

# **The Role of Editorial Cartoons in the Democratisation Process in Nigeria:**

**A Study of Selected Works of  
Three Nigerian Cartoonists**

**Ganiyu Akinloye Jimoh**

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*The Role of Editorial Cartoons in the Democratisation Process in Nigeria:  
A Study of Selected Works of Three Nigerian Cartoonists*

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this dissertation, The Role of Editorial Cartoon in Democratisation Process in Nigeria: A Study of Selected Works of Three Nigerian Cartoonists is original and carried out by me.

**JIMOH, GANIYU AKINLOYE**

## **DEDICATION**

THIS PROJECT IS DEDICATED TO

ALL ACHIEVERS: PEOPLE WHO WORK WITH PASSION, VISION AND  
MISSION TO MAKE POSITIVE IMPACT IN THE LIFE OF OTHERS.

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*“If I made it, it’s half because I was game enough to take a wicked amount of punishment along the way and half because there were an awful lot of people who cares enough to help me.”*

--- Althea Gibson

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## **ABSTRACT**

Political Cartoons otherwise known as Editorial Cartoons are single panels of graphics that are satire of political events. Apart from serving as a corrective measure, they also serve as historical documents and are a ‘snapshot’ of the political climate of a given period.

Over the years cartoons have shaped public opinions on societal issues that have sometimes resulted in tragedies in the manner in which information is transmitted to the public.

In 2005, over 300 people were killed in the Northern part of Nigeria during a religious riot fuelled by a Danish Editorial Cartoon publication which satirized the Islamic religious leader, Muhammed. Such occurrences show that cartoons are a formidable force and could serve as mirrors of the society.

Cartoons have played a major role in the democratisation process in Nigeria particularly during the military era. The Newspapers are awash with various images depicting the ills in the society. The themes range from corruption, political instability to electoral fraud.

This thesis examines the role played by editorial cartoons in the democratisation process in Nigeria. It focuses on the military era between 1983 and 1999: this period being the last phase of military incursion into Nigerian politics.

Thirty published editorials cartoons by three renowned cartoonists: Josy Ajiboye, Adeboye Adegbenro and Akin Onipede are studied and analysed to establish their roles in documenting what is regarded as the ‘Khaki’ years of oppression in Nigeria.

The analysis carried out reveals that cartoons played vital role in documenting, critiquing and reflecting social and political issues.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.0 Introduction

#### Background of the Study

'The political cartoon has been one of the most powerful weapons through the ages ... dictators of the right and the left fear the political cartoonists more than they do the atomic bomb. No totalitarian government can afford to be ridiculed' (DeSousa & Medhurst, 1982: 202).

Editorial cartoons are single panel graphics that comment on political events and policy, and serve both to define the significant topics of political discourse and record them, thus creating a “snapshot” of the political climate in a given period. Cartoons have been seen from the humorous perspective and generally have not been studied for their rhetoric capabilities (Vinson, 1967: 35), however, the recent *Jyllands-Posten's* Muhammad cartoons controversy in Denmark, which sparked violent protests around the world, speak to the continuing importance and potential power of cartoons as a medium of political communication.

Some scholars see cartoons as an important medium for the formation of public opinion on salient social issues (Agberia, 1993; Adekanmbi, 1997; Everette, 1974; Vinson, 1967). They are seen as "both opinion-molding and opinion-reflecting" (Caswell, 1982: 14), and they provide subtle frameworks within which to examine the life and political processes of a nation (DeSousa & Medhurst, 1982: 153). Cartoons are intended to transform otherwise complex and opaque social events and situations into quick and easily readable depictions that facilitate comprehension of the nature of social issues and events (Agberia, 1993: 33). In doing so, they

present society with visually palpable and hyper-ritualized depictions (selectively exaggerated portions of 'reality') that attempt to reveal the essence and meaning of social events.

Editorial cartoons are defined as "a graphic presentation typically designed in a one-panel, non-continuing format to make an independent statement or observation on political events or social policy" (Edwards & Winkler, 1987: 306), they often employ humor or irony to point out shortcomings or hypocrisies within the political system. While many studies (including this one) use the terms "political cartoon" and "editorial cartoon" interchangeably, others differentiate between comic strips with political content, and single panel cartoons that make commentary on politics and policy. The latter would generally appear on the editorial page of a printed newspaper, and are the focus of this study.

