

TOWARDS A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF CARTOON COMMUNICATION MODES AND THEMES: THE NIGERIAN NEWSPAPER CARTOONS EXAMPLE

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Abstract

Cartoons are also common features of Nigerian print media of which newspapers, magazines and books are inclusive. However, most Nigerians do not fully understand the meanings of newspaper cartoons. This article attempts to shed light on the issues by discussing types of cartoons, and categories of cartoon themes. It reveals that newspaper cartoon themes are usually based on news materials, which from the context of mass communication, may require some knowledge of current affairs for their understanding. It concludes that the low visual literacy level of majority of Nigerians has deprived them of the knowledge of reading cartoons, understanding their communication modes, and hence appreciating and enjoying newspaper cartoons.

Key words: Cartoon, Communication, Newspaper

Introduction

Cartoon is generally defined as humorous drawings that may convey messages with subtly hidden meanings (Udechukwu, 1979; Emi, 1980 and 2004). There does not seem to be a consensus in categorizing the various forms of cartoons that abound in the print media (Bittner, 1989; Olaniyan, 2000; Agberia 2001; Osho, 2001; Nnabuike, 2006). This is because scholars who have written on the subject have adopted different criteria, some of which are interrelated and overlap, conceptually, in categorizing them. Such criteria range from the cartoons' subjects or themes to their forms and styles. For instance, Wainwright (1972) did not distinguish between the single panel editorial type of cartoon from other cartoons, all of which he says could be political cartoons on account of their theme. He, however, made reference to cartoon strip and pocket cartoon, the latter of which he describes as a single-column commentary cartoon.

Emi (1980) identified three types of cartoons, namely: the main/editorial cartoon, the pocket size cartoon and cartoon strips. He identified a new genre of the cartoon strip; the cartoon documentary, following his creation of *Road Safety Challenges Part I; a Cartoon Documentary*, which he drew in the style of naturalism on a multi-panel format, and was published in 1991 by the Federal Road

Safety Commission of Nigeria (FRSC) in English, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo languages. He contends that cartoon documentaries can be published wholly in books like comics or serialized on the pages of newspapers and magazines as syndicated cartoons. He, therefore, submits that cartoon strips should not be considered as funny humorous drawings at all times since they could, in the form of cartoon documentaries, focus on serious issues like road safety, drug trafficking and abuse, human conflict, environmental degradation and women empowerment(Emi, 1995, 2004).

The publication of the *Nigerian Women Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: a Cartoon Documentary*, another work of his of this genre of drawing in the late 1990s in *The Spark* magazine, proved the viability of using this type of cartoons as a channel of mass communication. Bittner (1989) categorized cartoons into two types, which are the comic and panel cartoons in his discussion of the subject. Applying a criterion that is based on subject matter, he posits that comics, which usually appear in the form of strips of multiple panels and could be published as books, may thematically, be a form of direct social commentary or a political cartoon. The pictorial contents of such cartoons are of course similar to the ones drawn in a single panel.

Agberia (2001) speaks of three broad types of cartoons. These according to him, are the political cartoons and caricature gag panels and the cartoon strips. Osho (2001) listed six types of cartoons, which he referred to as general interest cartoons, political cartoons, editorial cartoons, economic and trade cartoons, sociological and environmental cartoons as well as social cartoons. In a more recent work on the subject, Fatugase (2010) making allusion to the themes and functions of cartoons that are published in newspapers, magazines and books, identified several types of cartoons. Citing the works of Britner (1989), (Emi & Osho, 2001), she made reference to cartoon strips, syndicated comics, panel cartoons, gag cartoons and caricature, among others.

