized within hermeneutical framework. Three newspapers were purposively selected for the study: *The Hope*, *The Nation*, and *The Punch*. A purposive sample of 36 editions of the newspapers was drawn within the election period of August to November 2012. In the selected editions, a total of 48 journalistic items of News, Features, Editorial Comments and Opinion were subjected to hermeneutical interpretation and analysis to unfold manifest and latent meanings used in reporting the issues of conflict in the elections. It was observed that the selected newspapers tended to have ignored the ethics of professional reporting and social responsibility by allowing ownership influence and political consideration to colour their reportage. The newspapers published conflict inducing stories which heated-up the Ondo State political climate. The findings showed that the reports reduced the ability of the press to grow beyond political and sectional patronage. The study concludes that the Nigerian press needs to get acquainted with, and adopt the conflict-sensitive approach in reporting elections in Nigeria. The press must develop the ability of being mediators in political conflicts, by paying careful attention to use of language in their gate-keeping, agenda setting and status-conferral roles in the political reporting process.

Key Words: Nigerian Press, Electoral Conflict, Conflict-Sensitive Press

Introduction and statement of the problem

Isola (2010), drawing inspirations from Akinsanya (1981); and Anifowose (1982) posit that conducting free, fair and violence-free election has become a serious perennial problem which seems to have defied solution since independence in Nigeria. Ordinarily, an election should be a platform on which politicians should test the popularity of their programmes, desires and aspirations for improving the lives of the people. However, it has become a recurrent battle where politicians and their supporters display physical prowess and test out dubious and naked violent tactics in the process of contestation for political power. Most of these tendencies manifested in post-independence politics. In the Southwestern part of Nigeria, the 1965 and 1983 elections were marked by so much malpractices and violence, as a result of the naked violent tactics displayed by the ruling political parties to win over this section of the country, and the cold defiance which the opposition party members and their supporters displayed in resisting the take-over of the states. The failure of these elections was the major ground on which the military justified their termination of the first and second republics.

Muyiwa Popoola

These various election crises set Nigeria back by many years in its journey to democracy with consequences on the political, socio-economic and human development of the country. It is obvious then from the foregoing that the press as an important institution in the democratic process contributes to elections in Nigeria. As the fourth estate of the realm, the press provides the platform for narratives and discourses in the service of elections, political negotiations and other features of the contestations among politicians and other civil organizations involved in election administration in Nigeria. In the process, it has contributed to the successes and pitfalls that have been witnessed in the various elections in Nigeria.

Since they are placed in a privileged position to access public information, to interact with parties in political conflicts and to reach destinations that the public is unable to reach, the media are able to shape mass opinions and influence agenda for public governance. Moreover, citizens reflect and articulate their opinions and feelings about elections in the press. This goes a long way in determining the outcomes of elections.

However, since political elites have realized the importance and power of the press during elections, they often exhibit the tendency to manipulate the press to further their political agenda during elections and thereby ensuing conflicts. In the process, the press inadvertently reports election issues in manners that lead to escalation of election conflicts and sometimes violence. This study investigated how selected Nigerian newspapers reported the issues of conflict in respect of the 2012 governorship elections in Ondo State, Nigeria.

Press role in electoral process and the conflict sensitive paradigm

The traditional functions of the press explain media involvement in public activities and in influencing public policies in the governance process. However, the press is implicated in contemporary societal conflicts based on the effects that its activities produce in the social conflict dynamics. Such effects could be as simple as increasing a single individual's knowledge or understanding of an issue or event, or it may be as complicated as influencing people's attitudes and behaviours in undertaking actions that could have destructive consequences on the society.

This trend has provided reasonable justification for the attention communication scholars have paid to the effects of the press on the society, since late 19th century when modern mass media began to emerge in its present form. Such focus has been on the media and the system within which it operates, including such systemic components associated with media operations, the political environment, the sphere of activities of pressure groups and propagandists, public opinions and effects of emerging technologies in the media (McQuail, 2000). The first phase of media effect studies emerged with the attribution of an all-powerful strength to the media to produce automatic effects on the audience. This theory, articulated as the 'Hypodermic Needle' effect was propounded based on the perceived power of the media to shape people's opinions, mould behaviors and even impose political ideologies against the people's will. Studies that boosted this theory include those conducted by Lippman (1922), Lasswell (1927) and Bruntz (1938). This all-powerful

assumption of the media was challenged in the second phase of media effects studies through empirical investigations that studied media contents and messages, linking them with the manifest behaviors of the audience. Such studies as Blumer (1933), Lazarsfeld et al (1944), Berelson et al (1954) and Hovland et al (1950), blazed the trail in this phase of media effects studies. The outcome of these studies assigned a modest role to the media in effect production and described the media as incapable of singularly causing any major planned or unintended effects on the audience. Klapper (1960) sums up the conclusion of the various researches at this phase by saying: "Mass communication (media) does not ordinarily serve as a necessary or significant cause of audience effects, but rather functions through a nexus of mediating factors." (p. 64)

