

Cartoon Illustration as an Effective Medium of Expression in Nigerian Press

Josiah Okeke*

Nwafor Orizu College of Education Nsugbe, Anambra State, Nigeria

*Corresponding author, email: okekejosiah600@gmail.com

doi: 10.17977/um065.v5.i3.2025.4

Article history

Submitted: 4 February 2025

Revised: 24 February 2025

Accepted: 25 February 2025

Published: 25 February 2025

Keywords

Cartoon illustration

Humor

Political commentary

Satire

Social critique

Visual appeal

Abstract

Several avenues have been explored by man to express opinions and make them accessible for public appraisals. Sometimes, there are occasions where it is not very safe and prudent for opinions to be expressed directly for security reasons. Cartoon therefore, becomes very eloquent but subtle here, especially in communicating political and social issues. Volumes of literacy language are effective means of communication, but sometimes they sound boring to the beholder, who may have to go through all the lines and pages of a text before the message is comprehended. On the contrary, a small cartoon is capable of speaking volumes to the beholder at a mere glance. The study therefore, presents cartoon as a viable and easy means of delivering messages to the beholder in view of its visual attributes. It specifically focuses on examining the humours and satires inherent in cartoons and their implied meanings, which majorly circumscribe on denouncing the societal vices. The cartoons that constitute the subject matter of the discourse are culled from various sources, all of which feature as mouthpieces against the evil practices pertinent to the Nigerian politicians.

1. Introduction

Cartoons are artistic impressions that employ satire as a visual imagery to deploy messages safely so as not to give room for conceptions that usually evoke hostilities. Toluwani and Shobukonla (2023) view cartoon as the process of creating pictures and drawings that look comical, sarcastic, or distorted. is a subtle way of visually critiquing ideas, behaviour, leadership, among others, in the most humorous way that the audiences amused rather than enraged. Oluremi (2019), has asserted that humour in its different forms of verbal and non-verbal expressions, has the potential to consciously or unconsciously evoke laughter from an audience. He states that different spheres human activity have general specific and general humour to address issues of personal and general concern. Cartoon is an image or series of images intended for satire, caricature, or humour, or a motion picture that relies on a sequence of illustration for its animation. Making it more comprehensible, Ekpe (2016) views cartoon as one of the satirical methods of transmitting ideas, emotions, feelings, thoughts, information and messages to others through illustrated visual arts of drawing or painting for caricature or humour with scanty or no words.

Cartoons manipulate satire and imagery as a strong and safe language or as a means of driving facts home to the comprehension of the ignorant. Putting it more explicitly, Adejuwon and Alimi (2011) opine that it is a visual metaphor or metaphorical codification through which an artist (a functional member of the polity and keen societal gauge trained in close observation), informs, educates or entertain his viewers. Most cartoons centre on current issues in the society, which sometimes have not received any critical comments probably because people have not understood that they could express their feelings visually in the Press. Or it could be for the fear of unwholesome indictment, or false allegations, or confiscation of one's property especially when the criticism is pointing accusing fingers at the ruling class.

Many newspapers and magazines in Nigeria such as the Vanguard, Daily Star, the Guardian, among others, feature cartoon and comic strips, which are laden with trending events on socio-political subjects. Cartoon forms one of the most strategic and important media used to spread information and enlighten the public on current issues reflecting social facts of existence of a particular society at a particular point in time. As stated by Emi and Obun-Andy (2017), cartoons are channels with which cartoonists seek to make their comments whether personal, private, or public known on the pages of newspapers. Most cartoons are composed of human images with distorted forms created to draw attention with attached statements to facilitate easy interpretation. In a despotic government where freedom of speech is strictly prohibited and craftly designated as 'Hate Speech', cartoons are cautiously exerted as the safest medium of expression against their avaricious tendencies.