In spite of the foregoing, it is plausible to categorize cartoons into five types, by adopting their functions, sizes, subjects, communication modes and drawing styles as criteria. It is, however, noteworthy that these criteria could overlap contextually in the course of carrying out the task. The following are the five types of cartoons classified based on the aforementioned criteria:

(i)The Editorial Cartoon

The first category characterized by function is the editorial cartoon. The size of the editorial cartoon, which is drawn on only a panel or frame and can be referred to as a single panel cartoon, is relatively big and, often, covers several columns (Emi, 1980). It is called an editorial cartoon because it is usually based on a current topical subject and published on the editorial page of a newspaper. The editorial cartoon, which is sometimes referred to as a political cartoon due to its political theme, could be square or rectangular in format. The size of this cartoon which is often standardized varies and maybe virtually half of the page of a newspaper. *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, and *The Nation* exemplify newspapers, which have done this in Nigeria.

The cartoonist can incorporate many figures, objects, and other motifs in his drawings without depreciated clarity in composition because of the cartoon's broad size. Thus, the cartoonist can express abundant humour and satire in an editorial cartoon format without applying captions. Here, the desired effect, such as satire, could be derived mainly from the peculiar characteristics of the subject that is being lampooned.

Will Dyson, David Low, Giles and Philip Zec cartoons typify main editorial cartoons published

abroad before the end of the seventh decade of the twentieth century (Wainwright, 1972; Emi, 1980). Their Nigerian counterparts are Akinola Lasekan of the *West African Pilot*, Dedekson of the *Daily Service*, Cliff Ogiugo and Josy Ajiboye of the *Sunday Times*. Azeez Sanni, Muyiwa Adetula, Akin Onipede, Cheche Egbune, Bennett Omeke, Victor Asowata, Osuji Godrick, Leke Moses, Moses Ebong, Kaycee Okoronkwo, Ckwuemeka Emenike, Mike Asukwo and Albert Ohams are some contemporary Nigerian editorial cartoonists.

The *Cartoon Punch*, *Sketch scope*, *Josy Ajiboye on Sunday*, and *Brawn Bullet* are examples of how the continuous use of cartoon and a newspaper's editorial policy can conceptually standardize an editorial cartoon format. It is noteworthy that Bisi Ogunbadejo, Obe Ess and other cartoonists of the Guardian newspapers since the 1980s, maintained a tradition of publishing editorial cartoons in multiple cartoon strip format that have bestowed comic character on them, since the 1980s.

(ii) Pocket Cartoon

The pocket cartoon is a type of cartoon that derived its name from its size. This cartoon of a miniature size is usually published on one or two of a four-column to six-column format that is adopted by a newspaper as its page design. The pocket cartoon cannot conveniently accommodate lots of images on its format. Nevertheless, pocket cartoonists render their cartoons efficient by strategically portraying a significant resemblance of the persons and objects in their drawings to their life models by depicting their peculiar physical attributes, dressings and speeches. For instance, *Brawn Bullet* otherwise known as Muyiwa Johnson rendered the figure of Richard Akinjide recognizable by the portrayal of his facial marks in the drawing. They also complement their drawings with short witty comments.

Comparatively, the pocket cartoon is more economical for the publisher in terms of the use of space than the main/editorial cartoon whose superfluous spatial use could cost the publisher several hundred naira worth of potential advertisement space. This is the probable reason why newspapers and magazines editors have found it expedient to use pocket cartoons as space fillers when planning their publications pages. Some examples of pocket cartoons published abroad are *Pocket Cartoon* by Osbert Lancaster and *Little Cartoon* by Timothy Birdsall, which appeared often in the *Daily Express* and the *Sunday Times*, both of London (Wainwright, 1972).

Albert Ohams had many of pocket cartoons published in *Prime People* – a people oriented soft sell news magazine that was published in the 1980s. Yubie Uko and Peter Thomas have performed similar feat for *Fame* magazine. Nigerian newspaper pocket cartoons are exemplified by *Omoba* and *Kabiyesi* created by Dotun Gboyega for the *Punch* and the *National Concord* respectively; *Pappy* and *Paddy* were created for the *Daily Sketch* by Rod Adoh Emi (Rodman) and Layi Animashun respectively, in the 1980s. Others are *Mr. & Mrs.* produced by Akapa for *The Vanguard*, and *Ripples* drawn by Muyiwa Adetula for *The Nation*. Unfortunately, *Omoba*, which was drawn for decades by many cartoonists of *The Punch* newspapers, is no longer published as its space has been devoted to the publication of quotations.