Cartooning has been one of the most significant tools in propagating and promoting the cultural heritage in Nigeria. Editorial cartoons throughout Nigerian history reveal that they have served as unique windows useful in understanding local and national politics. Using imagery, metaphor, symbolism and other rhetorical devices, the cartoonist defines political situations and attempts to interpret them visually in a way that is both amusing and thought provoking. The exploits of Akinola Lasekan, with his editorial cartoons in the '*West African Pilot*' in the 1940s and 50s reflect colonial life, and also depict the struggle for nationhood which later culminated in Nigeria's independence in 1960 (Olaniyan, 2002: 5). In addition, cartoonists like Dele Jegede, Josy Ajiboye, Aliu Eroje, Boye Gbenro, Akin Onipede among others through their cartoons have decried the rapid deterioration of the Nigerian state, in the hands of corrupt political leaders. The metaphors and other figurative devices used in the visual language of editorial cartoons are often 'powerful' and the key purpose is to reflect and maintain power relationships in a given political structure. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, political cartoons, serve as a unique

record of the particular events, attitudes and narratives present during a moment in political history (DeSousa & Medhurst, 1982: 75).

Editorial cartoons featured prominently during military rule in Nigeria. The period (1983-1999) witnessed remarkable events in the democratisation of the country. Characterised by abusive use of power by the military government beginning with General Muhammad Buhari's coup d'état on 31 December 1983, followed closely was the tenure of General Ibrahim Babangida, who was described as the "Maradona" of Nigerian politics due to his methods of politics visible in the annulment of the Presidential Election in 1993, and the eventual transmission to democratically elected president in 1999. Each of these developments elicited specific reactions from the Nigerian people and the editorial cartoonists of the time who as 'visual journalists' captured the sequence of the events in satirised-illustrations.

This study aims to examine the role editorial cartoons played in the transitional phase of Nigerian democracy. Selected published editorial cartoons by three Nigerian cartoonists will be analysed. The period 1983 to 1999 is brought to focus because it was the period that witnessed (till date) the last military era in Nigerian politics and it was a period on which the foundation of the present democracy was built.

### **1.1 Statement of Problem**

Editorial cartoon has a long-standing tradition of merging social satire with political commentary in a society. It has in several situations, been the most direct medium for criticizing maladministration in governments (Agberia, 1993: 7). According to Onipede (2007: 2) the history of the struggle for democracy in Nigeria will not be complete without discussing the role of Nigerian cartoonists during the military era.

This study aims at exploring the role this genre of graphic art had played in documenting

and reflecting the socio-political conditions during democratisation period in Nigerian.

## **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

The main objectives of this study is to establish that editorial cartoons play significant role in the society in which they are made and can serve as historical text in documenting and reflecting the socio-political state of affairs in Nigeria.

## **1.3 Research Question**

This research seeks to answer the following research questions:

- i. What are the roles of editorial cartoons in the Nigerian democratization process?
- ii. Do editorial cartoons reflect socio-political experiences?
- iii. Can editorial cartoons serve as historical text?

## **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This study will throw more light on the role of editorial cartoon in the democratisation process of Nigeria. As there is a dearth of publications and research on the art of cartooning in Nigeria, the previous studies either focused on the works of particular cartoonist (Emi, 1980; Oyo, 1993; Adejinle, 1987), or on formal analysis of styles in Nigerian cartoons (Olaniyan, 2005). This study will contribute to knowledge on the role of editorial cartoon not only in the development of the contemporary art but also its significance on the Nigeria political scene.

## **1.5 Scope of the Study**

This study will focus on selected editorial cartoons by three professional cartoonists published in major Nigerian National Newspapers between 1983 and 1999. Thirty editorial

cartoons by three cartoonists: Akin Onipede, Boye Gbenro and Josy Ajiboye, will be selected; ten works from each cartoonist published between 1983 and 1999. These cartoonists are outstanding and have been one of the few Nigerian cartoonists who used their works as a weapon against tyrannical military rule of the period.

## **1.6 Methodology**

This study will focus on the qualitative analysis of data, which will draw heavily from primary and secondary sources to achieve its objectives. Primary sources will include oral interviews with the cartoonists whose works are being studied. Scholars and newspaper readers will also be interviewed. Copies of published editorial cartoons from 1983 to 1999 will be retrieved from these national dailies; National Concord, Sunday Concord, Sunday Times, A.M News, Tempo and The Punch, being the newspapers that featured the works of cartoonists under study in this period.