Satires inherent in cartoons help artists to make persuasive and compelling statements on political issues that update the audience with full information on the state of governance, which can arouse, incite and instigate them. On this, Usman and Momoh (2016) state that cartoons can be used to frame leadership crisis in political parties, communicate failure in government, unmitigated policy disaster, or to set alternative policy agenda, etc. In another perspective, Onakpa (2014) visualizes it as a vital tool employed by the Press for its watch-dog role in the society.

The study therefore, focuses on exploring cartoon as a medium of expression through which vital information on decadence in politics and governance, social life and even religion, can be satirically and humorously depicted in the Press so as to hold the attention of the audience. As stated by Emi and Obun-Andy (2017) there are three major divisions of cartoon, which include the editorial cartoon, the pocket size, and the cartoon strips. The former seen mostly in magazine is made up of a single drawing with attached literacy information to induce easy interpretation of the subject matter of the cartoon. The latter, consisting of comic strips or cartoon strips, are seen in newspapers all over the world with short series of cartoon illustrations arranged in sequence. For clarity, the major divisions of cartoons include: 1. the editorial cartoons which focuses on socio-political events found in newspapers and magazines, 2. the comic strips which involve stories narrated through panels, 3. the gag cartoons or single-panel cartoons complemented with humours, 4. the caricatures which go with distorted features of humans and animals, and 5. the animated cartoons found in TV shows or films. The main features of every cartoon are satires, humours and caricatures; however, adventure, critiquing and drama are also significant aspects of cartoon.

2. Method

The study adopted a qualitative research approach, utilizing content analysis to examine selected cartoon illustrations published in the Nigerian press. A descriptive and interpretative framework guided the research, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the visual and thematic elements of cartoons. This approach was particularly suited to uncovering the effectiveness of cartoons as a medium for political commentary and social critique, with a focus on their satirical and humorous attributes.

Cartoons were sourced from newspapers, magazines, and online platforms known for their illustrative content. The study employed purposeful sampling to select cartoons addressing socio-political themes such as governance, corruption, domestic violence, and economic profligacy, specifically within the Nigerian context. The selected cartoons were representative of the styles and themes necessary to achieve the study's objectives.

The analysis involved a detailed thematic and visual examination. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring issues and societal concerns depicted in the cartoons, while visual analysis focused on design elements such as exaggeration, symbolism, humor, and satire to evaluate their effectiveness in communicating messages. Each cartoon was interpreted within its socio-political context, emphasizing how it subtly but powerfully addressed societal ills in Nigeria.

To ensure reliability, the study drew on multiple sources and cross-referenced interpretations with existing literature. Validity was established by corroborating findings with expert opinions and scholarly works related to political cartoons and visual communication. Ethical considerations were also integral to the research process. The study acknowledged the intellectual property of the cartoonists and avoided any bias or misrepresentation of the content.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Brief History of Cartoon

Ever before drawing or illustration was named as cartoon, preparatory and exaggerated drawings made to be executed as frescos, tapestry and stained glass, were found in the studios of artists like Leonardo da Vinci, Annibale Carracci, Michaelangelo Buonarroti and others, which took the form of caricatures of persons, situations and circumstances. These exaggerated drawings were named in the Italian language as *caricatura* - caricature (wikipedia). They were finished works of art that provided detailed inspiration for later copies, which might be much larger than the original works. Bagwan (2021) also states that another Italian name for cartoon is *cartone*, which translates to large, full-sized drawing done on sturdy paper.

In the Italian expression, these works, as explained by Earls (1987) were also referred to as *modelli* preparatory studies and models usually at a smaller scale, for a work of art or architecture, especially one produced for the approval of the patron commissioning. In the 20th Century, cartoons began to be much more popular and eased in animated film as print cartoons (Becker and Goldberg, 2008). In 1843, Punch magazine began to refer to satirical drawings perched on its pages as cartoons, often highlighting the works of English cartoonists such as Tenniel J., E.H. Shepherd, Fougasse, and Pont (<http://www.punch.co.uk/cartoon>). John Leech who is believed to be the first to draw what he named *Cartoon 1: Substance and Shadow*, for the Punch in