(iii) Comic, Gag and Strip Cartoon

The third category, which is based on subject, could be referred to as the gag, comic or cartoon strips. The gag cartoon, which simply means *funny cartoon*, could be drawn on a single panel like an editorial cartoon. It is called a comic or cartoon strip if it is created in several sequential panels.

Although the intention to lampoon or create pun or satire may be difficult to spot in the gag cartoon, it instructs, influences and entertains while striking a cord that touches man by revealing social truths, which are discernible in its images and captions. It constitutes an editorial cartoon if it is based on a topical issue and published on a newspaper's editorial page.

Gag cartoons can also be based on politics, the economy, socio-cultural and environmental matters as well as fiction (Emi, 1980; Wainwright, 1972; Bittner, 1989; Osho, 2001; Nnabuife, 2006). The comic, gag or strip cartoon appears like storyboards. It can be drawn in horizontal or vertical oriented panels, and it is suitable for the dialogue or commentary style of communication. It can also be created in horizontal and the vertical oriented panels.

Cartoons strips are sequences of drawings that may be based on humorous stories or adventures. A number of panels that constitute a strip are filled with images, topical captions and dialogue in a story telling manner, which visual effect, is to some extent, akin to that of still films. Each panel or frame within a strip is a picture on its own if published detachedly. Cartoon strips are drawn in various styles ranging from naturalism, caricature to surrealism. These styles are adopted according to the thematic and idiomatic preference of the cartoonist. For instance, naturalism is a feature of cartoons strip, which may pertain to the depiction of people or objects with such fidelity that their resemblance of the figures or models, which they imitate, appears photographic.

Surrealism as a style of cartooning is best employed for expressing romantic themes featuring fantasy or dreamlike stories, while direct caricature is characterized by the distortion and stylization of forms or figures. It is pertinent to mention here, that some cartoonists apply a multiple of styles in their works so that it is possible to identify traces of naturalism and caricature in a single work.

One of the earliest examples of gag, comic and cartoon strips is the *Yellow Kid*, created by Richard Outcault in 1895. It was published in USA by Pulitzer Press with a four-colour printing machine. There were also *The Katzenjammer Kids*, *Mutt and Jeff* and *The Gumps* (Emi, 1980; Brittner, 1989). In 1929, John Flint Dille, a cartoon syndicate pioneer, created *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*, a series that became the fore-runner of science fiction (Brittner, 1989).

Early Nigerian newspapers like the *West African Pilot*, *Daily Service* and the *Morning Post* published several syndicated cartoon strips of foreign production daily on their pages in the 1940s and 1950s. Nigerians who read the newspapers in this era will remember seeing cartoon strips such as *Mandrake the Magician*, *Judd Saxon*, *Big Ben Bold*, *Flash Gordon* and *Henri* on a page of the *Morning Post*. The *Daily Times* (Nigeria), which existed during this period featured *Burin*, *Buck Yarn* and *Garth* (Emi, 1980). The newspaper dropped the first two cartoons but continued to publish *Garth* for decades before its print editions became defunct recently.

Gab Ore-Okpako's *Amusa Sango* was published regularly in the *Daily Times* in the early 1960s under the editorship of Peter Enahoro. Oke Horton's *Safe Journey* based on the famous Radio Nigeria drama series on the adventures of Alao the Master Driver and his motor boy, Shaky followed suit much later. Some strip cartoonists of the post-civil war period in Nigeria are Cliff Ogiugo, Tunde Okusi of the *Pappy Joe* fame, Dele Jegede, Kenny Adamson, Rod Adoh Emi a.k.a. Rodman, Egun Aleshinloye and Obe Ess. Others are Bayoor Odulana, Dotun Gboyega, Ayo Martin-Tajo, Boye Gbenro, Basil Okafor, Emmaboj, Albert Ohams, Morak Oguntade, Mallam Kabru, Kayode Ereolere and Dan Ifeagwu (Udechukwu, 1979; Adebolajo, 1992; Olaniyan, 2000; Nnabuife, 2006; Onipede, 2007).