The import of this statement is simply that the press could only act substantially in concert with other social, political, economic and educational factors in effecting change of attitudes and behaviours of the audience at any particular moment. That has led to the contemporary thinking in media studies which tends to confirm a powerful media audience but also an equally powerful audience, whereby both the media and the audience engage in constant interaction and negotiation in media construction of meanings (Bryant and Thomson, 2002). The media effect theory is central to understanding how the media can influence socio-political conflicts and violence, such as election violence. Singer (1970) says the media can contribute to intensification of conflicts by simply indicating the occurrence and location of riots, publicizing the causes of the riots or giving prior publicity to the likely occurrence of riots. McQuail (2000) equally recognizes that media can instigate collective behaviour during situations of public turmoil such as rioting. Such collective public reaction could emerge in form of:

- a. Widespread panic in response to alarming, incomplete or misleading information
- b. Amplification or spreading of crowd or mob activity
- c. Possible encouragement and aid given unintentionally to terrorists.

Also relevant to media interaction with politics and elections is the agenda-setting role of the media. This media functional theory explains how the press, through its contents, determines issues that attract public attention from the importance attached to such issues from among plethora of issues that arise daily in the public domain. Lippman (1922) pioneered investigations into the understanding of how the media shape the perception of the audience about issues in their environment through the agenda-setting function. However, Cohen is credited with refining Lippman's idea of agenda setting, when he wrote that: "The press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (Cohen, 1963, p. 13). In essence, the media attach more importance and prominence to issues that it thinks are important to the public by strategic positioning of its contents, while neglecting other

issues that it thinks are less important. McComb and Shaw (1972) offer a practical and more articulate interpretation of agenda-setting theory:

In shaping and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position...The mass media may well determine the important issues—that is the media may set the 'agenda'.... (p. 176)

Iyengar and Kinder (1987) extends the agenda-setting theory further with the idea of priming in the agenda-setting process. Priming explains the process by which the press deliberately draws attention to some aspects of political or social issues at the detriment of others, which could be much more important. This process could pose danger to the society, which could be deprived of the robust outcome of public discussions of the neglected but important issues.

Lang and Lang (1983) also came up with another extension of agenda-setting theory, which they tagged 'agenda-building.' They describe this as a collective process by which the media, the government and the citizens reciprocally influence one another when it involves formulation of public policies. The basic premise of agenda-building is that the press profoundly affects how societies determine what its important concerns are by mobilizing the various institutions towards a consensus. This idea suggests a whittling down of the power of the press to solely determine the social agenda for public discourses: nevertheless, the press remains a key factor in that process because of its enormous influence on other social and political institutions.

A macro-level consequence of agenda setting function of the press was articulated by Noelle-Newmann (1984), which she dubbed 'Spiral of silence' theory. This theory describes a process whereby people holding contrary opinions to the dominant views in the media keep such views to themselves because of fear of rejection or isolation. Thus, in a spiraling process, the dominant view spreads easily because the adherents are encouraged to proclaim them by the press, while the other views held by the minority gradually disappear from public consciousness because their adherents had chosen to remain mute. The long term consequence of the persistence of spiral of silence is articulated by Baran and Davis (2003):

If various viewpoints about agenda items are ignored, marginalized or trivialized by media reports, then people will be

reluctant to talk about them. As time passes, those viewpoints will cease to be heard in public and therefore cannot affect political decision making. (p. 316)

In the works of Popoola (2009, 2012, 2014, 2015), what this tends to suggest is that if the press allows itself to be drowned in partisanship and sectional patronage during an electoral process or in reporting conflicts that characterize elections, the press could erode the confidence reposed in it (the press) by the public and this may result in frustration in the political environment. Consequently, on how a socially-responsible press is expected to report the electoral process and particularly the conflicts that may characterize such process, Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956), Kunczick (1988), McQuail (2005) and Folarin (2006) posit that the chief duty of the socially-responsible media is to raise conflict to the plane of discussion with proposals for resolution in order to bring about development, realizing that societal peace is a strong condition for development.

This role of the press in reporting conflict is now understood in the light of conflict-sensitive journalism as made popular by Howard (2004). Conflict-sensitive journalism was distilled from the concepts, assumptions, propositions and prescriptions of peace journalism. In the exposition of Kemp (2004) on peace journalism, he describes peace media system as one that successfully minimizes violence and is able to promote peaceful behaviours in society. It is a media system that has orientated its culture and the cultural development of the society within which it operate towards peacefulness. It is a media system that has developed ideals, ethnics, mores, value systems and institutions that minimize violence and promote peace within it and among the audience. In identifying peaceful media, not only the state of the media should be considered, but also their orientation.