1843, worked assiduously to create impact in the political scene in London with his verbal and graphic political satire with light social comedy (Bryant, 2005). The work was a metaphorical rendition of the self-aggrandizing and lofty posturing of Westminster, London politicians. John Leech in his cartoons criticized artists for ignoring social issues such as poverty; and satirized the British government insensitivity at recognising the penury and squalor of the hungry proletariat. He depicted in his work paupers in rags, many of them physically discriminated against and all of them seemed tightly held in the moras of inextricable squalid. The art exhibition organized by the government, after the conflagration of 16th October, 1843 that destroyed the first fresco mural, created an art competition to decorate the Westminster Hall, London with a new mural. Preliminary sketches were submitted to the Panel of experts who should select the best that could be executed on the wall. The name was given to such sketches satirically and humorously rendered as cartoons. This brief historical analysis of the inception of cartoon was with the Western world.

In Nigeria, cartoon started in 1948, through the political and journalistic activities of Nnamdi Azikiwe displayed in his newspaper called West African Pilot. His particular interest in art is evident in the several coverages given to art exhibitions in newspapers. According to Oloidi (2004), it was this media coverage of art that Zik first heard about Akinola Lasekan who, at that time, was second only to Aina Onabolu in terms of artistic versatility and creative ingenuity. Akin Lasekan was a painter and an illustrator, who had worked in many companies or establishments as a good illustrator before he met Zik in 1937.

Not only did he show his creative prowess in illustration, he also excelled in paintings, both portraiture and outdoor compositions. He had already begun to develop books on cartoons in which he depicted graphically the aberrant behaviour and superiority syndrome of the colonial administration. He published several books on cartoons such as *The Nigeria in 1945 - "a cartoon story of the General Strike of 1945"* and *Drawing Made Easy*, which broke the jinks of the influx of European textbooks. When Zik saw the illustrations of Lasekan, he decided to introduce cartoon formally into Nigerian print-media. He convinced Lasekan to start working on illustrations that would be relevant to his political career in his newspaper - West African Pilot. He knew the power of visuals. A one-page illustration is capable of speaking volumes much more than mere literary instrument.

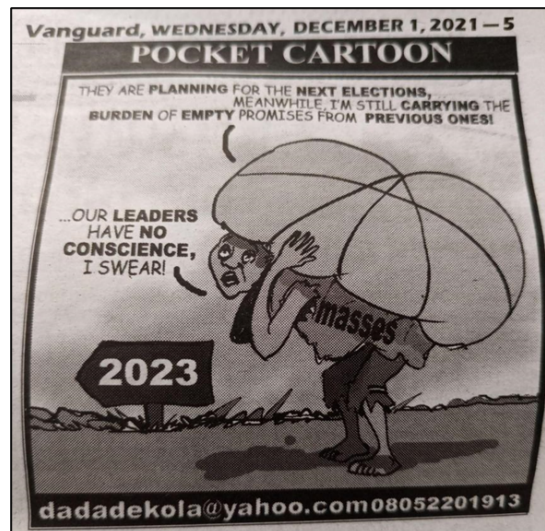
In 1948, cartoon began to be part of the newspapers through which Zik could fight the colonial government and his Nigerian political opponents. Lasekan was officially employed as the first cartoonist to the several newspapers established by Zik, thereby making him the first in West Africa to have a cartoon tradition. Speaking on the creative ingenuity of Lasekan, vis-a-vis cartoon illustrations, Oloidi (2004) states:

Without doubt, the cartoons of Lasekan covered practically all areas of colonial experiences. But more essentially, they focused on racial injustice, nationalism, economy, corruption, quality education, illiteracy, unity, discrimination and various social problems.

It is therefore, apparent from the above statements that Lasekan had used cartoons to address Zik's achievements, politics in Nigeria, man, Africa, and most essentially through Zik's West African Pilot.