Sequel, which was published in the *African Concord*; *Cartoon on the Run* in *The Westerner*; *Banter* in *Quality* magazine; *Life with Connie* in *Totally Whole*, and *Ibrahim* in the *Drum* magazine, symbolize some Nigerian magazine gag/strip cartoons. They were drawn by Dokun Abioye, Ekeolere, Obe Ess, Ape Ekene and Jayne, respectively. Examples of some contemporary Nigerian newspaper gag/cartoon strips include *Mama Lasisi* created by Aliu Eroje, *Efe and Jude* by Benette Omeke and *Giggles* by Chukky all of which were published in *The Punch* newspapers. Cartoons which are referred to as general interest cartoons, political cartoons, economic or trade cartoons, social cartoons, environmental cartoons as well as sports cartoons can be included in the comic, gag and strip cartoon category (Wainwright, 1972; Bittner, 1989; Osho, 2001).

Cartoon Documentary

A cartoon documentary is a series of drawings with captions that are executed on an issue or a subject. Rendered in the style of naturalism, it is produced on a well-researched subject such as slavery, environmental pollution, animal conservation drug abuse, smuggling and road safety. It is similar to a documentary film in several respects but differs from the sense that the documentary film is animated and has audio quality. It is also noteworthy that it is not a comic, which drawings may be created as caricature, and feature fictionally conceived dialogues presented in word balloons (Emi, 1991, 2013). A cartoon documentary could be displayed for public viewing like other forms of drawings and artworks in art exhibitions. Its potentials as a graphic art form could be maximally realised when it is published as cartoon strips in print media such as books, magazines and newspapers where it is used as a channel of mass communication.

Caricature

The use of caricature as a style in creating illustrations for use in features (newspaper and magazine articles) exemplifies the fifth type of cartoon. The caricature is generally a drawing with deliberate attempts made by the cartoonist to exaggerate and distort the forms of the figure/objects in it. Caricatures may portray human figures with heads that are increased considerably in size and in such a manner that they dwarf the torso and limbs of the figures. Unlike other types of newspaper cartoons, they may not depend on captions to fulfill their communication roles.

The arrival of academics such as Yemi Ogunbiyi and Femi Osofisan at The Guardian boardroom in the 1980s marked the climax of this type of cartooning in Nigerian print media as the frequent use of caricature to illustrate newspaper editorial materials and features became the order of the day. Beginning at The Guardian, the practice blossomed at the *Daily Times* when Yemi Ogunbiyi went there as its Chief Executive Officer (CEO) later in the decade. Some other Nigerian cartoonists who have produced caricature cartoons used as illustrations are Kenny Adamson, Boye Gbenro, Yekeen Balogun and Yomi Ola.

The Cartoon as a Drawing and Medium of Communication

A means by which one can further understand the meanings of cartoons is to understand them as drawings and tools for communication. A cartoon is basically a drawing – a pictorial representation.

Since drawings, like all other visual art forms, are characterized by elements such as line, colour, shape and texture, it becomes inevitable that the cartoonist use these elements in portraying the images of the human figures and objects in his works. The peculiar manner by which he applies these elements to execute his drawings inadvertently, constitutes drawing styles. Such styles, which may be as a result of the peculiar use of lines or any other shading technique in the depiction of the three-dimensionality of figures or objects is acceptable provided that they do not contradict the basic principles of cartooning, and hence visual communication.

The novice often feels that any person can create the funny grotesque drawings of figures and objects that are depicted on the cartoons, with ease. Some cynics even express the view that apart from the witty captions that are evidence of genius in the cartoonist, the drawings in cartoons could be likened to child art. Such unfounded views are a measure of the people's ignorance of the true nature of cartoons. Although simplicity in pictorial representation is one of its desired values, it should not be felt that cartoon images are drawn without any serious thought of the real shapes and forms of the objects and figures depicted in them. If anything, the cartoonist is usually good at drawing human figure in the style of naturalism, but adopts caricature as a tool for lampooning and creating fun to make people laugh.