The fact that violent incidents are reported in such media does not necessarily mean that they are not peaceful. The cultural orientation of the media and how it is able to minimize the impacts and spread of violence in the society in addition to preventing the culture of violence ingrained in its reporting are the most important factors that determine the virility of peace media. In essence, the cultural dynamics of such media is towards peacefulness. In a peace media system, we not only simply see a media system in a state of peace but also a media system that:

- (a) Desires to be peaceful and seeks to orientate its culture in that direction;
- (b) Has developed cultural and technical means to achieve peacefulness, and
- (c) Has achieved success in this endeavour.

The success of a peace media system is in how it deals with conflicts and violence when, for whatever unfortunate reasons, it occurs in the society.

The Nigerian mass media system can be transformed into a peaceful media system whereby it plays a central role in the promotion of peace in the multicultural and diverse Socio-political environment. It can emphasize the benefits of peace by raising the legitimacy of groups and political leaders that are working for peace. It can help transform the images of the enemy among rival political and social groups that are involved in the country's recurrent social and political conflicts. In the midst of most social conflicts, the media is privileged to be in a position to contribute to peace initiatives, especially in reconciling various factions after political turbulence because:

- (a) They help in defining the atmosphere in which peace negotiation takes place in political processes.
- (b) They have active influence on the strategy and behaviour of stakeholders in political and social conflicts in conflict environments.
- (c) They have important influence on the nature of debates during peace processes and negotiations.
- (d) They can buttress or weaken public legitimacy of the stakeholders involved in peace processes.

However, the principles of conflict reporting enunciated in peace journalism have been criticized and therefore regarded as over prescriptive and consequently gagging objectivity in reporting conflicts, since peace journalism only encourages coverage of only aspects of conflicts that foster peace and discarding issues in a conflict that may promote violence and escalation of conflict. According to Howard (2004), peace journalism is unattainable due to how it limits objectivity in reporting conflict, where as conflictual issues left out in reportage of a conflict may not only be germane to understanding of such conflict, but more importantly useful for reconciliatory and peace moves in conflict situations. Stemming from this perceived deficiency of peace journalism, conflict-sensitive journalism now appears in the literature as a dominant paradigm in respect of how the media should handle conflict. Unlike the provisions of peace journalism, conflict sensitive journalism gives the media the latitude to cover all aspects of a conflicting issue, but emphasizes and gives prescriptions on the use of language in reporting the conflict, in such a way that the reportage will focus on de-escalation of the conflict, rather than escalating it to violence and disorderliness. According to Howard (2004), in reporting conflict in a sensitive and socially-responsible manner, the journalist must:

Avoid reporting a conflict as consisting of two opposing sides. Find other affected interests and include their stories, opinions and goals. Avoid defining the conflict by always quoting the leaders who make familiar demands. Go beyond the elites. Report the words of ordinary people who may voice the opinions shared by many. Avoid only reporting what divides the sides in conflict. Ask the opposing sides questions which may reveal common ground. Report on interests or goals which they may share. Avoid always focusing on the suffering and fear of only one side. Treat all sides' suffering as equally newsworthy. Avoid words like devastated, tragedy and terrorized to describe what has been done to one group. These kinds of words put the reporter on one side. Do not use them yourself. Only quote someone else who uses these words. Avoid emotional and imprecise words. Assassination is the murder of a head of state and no-one else. Massacre is the deliberate killing of innocent, unarmed civilians. Soldiers and policemen are not massacred. Genocide means killing an entire people. Do not minimize suffering, but use strong language carefully. Avoid words like terrorist, extremist or fanatic. These words take sides, make the other side seem impossible to negotiate with. Call people what they call themselves. Avoid making an opinion into a fact. If someone claims something, state their name, so it is their opinion and not your fact. Avoid waiting for leaders on one side to offer solutions. Explore peace ideas wherever they come from. Put these ideas to the leaders and report their response.

Scope and Methodology

This study only focused on the reportage of the gubernatorial matters of conflict among the three major contenders for the governorship seat in the Ondo State. These three candidates were: Olusegun Mimiko of the Labour Party (LP) the ruling party in the state, Sola Oke of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the ruling party at the federal level, and Akeredolu of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN). These three candidates and their parties were selected in the state because the parties on the platforms of which they contested were the most prominent political parties in the state as at the time of the elections.

The study was conducted using dialectical hermeneutics, a qualitative research tool.

The newspapers selected are *The Hope*, *The Nation*, and *The Punch*. Remarkably, *The Hope* and *The Nation* newspapers selected had some form of political affiliations as a result of their ownership at one point or the other during the period of study, and this largely informed their selection for the study. Also, *The Punch* was chosen because of its wide spread circulation and its prominent coverage of political issues. All the newspapers were also English language newspapers. This factor is important since most of the political discourses among political elites were conducted in English language, which makes the coverage of such discourses easier for journalists to report.