Published and unpublished literary materials will be reviewed. This will involve gathering of information from books, journals, newspapers' articles, exhibition brochures, magazines, internet etc. The Universities Libraries ( University of Lagos, University of Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University etc.) , Centre for Black Arts and Culture (CBAAC) library and Media houses ( Punch Newspaper, The Guardian, The Nation etc.) will be visited for these secondary materials.

Descriptive and historical methods will be used to analyse the data collected. The analysis will be chronological and comparative of the various factors of historical, political cultural and stylistic relevance to the study. Visual elements of the various works will be studied and analysed to establish the findings of the study.

### **1.7 Limitation of the Study**

Since there is dearth of publications on cartoon scholarship in Nigeria, it is envisaged that getting enough secondary materials on editorial cartoons will be a major limitation of this study, majority of the data will be collected through fieldwork.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.0 Historical Background

The word ‘cartoon’ is derived from the Italian word ‘cartone’ meaning ‘paper’, the term was used by painters for preliminary drawings on paper which were then transferred, either through tracing or punching, on to a surface which may be a ceiling, a large canvas or a wall ( Jegede, 1990: 2 and Adekanmbi, 1997: 7).

According to Adekanbi (7), the word cartoon is used loosely to describe any drawing published originally in a periodical that makes its own point, with or without a caption. He posits further that the uniqueness of a cartoon can be clearly distinguished from an illustration or sketch, in that the cartoon strip or comic strip usually tells a story and often appears in periodical publications, whereas an illustration simply illuminates a scene or point accompanying an extended text in a publication (8).

It is important to make obvious two distinctions about this field: the difference between “comics” and “cartoon,” for Scott McCloud (1993: 2), comic is “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and (or) to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (9). This definition builds on an earlier one by Will Eisner (comics as sequential art) and is widely accepted as a standard way of understanding comics. Comics, then, are not just doodles, but rather visual symbols designed with a specific intent or purpose.

On the other hand, according to Everette (1974: 662), defining cartoons is trickier because there is not one widely accepted definition. Therefore, he proffers a definition based on an amalgam of current literature and discussions in the field. He states:

‘...generally, cartoons are single or multi-framed images that convey a message both with words and symbols. Both comics and cartoons use symbols, but comics have a sequential nature to them that utilize more panels to tell their story thereby allowing for more depth to the story. Cartoons, on the other hand, invoke two conceptions: their presentation (all information presented in either a single or just a few panels, versus presentation in multiple panels) and their production (animated programs are also called cartoons; however comics are mainly relegated to print). In this, cartoons can be far simpler in their presentation however they amplify that which they want the reader to recognize and understand (665)’

Cartoons are amalgams of images (the symbols), captions (the written words), and social commentary (the spoken and unspoken words). They combine all of the information needed to understand their message into one simple visual form and present it in an easily accessible medium in books, newspaper, or the web.

A cartoonist uses various icons which are symbols representing objects within a bordered object called a panel, or frame. These panels represent a single moment in time: a slice of life caught in mid-pose, much like a photograph. Unlike comic strips or comic books (mediums that have multiple panels), all information is found within the single image, thus they may be complicated and difficult to decipher at first glance. Cartoons also utilise specific visual elements in order to replicate human communication. Sound (dialogue, self-talk, music, etc.) is created using words and symbols.

Editorial cartoons also called political cartoons is a type of cartoon that is satirical by nature, using humour to draw attention to a significant social-political issue and are usually featured on the editorial page of newspapers. According to Agberia (1993: 10), editorial cartoons are designed to satirise current political matters and offer subtle criticism cleverly coated with humour and satire.

The common features of such cartoons, according to Olaniyan, (2000: 4) are a good grasp of current affairs, clearly identifiable political issues and problems that are local and international, deft craftsmanship and skills in snappy graphic language.

Editorial cartoons in its present usage trace its origin to the art of ‘caricature’, which is referred to as made-up features with humorous intention. According to Jegede (1990), the use of the word ‘cartoon’ dates back to the fifteenth century when it was used as an essential element in the completion of stained glass designs as well as frescoes, a form of wall painting practiced by the Italians. Cartoon is generally understood as any drawing which through the use of humour, satire or caricature provokes a response in its audience (2).