3.2. Cartoon Illustration, a Language of Communication

Cartoon has been a language of communication for more than one hundred years now. It is employed as a means of denouncing the evils that bedevil the society. Onakpa (2024) states that cartoon is often satirical in nature and castigates the social misdeeds, sayings, views or events that have to do with highly placed personalities. He further opines that cartoon is therefore, a vital tool employed by the press for its watchdog role in the society. The cartoonist needs knowledge on events around his world, especially political events that affect him and other citizens (Iyorza, 2015). For instance, dishonesty and fraudulence observed among the ruling class have been severally censured by using cartoon as a subtle avenue of exposing them. This tendency to deceive and then siphon the economy of the nation as earlier stated, is part of what leads to the misery of the masses portrayed in the picture below.



© Adekola, 2021

Figure 1. Masses Carrying the Burden of Empty Promises

Perusing at the above illustration, it is conventional for innumerable promises to be heaped up by most Nigerian politicians, especially in the course of striving to scale through to the seat of governance. Exaggerated pictures of their proposals for their purported selfless service are therefore, painted to convince the unsuspecting electorate, whose votes are coveted by the desperate power-thirst politicians. This category of politicians usually emerge in the guise of the people's messiahs; but when the ball is rolled into the field for them to play, the once self-proclaimed saviours metamorphose into the most formidable adversary of the masses. Cartoons serve to underscore the vacuous campaign promises perpetrated by political actors, whose consciences are adamant and impregnable. However, Olatunji (2022) has warned that it is time for Nigerians to wake up and understand the shenanigans of these politicians.

The illustration features debilitated and defenceless masses crouching under the heavy laden of promises that are mere will-o-the-wisp. Such illusory babblings otherwise unfulfilled promises, are the scheme of virtually all the Nigerian politicians, who bask in profligacy that has become the bane of the nation's economy. In this political cartoon, Nigerian politicians are depicted as crops of individuals void of conscience, who are ever ready to contravene all nation's laws, and trample on all human rights for their selfish gains. Olatunji (2022) further observes that the present crop of politicians have reprobate minds. They don't have the character to do good. In this creative format, the squalor and agony that characterize the masses are captured in the austere countenance rendered in simple lyrical impressions by the artist. One can optically estimate the weight of these empty promises pressing down the wretched rag-clad masses to a state of forlorn and abject destitution. From the stout arrow-shaped sign-post pointing to 2023 clearly written, it is an indication that they are only targeting to grab another tenure of office, whereas the down-trodden are being cumbered with promises that are nothing more than optical illusions.

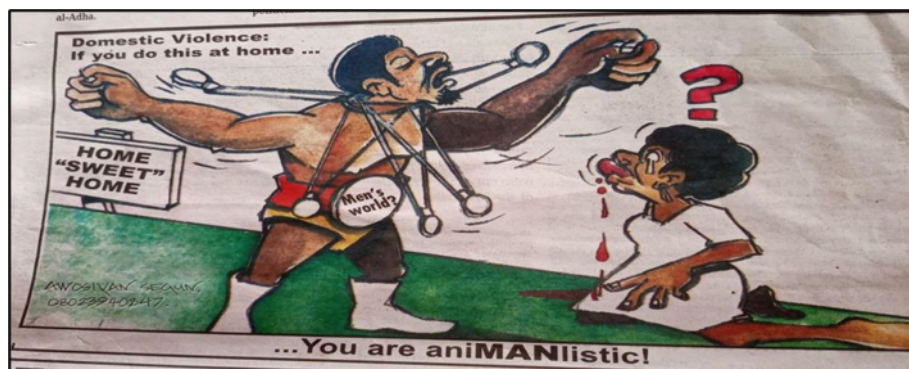
The power of cartoon is also significant in condemning social anomalies that are now recurrent factors in the society. Today, it is now endemic for violence to erupt at homes, which sometimes results to loss of life. This is the calamity of some incautious families, which does not happen suddenly; it gradually begins to develop from simple dissensions to grievous contentions that sometimes culminate to bloodshed. Sounding a note of warning on this, Morohunfola (2021) states that domestic violence is a major public health problem that affects millions of people and often results in physical and emotional injuries and deaths. Some people display a measure of levity over a matter that could have been handled with sobriety at its budding stage. However, by the time they realize its enormity, everything has blown skyhigh. According to Edwards (2022), domestic violence is a major public health problem, due to its affecting more than 2 million women and 800,000 men and resulting in homelessness, injury, or death of victim, billions of dollars in healthcare costs, and lost work productivity. The pictorial information below captioned: The beginning of domestic violence, is what obtains in some homes as portrayed by the artist.