The purposive sampling was used to select 36 editions of the selected newspapers over a four-month period: August and September 2012 (the pre), October 2012 (election month) and November 2012 (the post election). This was done to ensure that only the editions of the newspapers that carried the matters of conflict in the said elections were selected and examined. The following units of analysis - news, features, editorial comments and opinions were examined in the 36 editions.

The analysis of the contents of the newspapers was done to investigate partisanship, and incitement into violence inherent in the newspaper reportage of the elections; and also to explore the influences of ownership or control of the newspapers on such political stories. Such contents were subjected to hermeneutical interpretations organized around Jensen's semiotic framework, which is adopted in communication sciences and cultural studies (Baran and Davis, 2003). This literary analytical method affords deeper and better understanding of the contents of the selected newspapers in relation to the socio-cultural and political environment within which the newspapers operated during the study period. This analytical tool is favoured over quantitative tools because it enables the researcher to reach and expose hidden and embedded meanings behind contents which have far-reaching effects on the socio-cultural context within which the producers and recipients of texts interacted.

Selected newspapers and matters of conflict in the 2012 Ondo State gubernatorial elections: A conflict sensitive or conflict inducing press

Months before the October 2012 gubernatorial elections in Ondo State Nigeria, political discourses in the selected newspapers were laden with incitements and demonization of rival political parties and key politicians. The newspapers were clearly partisan and sometimes vitriolic in their contents, giving an early indication to the direction to which the elections were likely to be concluded. The political environment was heated up while the public was surreptitiously educated on what to do if their wish to have the government they desired was frustrated.

Before, during and after the election, several issues were thrown up in the newspaper reportage which generated negative exchanges among politicians. Volatile and conflict inducing stories were published by the newspapers who ignored the potential consequences of such contents. The jostle and quest for political power and ascendancy to the Ondo State political throne caused pervasive anxiety among politicians on the side of the ruling party, the Labour Party (LP) and the two strongest

oppositions: the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN). This found expression in the contents of the newspapers sympathizing with both sides of the divide. While *Hope* defended strongly the cause of the LP, its proprietor, the *Nation*, owned by an ACN party leader and chieftain, deployed its contents massively and unprofessionally to the support of the ACN. The Ondo State PDP, which had the support of the ruling party at the federal. PDP, also used the press to establish its formidability and how resolute it was to win the Ondo State governorship seat for the party. All these were evident in the reported exchanges and altercations as shown thus:

NEWSPAPER: THE HOPE

GUBER POLL: LAGOS LGs TAXED N.5B TO CAPTURE ONDO

An alarm has been raised over the reported decision of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) leadership to compel Local Governments in Lagos State to donate a whopping N7m each to enable it capture Ondo state in the October 20 governorship election. Lagos has 57 Local Councils. (*Hope, September 14, 2012, Pg 1*)

COUNTDOWN TO OCTOBER 20 (2): HOW MIMIKO WON THE GREAT DEBATE

.....Like many of his foot soldiers, **Olusola Oke lied with Hitleric audacity, accused falsely like Satan and promised liberally the things that neither match his party's colorless history nor reflect his zigzag propensities.** (*The Hope, October 4, 2012, pg. 4*)

ONDO GUBER POLL: TURNING INTO A "ROFO ROFO" FIGHT

Replying him, Chief Ruben Fasoranti, leader of the Afenifere lashed back at Bisi Akande (Chairman of the ACN) and his allies, saying they are a bunch of jokers, liars, deceivers and unserious elements who merely wanted to paint real Awoists in bad light...Writing about the guber poll in *The Nation* newspaper, Sam Omatseye: a noted columnist, ran down the state governor, Dr. Olusegun Mimiko, saying he betrayed Olusegun Agagu, Olusegun Obasanjo and Bola Tinubu among others on his way to the governorship position. Omatseye was lampooned by columnists far and wide, called a slave who is working on behalf of his paymaster, Chief Bola Tinubu. (*The Hope, October 13, 2012, pg. 7*)

ONDO 2012: POLITICAL DEBATES, ET AL

The desperation of the Action Congress of Nigeria, having foolishly advertised to take on the Labour administration in Ondo state, is mind boggling. The party has been rumored to have attempted to suborn any subornable conscience in its bid to actualize the plans for taking over Ondo state...like they say in a game of chance, the party is going all out for broke. Ondo state, the party is now finding out, is threatening to be its Waterloo. (*The Hope, October 16, 2012, pg. 1*)

TOWARDS FREE, FAIR POLL IN ONDO STATE

.....On our part, in view of the unprecedented performance of the incumbent governor, we call on the electorate to troop out en masse to cast their votes and ensure the return of Dr. Olusegun Mimiko as governor of the state. (*The Hope, October 18, 2012, pg. 6*)