The first picture to be called a cartoon was John Leech’s drawing in 1843 in the ‘Punch’ newspaper in Britain. The word was first used when a great exhibition of cartoons were given for a competition, devised by Queen Victoria’s consort Prince Albert, to prepare designs for Frescoes for the new House of Parliament. From the entries which were naughty and ridiculous in subject matter, John Leech drew a series of imitations in Punch, satirizing them and railing at social and political abuses of the day (Popoola, 1983: 5). Earlier than this, in Britain, William Hogarth (1697-1764) had established a reputation as the first political cartoonist while, in Spain and France, Goya (1746-1828) and Honore Daumier (1808-1879) respectively, used the medium

to launch vicious and satirical attacks on those socio-political practices which they considered repulsive to public sense of decency (Jegede, 1990: 3).

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the general course of ‘pictorial comedy’ was shifted by the First World War. Political cartoons during and after the war were excessively partisan while the cartoons about the war itself tended to alleviate the pain of the struggle (Popoola, 1983: 18). The audience for comic publication was greatly enlarged after the war. The most interesting features of cartoons and caricature in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were the establishment of ‘one-line-joke’ and the ‘pictorial-joke’ without words with enormous diversity of styles of drawing. The New Yorkers was probably the inventor of the ‘one-line-joke’. The ‘joke’ without word often in two or more frames, was the extreme of economy of language (Adeniran, 1984: 10)

Cartoon got to an advanced stage in America after a temporary imitation on European style. The American native school produced renowned cartoonists like Thomas Nast who was hired by ‘Harper’s Weekly’, a magazine founded in 1857 to draw pictures of news events. His cartoons about the U.S civil war published on September 3, 1864, put him in the first rank of the U.S. cartoonists. Nast’s drawings were vigorous, simplified in idea and usually humorous. The trend in American cartoons from 1883 to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century according to Popoola (1983) ‘...could appear to lie in these directions: greater sophistication, greater obliqueness of presentation, the triumph of the ‘one-line’ caption or even the caption less cartoon and the substitution of vulgarity and illiteracy for charm and fancy ( 27)’.

## **2.1 History of Cartooning in Nigeria**

Caricature as a form of art had existed for a very long time in Nigeria before the advent of the colonial masters, contrary to the belief that this form of satirisation in Nigeria is a colonial innovation (Onipede, 2007: 2). It would be pertinent to note that the functional concept of cartoons have been embedded in some Nigerian traditional Societies which were used to satirise and correct the ills of the society. Satire in traditional societies found expressions in verbal and visual elements which include abusive and mocking songs during traditional festivals such as Oke Ibadan, Gelede, Efe and Bolojo etc. and sculptural mocking images on helmet and facial masks worn by the masquerades during Egungun festivals.

## **2.2 Form of Satirisation in Nigeria**

Egungun is a form of ancestral worship in Yoruba land and is also used as a form of satire, ridiculing wrong doers in the society. Another form of satirisation is the Efe ceremony which is often celebrated during the annual Gelede festival; a period when special sacrifices are offered to appease the goddess, 'Iya Nla', to protect the society from any impending dangers (Adejinle, 1987: 10). The actual ceremony commences with the Efe entertaining the elderly women in the society. In the course of this, the Efe mocks and criticises the traditional rulers/government and condemns known defaulters in the society such as exploiters, deviants and murderers. These satires are usually expressed verbally by the Efe masquerade. This is in contrast to the Gelede/Egungun masquerades who communicate satire visually through differs traditional motifs portrayed on the mask (11).

### **2.3 Modern Cartooning in Nigeria**

According to Olaniyan (2002: 124), cartooning in its present mode in Nigeria had no indigenous provenance and was part and parcel of colonial modernity. It is attributed to the contact with the west. Akinola Lasekan (1916-1974) was reputed to be the first Nigerian cartoonist to work in the media (Olaniyan, 2002; Onipede 2007; Adekanmbi 1997; Jegede 1990). Akinola Lasekan, a graphic artist, illustrator, teacher, textile designer and painter became famous as a result of his political cartoons, featured in the 'West African Pilot': a newspaper established in 1937, this paper was founded by Nnamdi Azikwe (1904-1996), the founder of the first Nigerian anti- colonial political party, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), between 1944 and 1966. Lasekan's early cartoons were stiff and mainly illustrative. Stylistically, Lasekan was handicapped because the cartoons, in the absence of process engraving, were printed from woodblocks, a process which discouraged creative embellishments (Jegede, 1991: 6). The drawings and captions were all carved out meticulously in woodblock before printing and it was not until much later that he started signing his cartoons under the pen name 'Lash'.