The cartoonist deems the details of human figures and object such as their peculiar forms, which may be obese, thin, tall or short as vital aspects of his pictures. For example, the particular shape of a car, with which it is easily distinguished from other brands, is emphatically represented by a conscientious cartoonist. The drawing style that he adopts is determined by the concept within which context the car is incorporated as a variable on the format. Unless the concept permits otherwise, a rich politician, bureaucrat or technocrat is often depicted as owing and riding big and flashy cars of the Mercedes Benz range or jeeps, while the Volkswagen's Beetle is the mark of the lower or middle class citizens in the contemporary Nigerian society.

Some cartoonists such as Josy Ajiboye and Kenny Adamson are renowned for their skills in depicting their figures' clothes, a thing they do remarkably in details, for the sake of achieving maximal effect of characterization (Olaniyan, 2000). As has been mentioned earlier, the pocket cartoon is smaller in size and may as a result accommodate one or two figures only on its format conveniently. In this case, the inclusion of too many visual figures in the cartoon format may make the cartoon less comprehensible to the reader.

In contrast to the main and pocket cartoon, the strip cartoon may be sparsely or superfluously detailed, depending on their creators' objectives. The cartoonist who drew *Garth* adopted the style of naturalism for depicting the figures in his fictitious story, whereas Akin Onipede's *Manya* was rendered as caricature. There are main strip cartoons like *Megida* with blank background. Only human figures are depicted in the panels.

Captions

Captions enhance the understanding of cartoons. However, not all cartoons have topical captions and dialogues in the form of word balloons incorporated into their picture frames. Scholars such as Osho (2001) who uphold the escapist view of gag cartoons, contend that gag cartoonists do so because they do not want to be accused of creating cartoons with ulterior motives. This view may be, doubtlessly, right for cartoons that are obviously controversial and could be deemed to be in bad taste to the powers that be. In cartoons like this, the layout or placement of the objects on the format,

the postures/actions of the figures, which are at most labeled, lead the reader to understand the message. The thoughts and debates, which such cartoons generate regardless of the fact that nothing specific is said about a specific person are, therefore, considered as one of the desirable qualities of cartoons without captions. However, the actual message which the cartoonist intends to communicate to his readers may be lost on certain individuals who may not have been following the subject matter or news trend as closely as possible in the past.

More problematic in the comprehension of this type of cartoon is the subjective nature of individuals, which could influence their views of the works. This is because some readers could subconsciously view a cartoon in a peculiar way that manifests their personal values and life experiences. On the other hand, the inclusion of topical captions and dialogues in the form of word balloons or comment captions in cartoons complements its witty or humorous property as well as quickens catharsis in the readers. Of course cartoons that are based on sad themes such as death and illness are devoid of humour. Whereas the comment or the dialogue in some main, pocket and strip cartoons are brief and witty, it could be lengthy, non-witty or humorous in cartoon documentaries.

Cartoon Communication Modes

There are several types of cartoon communication modes. Three of these, which were identified by Emi (1980), are the direct representational mode, the pictorial analogous mode and the commentary mode. To these, is added the documentary mode that he has applied since 1991 in the production of cartoon documentaries (Emi, 2004). Depending on the aims, objectives and styles of a cartoon, the contemporary cartoonist's mode of expression revolves around these four modes of visual communication. These are applied, as the case may be, to make visual representations and express his thoughts or communicate his message. In this section, we shall comment on four communication modes as they have been applied by Nigerian cartoonists in their works that have been rendered in the pocket, editorial, strip formats.

(1) The Direct Representational Cartoon Communication Mode

The direct representational (DR) cartoon communication mode employs the representation of figures and objects that are directly associated with the cartoon's subject matter. Despite the efforts of the cartoonist to distort his forms in order to achieve caricature effect, his works could, by orientation constitute the DR mode as he could express the semblance between his visible images and their imitated model. In some cases, the names of individuals, groups, organizations and countries are inscribed on the figures in an attempt to specify concretely, the images to which they are alluding.