MIMIKO BEATS AKEREDOLU IN HIS WARD

The result showed a humiliating defeat of Akeredolu by Mimiko in his Ijebu 2, ward 5, unit 6. Details of the result showed that Mimiko gave Akeredolu a bloody nose even in his Ijebu 2, ward 5, unit 6. The result of this unit showed that Labour party (LP) polled 144 votes while ACN followed with 139 votes and PDP scored 35. (*The Hope, October 21, 2012, pg. 1*)

MIMIKO TODAY, MIMIKO TOMORROW

They underestimated the power of Iroko. They thought it was like before. They shot themselves in the leg and hanged themselves on their self-made red cards. Their weapons of political warfare failed them. They relied on their Emperor but they were all drowned in the sea... Now their hands have been broken like that of Oloolu and they have been completely mystified. Unfortunately, Sam Omatseye allowed himself to be dragged into the murky waters of partisan politics where he threw his professional decorum and journalistic integrity into the wind and descended into perfidy by belching out stench on Iroko from his rotten pen. (*The Hope, October 25, 2012, pg. 12*)

ONDO ELECTION: THE FACES OF INCOMPETENT LOSERS

Even though Tinubu and his retinue of comrades in their unholy acts employed many phantom methods to prevent the

wishes of Ondo state people from coming into reality, the wish of God prevailed over the wish one man who has become a mini-god of sort to ignoramus individuals in the Action Congress of Nigeria. Action Congress of Nigeria no doubt claims to be a party that parades all progressive elements in Nigeria, but the gritty truth is that the party is mainly a crowd of elite prostitutes who are using the name of the late sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo to score cheap political points and also garner sympathy from the people of South-west. Their composition is that of idiosyncratic charlatans whose trade is deceit. (*The Hope, November 5, 2012, pg. 16*)

ONDO ELECTION: OPPOSITION BASTARDIZES RECURSE TO ELECTION PETITION

.....But, if Olusola Oke had found out in a dream that his party, as presently factionalized and enervated, had won the gubernatorial election in Ondo state, he ought to have woken up to apologize to the political intelligence of the electorate...For the ACN man, it is difficult to see how far the recourse to election petition will advance the image of his party after the disastrous outing that was preceded by a boastful and ill-mannered electioneering. (*The Hope, November 13, 2012, pg. 18*)

ONDO ELECTION: SAD STORY OF SORE LOSERS

President Goodluck Jonathan, that God fearing gentleman who promised free and fair Ondo polls, once again lived up to his promise, to the admiration of all lovers of democracy and good governance in the country...In the meantime, nobody should call the charlatans to order, as they disgrace themselves at the election petition tribunal. (*The Hope, November 15, 2012, pg. 11*)

These reportage are conflict inciting and provocative. The use of language in an exaggerated and inappropriate manner is obvious in the description of Mimiko's victory and the defeat of his opponents. For instance, the reportage describes Akeredolu's loss as a *humiliating defeat* and further asserts that Mimiko gave Akeredolu a *bloody nose* in his ward. There are several instances of name calling and use of invectives and abusive words such as where ACN members and loyalists are described as *jokers, liars, deceivers and unserious elements*. These statements are offensive and should have been reviewed or completely expunged in the light of the social responsibility and peace advocacy duty of the press as well as its function as a gatekeeper.

NEWSPAPER: THE NATION

SUSPECTED LP THUGS, SSS INVADE ONDO NEWSPAPER

ACN To Mimiko: Stop Attacking Opposition

Ogunleye said it was worrisome that the LP administration is increasingly becoming intolerant of opposing views, especially as the governorship election draws nearer. He said: "it is unfortunate that suspected thugs of the ruling LP took away copies of our newspaper. I must say that I am not surprised. For more than four days now, I have been receiving frightening text messages from some people, threatening to kill me if we did not stop publishing the paper. (*The Nation, August 3, 2012, Pg 3*)

"MIMIKO BRINGING THUGS TO DISRUPT OWO TODAY"

LP: It's Not True

The Akeredolu Campaign Organisation (ACO) of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) yesterday alerted Ondo state residents to an alleged plan by the Governor Olusegun Mimiko administration to use thugs and other hoodlums during his campaign in Owo today. The thugs, who are being imported from Igbira land, the governor's ancestral home, are meant to terrorize, harass and intimidate the people of Owo... (*The Nation, August 30, 2012, pg 13*)

LP NATIONAL CHAIR, NWANYANWU "IS A POLITICAL PARASITE"

ACO (Akeredolu Campaign Organisation) described the statement as coming from **someone it described as a confused and frustrated political leper**, who has no base at home but pretending to be a political heavyweight in the sunshine state. (*The Nation, September 5, 2012, pg. 8*)