© Moses, 2022

Figure 2. The Beginning of Domestic Violence

Here, a couple who sleeps on the same bed lies in an alternate positions, in which the man’s head is rightly placed on a pillow on the head axis of the bed, while the woman on the reverse, lies with her legs resting on a pillow on the head axis of the bed. Their baby is helplessly abandoned on the floor, weeping and seeking the attention of its parents, who remain unruffled and indifferent with seemingly gloomy countenance. The scenario spells the disagreement treading their matrimonial path, which can still be handled before it escalates. However, it is very inordinate that some violence-infested homes may prefer to absorb all the shocks of domestic violence secretly to keep the third party out of the knowledge of the wickedness, keeping it behind closed doors only to create a forum for worst occurrence. On this, Aihie (2010), laments that violence against women in the home is generally regarded as belonging to the private sphere in Nigeria and is therefore shielded from outside scrutiny. The cartoon below further expresses a domestic violence that has transcended the realms of mere melancholy between a couple into physical combat that results to blood spillage.



© Segun, 2022

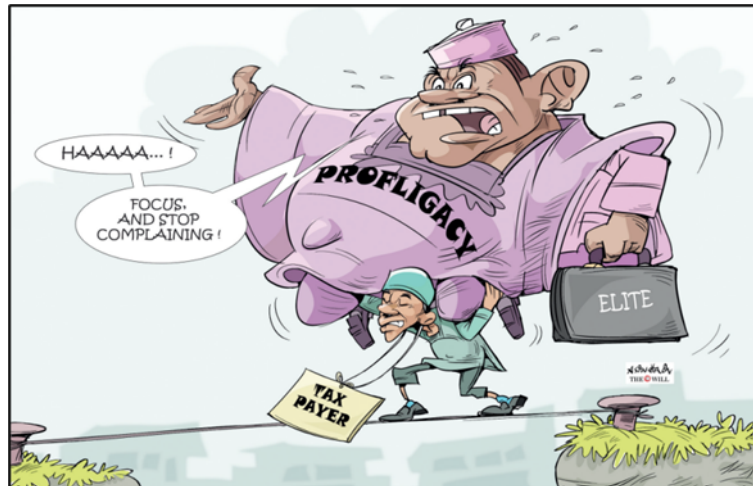
Figure 3. Consequences of Domestic Violence

The man (the husband) who occupies two-third of the picture plane assumes a macho pride with his fist tightly closed like a pugilist, who stretches out both arms to unleash more punches on the helpless wife, whose face has already been mercilessly battered. He seems to be a real champion of domestic violence overtly shown in the various medals of domestic violence (M.D.V.) upon his neck. This suggests the number of times the woman opponent (wife) has been savagely knocked to stupor. His red champion belt with the letters - Men’s World, is a sure evidence of his animalistic tendencies. The proofs of the man’s cruelty and brutality are apparent on the woman (the wife), who is kneeling and entreating for mercy with swollen lips, and nose and eyes all dripping blood sustained from the brute’s carnage.

The case of one late Osinachi Nwachukwu, an ardent gospel singer with a high-pitched voice, who was alleged to be a victim of domestic violence, may have started gradually until it developed into full bestiality that claimed her life. This was the ugly and pathetic saga that formed the columns of most Nigerian newspapers in 2022. Expressing her disgust for domestic violence, Morohunfola (2021), laments that domestic violence is common in Nigeria and hardly a week goes by without a report of abuse. There is therefore, need to promulgate stringent laws by the Government that avail the culprits punishments that serve as a deterrent to them.