(2) The Analogous Pictorial Mode

In the analogous pictorial (AP) mode, the cartoon portrays images or circumstances which differ visibly from those that they are actually concerned with, although with an intention to portray subtly, the contradiction, incongruity and irrationality in the subject matter. AliuEroje's portrayal of the Nigeria Police and Gani Adams in a cat and rat game follows the analogous pictorial mode. Adams is portrayed running from the law which had him cornered and subsequently being arrested. The reader is subtly shown the manner by which the police used its might to hound Adams.

(3) Commentary Mode

Cartoons are channels with which cartoonists seek to make their comments whether personal, private or public known on the pages of newspapers. However, the commentary cartoon mode of communication (CM) is marked by the predominance of comments in the cartoon as a means for passing information to the readers while creating humour or satire at the same time. Pocket cartoons usually employ the CM due to the limited space at their disposal. The figures depicted in them are few as the cartoon character only may be featured on the cartoon format. The comment, which may be a few witty words, could be made to appear on the cartoon as the statement made by the figure in response to the issue denoted in the cartoon. The CM, therefore, is a function of the visual elements and captions/comment, which have been arranged in a logical order in the cartoon format.

(4) Cartoon Documentary Mode

The cartoon documentary (DM) is different in orientation from the others in that its subject-matter is usually broad based and it has a structure that may require the recall of history, trends and a futuristic representation of places, things, people and events. Tayo Fatunla's *Ours Roots* cartoon strips which were published sequentially on the *Sunday Times* in the past is another example of cartoons of the DM.

Language in Cartoon Communication

All the visual and performing artworks have different but related modes of communications. The cartoons as a graphic art form often combine pictures and the verbalised text in order to evoke the desired reaction in their readers (Ogunnoiki, 1989; Medubi, 1997; Olaniyan, 2002). Ogunnoiki (1989) in his essay on the use of language in cartoons showed some peculiar ways by which cartoonists use language with pictorial representations to achieve this feat. He includes *diminuendo*, irony, ludicrous juxtaposition, overstatement, understatement, satire and paradox in his discussion of the subject. Others are rhetorical question, pun and parody.

Cartoon Themes and Society

In this part of the chapter, we shall undertake a broad discussion of the main themes that Nigerian cartoonists have based their works on over the ages. Nigerian newspapers and magazines have published cartoons which have focused on current topical issues. These themes include colonialism, social justice, probity, and corruption in public and private lives, police and bribery, inflation in the country. The Babangida regime's structural adjustment programme (SAP), and its political transition programme cum electoral abuses/malpractices have also been considered as thematic sources by the nation's cartoonists.

Based on the view that the media's traditional role is that of acting as a chronicler of the times over the ages, Nigerian newspaper and magazine editorial cartoon themes could be classified according to the times they were drawn and the various governments or regimes from which these policies emanated. It is known, for instance, that colonialism was the main theme of the *West African Pilot* and *Daily Service*, two newspapers with steadfast nationalist anti-colonial posture. Constitutional developments and the clamour for power much later by the National Council of Nigeria and the Camerouns (NCNC), Action Group (AG) and the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) - three main pre-independence parties in Nigeria in the colonial era - were typical of the themes of the cartoons.

The first republic in Nigeria was short-lived and although it had its issues of diverse thematic values,

newspaper cartoons did not make much impact on the system until the post-civil war years. If the themes of the civil war era were predominantly war oriented, post-civil war years' themes were derived from the new kind of life which was lived by the Nigerian survivors of the civil war. The oil-boom, which was to play a significant role in the economy of the country, engendered a breed of people whose materialistic outlook became evident in their life styles. Corruption became a subject for national discussion after the celebrated case of Godwin Dabboh versus Joseph Tarka-the latter being a commissioner accused of corruption in General Gowon's government. *The Punch* cartoonists, at the time had a field day working on this theme.

The situation in Nigeria was such that corruption in politics, the police force, judiciary and other walks of life constituted the cartoonist's subject matter. The Udoji salary arrears implementation in the early 1970s and its associated inflation were veritable cartoon themes, which were noted by Udechukwu (1979).