AKEREDOLU URGES MIMIKO TO ALLOW ACN TO TRANSFORM ONDO

.....I am not like Governor Olusegun Mimiko, who is a medical doctor but abandoned the profession for politics. His clinic is already taken over by bush. (*The Nation, September 20, 2012, Pg 8*)

BROTHER TODAY, GONE TOMORROW

.....When he decided to abandon Obasanjo, who was no little villain at the time, one would have thought that Mimiko had decided at last to prove his critics wrong. He had changed his chameleonic obsessions. He had become born again as a man of constant beliefs. That he would not allow the refrain gain ground that this man who jumps ship will jump ship again. That his hop from one party pole to another has made him too much of a feverish self-seeker, traitor, apostate impostor even to the point of sanctimony. Brother today, gone tomorrow. *(The Nation, October 1, 2012. Back page)*

AKANDE, TINUBU TO POLICE: STOP THUGGERY Akeredolu asks IG to transfer police commissioner

.....He said: "some thugs are attacking our people while returning from a rally in Ondo. It was quite bad. There are good police men; there are bad police men. The attack is too much and police are taking sides. I am saying this as a message to the Inspector General. Because we are gentlemen, we will not have thugs. **But if thugs attack our people again, we will send thugs bigger than those in Ondo State.**" They should not dare us. They dared us in 1965 and 1983 and Nigeria collapsed. **If they attack us, we will hit back in a way the police will not be able to handle in Ondo state.**" Akeredolu asked the governor to withdraw the thugs from the street or face the consequence. He said: "I want to call on the governor to rein in the thugs. I told him at the meeting we held with the SSS, but he was threatening me. I told him, no, because we are both candidates, the Commissioner of Police is partisan. He cannot be trusted. We reported the attack to him and he said it was ACN that was the first to attack. The IG should transfer him from Ondo State. **If Mimiko insists on using thugs, we will fight him to a standstill. If he does not rein in the thugs, we will meet him fire for fire.**" *(The Nation, October 5, 2012. Pg 4)*

MIMIKO SHOULD APOLOGISE OR FACE COURT ACTION

....."While the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and ACN are telling the masses how they will improve their living conditions, Mimiko is busy framing up lies. The only language LP understands is violence..." "I hereby give Governor Olusegun Mimiko seven days to retract the story; otherwise, I

will not hesitate to begin litigation. I also give him seven days ultimatum to resign for his inability to provide security in the state." *(The Nation, October 5, 2012. Pg 4)*

LP THUGS KILLED OVER CAMPAIGN MONEY

.....It was learnt that LP thugs started fighting with guns, cutlasses and other weapons over how to share governor Mimiko's money. Following their disagreement, some of them died in the process. "This has confirmed our fears that Mimiko has looted the treasury for the coming election..." *(The Nation, October 5, 2012. Pg 5)*

ONDO SOUTH ELDERS REITERATE SUPPORT FOR ACN CANDIDATES

They added that although Chief Olusola Oke, the governorship candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the state, is from the area, he would not get 20 percent of the votes cast in the area. "Quote us and tell the people, Oke would not win 20 percent of the votes in Ilaje. We don't want him." *(The Nation, October 7, 2012. Pg 4)*

ACN LEADERS URGE MIMIKO ON PEACEFUL POLL

"It would have been better for Mimiko to have contested for local government chairman, rather than being a governor. When I was a local government chairman, about 12 years ago, I built many markets and ultra-modern motor parks, the project the LP government is doing now with pride. Also, A detimehin said Mimiko should start packing his loads, stressing that the citizenry has had enough of his visionless government." *(The Nation, October 7, 2012. Pg 5)*

LAWYER CRIES OUT OVER PLOT TO ASSASSINATE AKEREDOLU

An Akure lawyer and human rights activist, Mr. Morakinyo Ogele, has cried out over an alleged plot by the Labour Party (LP) to assassinate the governorship candidate of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), Mr Oluwarotimi Akeredolu. SAN Ogele alleged that the LP was planning to ambush and kill the Akeredolu during his campaigns across the local governments. He said any mysterious death in Ondo State would be accounted for by

the LP. (*The Nation*, October 11, 2012, Pg 5)

MIMIKO'S ANTI-CHRIST-TIC

.....He is a political boil on a fatigued national buttock that is an enemy of ease; the obnoxious pregnancy on the knee that is a hindrance to spiritual genuflection. Hell, Mimiko has become the proverbial lizard on the mouth of the earthenware pot-pelted at grave danger to the pot and ignored soon to sully the precious, scarce drinking water. This is the time to regionalize South-west; and to rid the zone of self-harming, mainstreaming bums like Mimiko. (*The Nation*, October 11, 2012, pg. 22)