The matter of spending the nation’s economic resources recklessly is another cankerworm that has devoured the Federal account of the nation, which has consequently cast the masses into a mire of squalor. This is profligacy orchestrated by the evil schemes of those at the helm of affairs, who embezzle, misappropriate and loot our resources, only to grossly devalue the naira to short-change the masses. The unscrupulous clamour for socio-political and economic status has enunciated the reason for the gluttony and the ensuing profligacy

typical of an average Nigerian politician. They earn fat salaries and allowances that are many times more than what a university professor receives. They keep retinue of aides, fleet of cars, unaccountable security votes, among others. Our resources are therefore, recklessly and wickedly managed. Thus, Agbedo (2022), complains that more could have been achieved if the country's elected representatives and political appointees have managed the natural resources more prudently. The instance of this evil is seen on the illustration below, which depicts a plump and gorgeously dressed male figure being carried by a haggard looking and hunger-stricken tax payer - the masses.



© Asiwata 2022

Figure 4. Profligacy

The corpulent figure who visually weighs many times more than his carrier is stated to have hushed the tax payer (the poor masses) to stop complaining, but should proceed and bear his burden. This fellow, a typology of Nigerian politician, surprisingly belong to the societal elite, but nevertheless has no regard for education as witnessed in the eight months strike of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) last year 2022, which the Federal Government bluntly refused to pay necessary attention. The curiosity and pursuit of Nigerian politicians are only for their pockets and immediate families; and little wonder, the bloating and protrusions of the profligacy personified, as expressed in the artist's creative ingenuity. His eyes scintillating in the stylized face, and the extremely wide -opened mouth that reveals a set of teeth and a tongue, all help to express the tyranny and avarice about him.

Also, the overindulgences of our politicians in ephemeral pleasures are also captured in the next picture where a paunchy seated man who appears to be a gourmand, devours a whole chicken, otherwise, the National Cake with fork and knife. This is our economy being squandered by those at the driver's seat, our gullible politicians who device all trickeries in order to remain at the corridors of power.

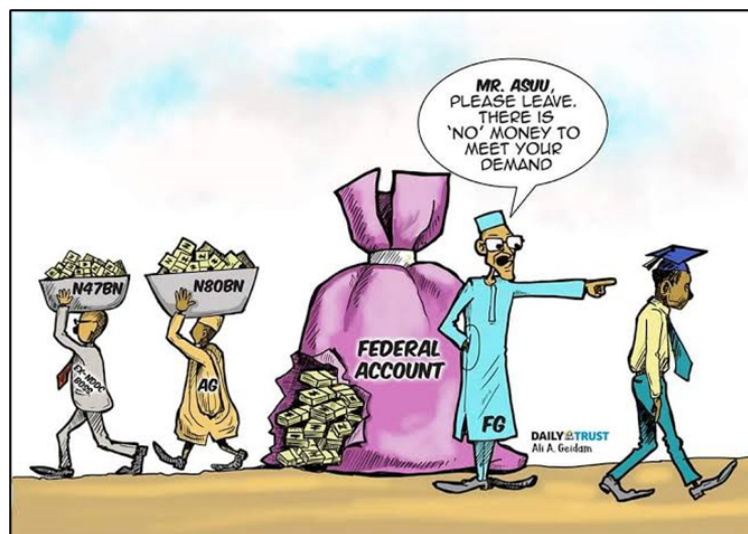


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Figure 5. An Avaricious Political Actor

His gaze is tilted towards a scrawny hungry-battered couple (the electorate), who comes with an empty plate expecting to experience the intervention of the hog over their economic predicament. They may have seriously campaigned and voted for him, but the man's unfriendly and derisive glare makes them wonder if they are no more remembered. The empty plate communicates a simple message that the couple is facing a lifetime of genteel penury and hence needed the attention of the bourgeois. At this point, it is very unfortunate that the confines of the politician's generosity are only on himself and his family members. This is not surprising because Nigerian politicians remember and befriend the electorate, whose votes are ultimately coveted for before the election. However, the moment the election is over and success made, phone numbers are blocked and nobody is known until the next campaign.