According to Jegede (1991: 4), Lash was concerned with some of the social vices which manifested in colonial Nigeria. By 1948, Lash became principal cartoonist to 'West African Pilot' and his cartoons were freer and more vitriolic in their attack on those who did not belong in the same political camp as Nnamdi Azikwe. Their cartoons graced the front page of the newspaper. Although the cartoons still retained the single-panel format, they were given prominence. This was done perhaps to ensure that, at a glance, readers caught all the 'venom' that Lash would customarily unleash on such political actors as H.O. Davies, Idowu and Bode

Thomas. Lasekan's cartoons were basically targeted towards the opposition party and tended to uphold the authority of his employer, Nnamdi Azikwe (Olaniyan, 2002: 17).

In December 7, 1959, Lash's cartoon depicted the Action Group, a major opposition political party to NCNC, being guarded by five wild dogs, each portraying the party as a 'Violator of Human Rights', 'Destroyer of Parliamentary Democracy' and 'Inventor of Mass Deceit' (Jegede, 1991). The image of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the leader of the party's stature was diminished in inverse proportion to the meteoric rise of Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, 'defender of the oppressed', the Nigerian 'David' who successfully confronted the 'imperial Goliath' and the greatest 'political evangelist' (7).

With the exit of Lash from the scene in 1966, strident political cartooning gave way, to strip cartoons. Attention was then shifted to action or comic strips. In 1960, for example, the 'Daily Times' showed no interest in publishing social or political cartoons by Nigerians. Rather, what the daily Times did with unswerving regularity was to carry, on daily basis, three strip cartoons on 'Bruin', 'Buck Ryan' and 'Garth', all of them from foreign sources. Meanwhile, Ore Gab Okpako had joined the Daily Times in May 1959. A graduate of Bennet Correspondence College, where he studied Commercial Art, Okpako was transferred from process engraving to the editorial section where he began as illustrator. Eventually, He went into cartooning and serialization- giving crisp and amazingly lucid artistic interpretation to Cypran Ekwensi's 'People of the City', 'Amusa Sango', the 'Spear Magazine', and 'Jagua Nana'. With the establishment of the 'Lagos Weekend', Ore Gab Okpako responded with the strip cartoon series, 'Omo Eko'.

Towards the end of the 1960s, Ayo Ajayi had become the staff cartoonist, drawing 'Tortoise Adventures' in Daily Times as a weekly column. At about that time too, Cliff Oguigo started his 'Little Joe' strip cartoon series in the 'Sunday Times'. All of these ran concurrently with 'Garth' and occasional syndicated foreign cartoons. Other cartoonists provided similar services although not on a sustainable basis (Olaniyan, 2000; Jegede, 1991).

Jegede further opines that the growth of editorial cartoon in Nigeria was due more to the efforts of individual editors than to any editorial policy. He supports Adekanmbi (1997: 14)'s view that the press as at early seventies had not fully appreciated the enormous power of the cartoon. He states:

'Until the eighties, what obtained in the area of cartooning was due more to the efforts of individual editors and than to any editorial policy. And the growth of the cartoon genre in Nigeria is indebted more to those individuals than either our colleges or schools of journalism, neither of which has no provisions for the training of the cartoonist (9)'.

Josy Ajiboye, a prolific cartoonist joined the Daily Times in 1971 and began doing illustrations and cartoons. Initially, his cartoons bore no title until one of the paper's journalists 'Sam Amuka Pemu' (Sad Sam) gave them 'Hey Life'. When Gbolabo Ogunsanwo became editor of the Sunday Times, he gave Josy's cartoons the title which has since become popular with the series: 'Josy Ajiboye on Sunday'. Sam Amuka is credited to have been a major contributor to the development which cartoonists have made on the scene today with the establishment of a new weekly newspaper "The Punch". The newspaper which got its name after the London Punch became the unofficial training ground for numerous humorous cartoonists. The enterprise at The