SUSPECTED LP THUGS ATTACK ACN MEMBERS IN ONDO COMMUNITY

.....It added: "Guns, machetes and other weapons were freely used by the LP thugs to chase away the defenseless ACN members. Various degrees of injury were sustained by our teeming members who were holding a legitimate peaceful meeting. Many of them are in critical condition in various hospitals in the area. Dele Balogun, a chairmanship aspirant, had broken ribs." It is also a notorious fact that the LP thugs have also been unleashing a high level of fury on members of the PDP. Recently, the LP thugs attacked PDP members during their ward congresses..." (*The Nation*, October 17, 2012, Pg. 8)

MIMIKO'S VICTORY IN PERSPECTIVE

This is the Ondo of Papa Adegkunle Ajasin, Papa Adebayo Adefarati and other titans of Awolowo School of political leadership. It fills me with trepidation to think that the Ondo that drove out Akin Omoboriowo in 1983 in order to enforce the enthronement of Adegkunle Ajasin who was the candidate of Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), Awolowo's party, has now degenerated into an insular and other-Yoruba-hating enclave... This confirms again the notion that democracy only offers a platform for choice but does not guarantee a rational one. The people however will have to live with the consequences of their choice, good or bad. (*The Nation*, October 29, 2012, pg. 22)

LESSONS FROM ONDO POLL (2)

The Ondo people were more concerned about what they considered their independence and freedom. They bought the propaganda that the freedom could be lost if Rotimi Akeredolu of the ACN won the poll. After the sentiments, it would be time for the people to reap the result of their action. (*The Nation*, November 4, 2012, pg. 21)

As evident in the excerpts, *the Nation* took side unprofessionally with the ACN and the party's governorship candidate, Rotimi Akeredolu. In the reportage, the newspaper displayed conspicuously its sympathy and support for the ACN and used all sorts of incriminating, acrimonious and vituperative language in condemning the opposition, particularly Olusegun Mimiko, the incumbent Governor and the LP's governorship candidate in the elections. The newspaper widened the gulf of enmity, hostility and animosity among the political parties and their aspirants through the reckless and unethical ways of reporting the activities and utterances of the political parties and their actors. The newspaper was largely partisan and bias in its reportage of the conflicting matters that ensued from the elections. This situation is worrisome considering the role the press is expected to play in bringing about a peaceful political order that is a prerequisite for national development.

NEWSPAPER: THE PUNCH

PDP ACCUSES POLICE OF BIAS IN ONDO FRACAS

Peoples Democratic Party in Ondo state has accused the police of bias in their handling of the cases of violence involving the PDP and other parties in the state... But the Police Public Relations Officer in the state, Adeniran Aremu, dismissed the PDP allegation, insisting that the matter was treated on its merit by the Criminal Investigations Department. (*Punch*, August 3, 2012, Pg 11)

ONDO OPPOSITION PARTIES BUYING VOTER CARDS - MIMIKO

Olusegun Mimiko Campaign Organization on Sunday alleged massive purchase of voter cards by some parties from prospective voters ahead of the October 20 governorship election in the state... Meanwhile, the Action Congress of Nigeria in the state has accused the Labour Party of aiming to circumvent the wish of the electorate in the coming election. (*Punch*, August 6, 2012, Pg. 12)

MIMIKO DIVERTS ONDO MONEY TO FUND CAMPAIGN - Akeredolu

Akeredolu Campaign Organization on Tuesday alleged that the ruling Labour Party in Ondo State had diverted the state resources to fund its campaign for the October 20 governorship election...But Governor Olusegun Mimiko described the allegation as "cheap blackmail", saying the state government had been augmenting shortfalls in the allocations to the local governments for teachers' salary. (*Punch, August 15, 2012. Pg 8*)

INEC TRANSFERRING OSUN, OYO VOTERS TO ONDO - PDP

..."This started about three weeks ago affecting all the local governments of the state and we have it on good authority that close to 10,000 of such transfers had already taken place." But the INEC Residents Electoral Commissioner in the state, Mr Akin Orebiyi, said only 30 transfer cases from other states, based on requests received before 60 days to the election, were processed. (*Punch, September 14, 2012. Pg 7*)

ONDO ELECTION: STAKEHOLDERS AGREE ON CREDIBLE CONDUCT

Political party executives, governorship candidates and other stakeholders on Friday agreed to work together to ensure the conduct of free, fair and credible election in the October 20 governorship election in Ondo State. (*Punch, September 23, 2012. Pg. 5*)

'LEAVE US OUT OF EKITI'S WOES'

Mimiko Campaign organization has advised the Ekiti chapter of the Action Congress of Nigeria to provide solutions to the problems facing the state instead of focusing on Saturday's governorship election in Ondo State. The Ekiti ACN had alleged that Olusegun Mimiko administration was out to frustrate the South West integration by refusing to join ACN. (*Punch, October 17, 2012. Pg 10*)