Dominant or Recurring Themes

One of the issues that have engaged the attention of Nigerian newspaper and magazine cartoonists more than other matters since cartoons began to be featured in the print media in the 1940s is the question of nationhood. They have found themselves battling colonialism, reminiscing about the nation's journey from independence to the nationhood and taking stock of its achievements and failures during the annual National Day Celebrations that come up on the first day of October.

Inflation in Nigeria is one example of recurring themes in newspaper cartooning. The price of the Volkswagen Beetle car, for example, had obviously begun to skyrocket as far back as the 1970s. By the late 1980s, its price, like other commodities in the Nigerian market, had increased irredeemably by over four hundred percent of its cost price at 1970.

The suffering of the common man who is most susceptible to the national economic adversities has continued to generate the subject matter for newspaper cartoons for quite some time. In the 1980s, following Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and the restriction on the importation of certain raw materials such as flour and wheat into the country, most workers had their salaries cut or lost their jobs in what was referred to as personnel rationalization or retrenchment drives. The offshoot of this development which had no social bounds, as it affected the low, middle and high income earning citizens- although in varying degrees, was that it drew sharp criticisms from the academics who feared that academic excellence and independence would be sacrificed unduly for economic gains if the exercise is carried out in the tertiary academic institutions. Before then, universities have been groaning from under-funding.

Perhaps, no other facet of the country's polity has generated recurring themes as its politics. Political instability arising from electoral malpractices, thuggery, violence, assassination, etc. has been the bane of politics in Nigeria. The Shagari era presented ample political subject matters that were chosen as topics for newspaper cartoons. Their contents remain, for now, as they have been since the colonial days, an index of Nigerian political instability, insincerity of leaders – both political and military leaders, ethnicity, illiteracy, non-challant electorate, human rights abuse, violence and poverty.

Military coups and military government generate newspaper themes and sub-themes during the period of about thirty years that the military governed the country. Military coups, decrees, high-

handedness of security operatives and the arbitrary way they have initiated, cancelled or pursued public programmes were the objects of many cartoons in the past. One of these was the country's annulled June 12, 1993 presidential elections and its aftermath—the controversial Interim Government headed by Earnest Shonekan.

Corruption in public life, cultism, and students' unrest in Nigeria which is symptomatic of some controversial government's public policies has been Nigerian cartoonists' subject matter. Nigeria's diplomatic posture in international affairs has equally engaged the attention of many Nigerian cartoonists. Similarly, international issues like racial segregation exemplified by apartheid in South Africa during the 1970 and 1980 years, military conflicts like the Israeli, Gulf and Syrian Wars, terrorism, drug and human trafficking have attracted their attention.

Mention must be made of such universal themes like crime, illness, love and death which have been expressed in Nigerian cartoons for decades. Quite expectedly, Nigerian newspapers are always on the prowl for celebrities whose demeanour or activities, often, constitute scoops. In this connection, Nigerian leaders like General Murtala Mohammed, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, Musa Yar'Adua and Goodluck Jonathan have been the subjects of many Nigerian cartoons. Popular sportsmen and women as well as musical stars also have been featured on cartoons. In the same vein, sporting encounters usually involving Nigeria, locally and abroad, are have been subjects of cartoons.

Editorial Policies and Cartoons Themes

The importance of newspaper cartoon themes cannot be overemphasized. They may derive their sources from events that affect the lives of individuals, operations of organizations or institutions as well as the stability of governments. Hence newspaper cartoons like other editorial materials like photographs, news stories and articles used as features, which constitute the main ingredients of the publication are subject to press laws exemplified by those of libel, defamation, obscenity and sedition. Consequently, newspaper publishing firms make overt or covert attempts through their editorial boards to influence their cartoonist's choice of themes and the way they are rendered. Such newspapers could insist that cartoons on certain themes should be used or not published on their newspaper pages.

We are aware, for instance, of the anti-colonial thrust of the political cartoons of Nigerian newspapers during the period of colonialism. To this end, anti-colonial subject matters were widely approved as being the most appropriate topics by such newspapers as the *West African Pilot* and the *Daily Service*. We also know that Akinola Lasekan who was pro-NCNC, and other partisan newspaper cartoonists of colonial Nigeria, made the political parties opposing their employer's parties, their subject-matters. However, these newspapers, like the *West African Pilot*, were mindful of the press laws which were meant to moderate their application. It is in view of this that the Zik's group of newspapers' editorial policy include a specific regulation that staff should not introduce a cartoon among other materials in their newspapers without the knowledge and consent of the company, and that defaulters of this regulation shall be summarily dealt with (Azikwe, 1970).

Government-owned newspapers have checked their cartoons' subject matter when the interest of government is at stake. The military regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo had periodic meetings with the press during which the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces briefed the press on government's policies, activities and problems. The idea was to inform the public about government policies while

soliciting for press support in the presentation of news materials.

Some newspapers such as *The Guardian* shun the use of cartoons with volatile religious themes that could fuel religious intolerance in the country. Nor will *The Guardian* make individuals its cartoons' subject matter; what it does, rather, is to focus its attention on themes or issues which pertain to governments, institutions, the polity in general and humanity at large. It is, therefore, plausible to state from the foregoing, that in times of emergency, newspaper cartoonists have consciously or sub-consciously made the national issues at stake the subject of their cartoons, bearing in mind their moral responsibilities to the readers, and that they are answerable to the relevant press laws. This is important when one considers the vulnerability of cartoonists, like other journalists, generally, to laws of libel and sedition. As a matter of fact, the newspaper editor is fully aware of the danger inherent in publishing materials, including cartoons which subject-matter could be prejudicial to a case that is being heard in a court of law. Femi Jolaoso was accused of committing this offence which is called "contempt of court" during the 1978 "Ali must Go" students' riot due to the cartoon he drew on the subject.

Delicate Themes

Some subject matters are delicate, volatile and highly sensitive. Their inflammatory potentialities have scared cartoonists and editors to the extent that some editor's consider them as taboos. These subjects are usually common knowledge to all editorial staff. The works of many daring cartoonists on such issues have, therefore, been "spiked."Until the Obasanjo regime, newspapers were silent on secret societies, their members and activities. The Obasanjo regime changed the trend when it banned government officials from participating in cultism (Adepegba1991). Thereafter, newspapers went to town with screaming news headlines and scathing cartoons on the issue.

Cartoons which border on imbalance in the Federal character, tribalism in government appointment, the sharing of the national revenue, political and religious intolerance are dynamites which could explode, tearing the nation apart if they are not carefully handled. This is more so when the cartoon can be misconstrued to imply something else by its multitude of readers. Most newspaper editors, therefore, are always careful about the themes of the cartoons they publish. It is usually not difficult for the cartoonist to know which themes to skip or which to work on based on their "offensive properties". The wary cartoonist will notice that his cartoons on particular subjects are often "spiked" while the ones on others get approval.

Indeed, it is in times when certain subject matters are considered as taboos and very volatile that cartoonists become indispensable. It is the time when the virtuoso shows his expertise. Understatement and pun become tools they could use to camouflage the seriousness of their subject matters.

Conclusion

Cartoons perform various functions which are determined by the styles with which they are drawn and the messages they convey and their meanings. It is obvious from the foregoing discussion that it requires the knowledge of interpreting the objects of lines, shapes and icons portrayed in cartoons by their creators to understand and enjoy them. Knowledge of current affairs derived from the habit of following news trend, constantly, also facilitates cartoon appreciation.

Nigerian cartoon themes are in some respects similar to those of other nations of the world. The issues of poverty, mass unemployment, terrorism, ethno-religious crises, civil war, human rights violation as well as corruption which have plagued many nations of the world, most especially the developing countries, have constituted the themes of several Nigerian newspaper cartoons. Although newspaper cartoons may appear funny, their theme which may render them serious and delicate makes it mandatory that cartoonists exercise caution in creating works on them as they could be sanctioned for violating the press laws that regulates their publication.

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