MIMIKO, AKEREDOLU, OKE BATTLE FOR ONDO TOP JOB

....It's principally a three-way race among the candidates of the Labour Party, Action Congress of Nigeria and the People's Democratic Party as the people of Ondo State go to the polls

today to elect a new governor...the state had remained peaceful despite the fact that the parties had been leveling serious allegations of violence against each other, most of which later turned out to be unfounded. (*Punch, October 20, 2012. Pg. 4*)

THREE PARTIES CHALLENGE MIMIKO'S VICTORY AT TRIBUNAL

Ojo (AP) alleged that INEC 'unlawfully' its name and the logo of his party from the ballot papers used for the election contrary to the 2010 Electoral Act. The ACN candidate demanded the nullification of the election. Oke in his own petition alleged irregularities, manipulation of votes and outright falsification of results in some areas of the state. (*Punch, November 10, 2012. Pg 8*)

ONDO GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION: THESE JOURNALISTS HAVE FAILED US

The Oct. 20 Ondo State governorship election has further exposed the rot and utter disregard for professionalism among many journalists in Nigeria...Before the election, the only time the state-owned media outfits didn't blacklist the opposition was when they are reporting half-truths about them; but that is understandable because of ownership factor...we heard of instances where journalists were "settled" to adjust, reframe or totally retract true stories that were earlier published and declare them as untrue. Is it right to report lies, literally abuse professional colleagues on air or heat up the polity for personal benefits? NUJ, it is up to you. (*Punch, November 10, 2012. Pg. 40*).

ONDO POLL TRIBUNAL WARNS LITIGANTS AGAINST BRIBERY

The Election Petitions Tribunal in Akure held its inaugural sitting on Thursday with a warning to expose anybody who would try to influence the outcome of its findings. (*Punch, November 23, 2012*)

The reportage of matters of conflict in the Ondo State 2012 governorship elections by the *Punch* newspaper could be said to be considerably fair. The newspaper, with the

use of language and balanced reporting played down issues that could fuel and escalate conflict among the political candidates. However, there are instances of unsubstantiated allegations that could have sparked off conflict and violent reactions as reported by the newspaper. These could have been avoided through painstaking investigations which outcome would have been very incontrovertible for public consumption as championed by a socially responsible press.

Conclusion

It is evident in the findings of this study that the selected newspapers' reportage of the matters of conflict in the 2012 gubernatorial elections in Ondo State, Nigeria, contravened the tenets of a conflict sensitive and socially responsible press. Obviously, *The Nation* and *Hope* newspapers, owned and controlled by the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) and Labour Party (LP) respectively, took sides with their owners and financiers and engaged in combat and war of words at the expense of professional ethics on the one hand and democracy on the other hand. The newspapers cared less about their social responsibility role as they sacrificed their constitutional mandate for ensuring peaceful political order on the altar of partisanship.

The two newspapers, *The Nation* and *Hope* displayed conspicuous interest in the outcome of the election and became veritable tools in the hands of their owners to launch ceaseless attacks and tirades against perceived opponents. Allegations, allusions to unearthly beings and events, offensive words and outright oaths were rained down on the opposing candidates without reprieve. *Punch* newspaper, however, was fairly responsible in its reportage, although some allegations it reported, which were capable of igniting conflicts, could have been avoided through meticulous investigations. This study, therefore, recommends that the Nigerian press needs to get acquainted with, and adopt the conflict-sensitive approach in reporting elections in Nigeria. The press must develop the ability of being mediators in political conflicts, by paying careful attention to use of language in their gate-keeping, agenda setting and status-conferral roles in the political reporting process.

The press needs to examine their status-conferral functions by focusing more on credible individuals, who are more peace-oriented and peace-loving in the political process, rather than violence patrons and questionable characters who take politics as a zero-sum game. Such individuals who exhibit the tendency of capturing power by all means must be exposed and discouraged from capturing power by the media in the interest of the society and for the survival of democracy.

The press should empower the citizens to exercise their right of asking questions about the credentials and antecedents of who is aspiring to govern them and how such an individual proposes to govern them. This involves providing citizens and civil society groups with access to the media to articulate their views and opinions, especially during preparation for elections.

There is the need for media practitioners to establish specific codes of conduct for political and election coverage and reporting in manners that will encourage their sensitivity to election-related conflicts. Such code should discourage violence and

portray politics as a means to serve, rather than as a means for self aggrandizement. In addition, media practitioners should be guided in their activities by the Code of Ethics for Nigerian Journalists as well as the legal framework for media coverage of elections in Nigeria. The ultimate, however, is for the journalist to be alive to his societal responsibilities and be guided always by his conscience.

Finally, the political class must realize the importance of the role assigned to the press as a distinct arm of government in a democracy. The same principle of non-interference in the affairs of other arms should equally apply to the press. The politicians must cultivate the habit of leaving the press to perform its constitutional role without intervention from outside. This is the only way the culture of true democracy can be sustained in Nigeria.

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