In another illustration, the gigantic Federal account is depicted to tower above the human figures with the powers that be, addressing Mr. ASUU that there is no money to meet his demand. However, on the contrary, political elements, NCDC Boss and the sacked Accountant General are shown on the visual imagery carrying away (looting) full loads of naira that amount to 47 billion naira and 80 billion naira respectively without the knowledge of the President (Nairaland, 2022).



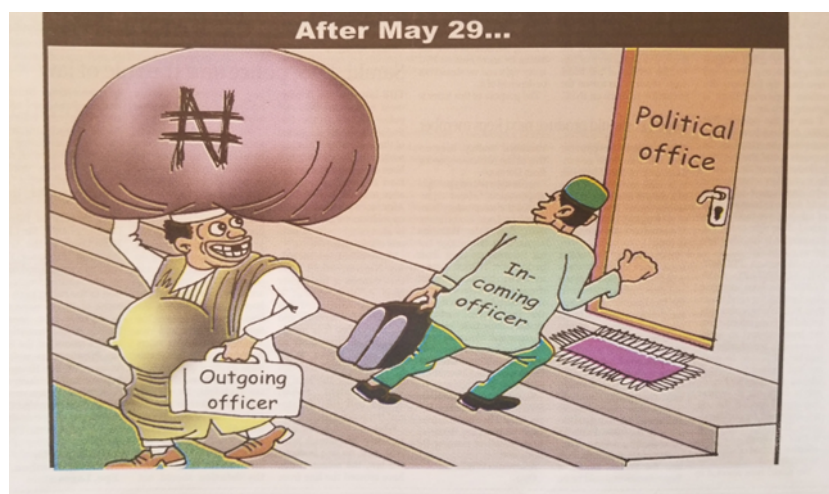
© Ali., 2022

Figure 6. Federal Government's Refusal to Meet ASUU's Demands

Such pouncing on the Federal Account was earlier witnessed in 1978, when the Ex-military Head of State, General Sani Abacha carted away a whopping sum of \$3.65 billion dollars, approximately over 2.4 trillion naira. What an enormous theft! This is one among the hundreds of lootings that have kept the country miles backwards. Until democracy in Nigeria becomes a constitutional representative government ably piloted by leaders, who bear in mind the state of the downtrodden or suppressed, and respond to the yearnings of the poor masses, it would continue to be a triumph of dictatorship in the guise of government of the people or the majority. Also, the most unfortunate thing about these billions of naira loots is that they will announce to us that the loots have been recovered, but only to be subtly, craftly and secretly stolen again, probably by those who recovered them. The case of Abacha and Ibori are typical examples. A particular cartoon by Asukwo generated variant reactions among Nigerians on the social media, who speculated that the loots (Abacha and Ibori), are likely to be re-looted by the government officials (Opera News, 2021). In this cartoon below, Lagos-Ibadan Express Way is depicted as a very big road like anaconda with its mouth wide open, and being fed with bundles of naira. It looks like a bottomless pit with no terminus, always ready to accept its food - bundles of naira, till eternity.

Many have reacted and reiterated with utter dismay that the major problem that infests governance in Nigeria is deep-seated corrupt practices, which have dragged the nation to the verge of total collapse. These have left the the country on the precipice about to tumble down the steep, dismembering and shattering beyond rehabilitation. The political actors who consider themselves juggernauts that defy any form of critics, are prime peddlers of corruption for which Nigeria is now identified with all over the globe. The judiciary who could have rescued us from drowning after our boat has capsized, is itself a bunch of weirdos who are ready to turn justice upside down for a chunk of unrighteous mammon. The Nigerian politicians are excessively self-centred individuals who have zero feeling of compassion for the the misery of the downtrodden. Olatunji (2022) has noted that they have mortgaged their conscience that the insecurity in the land means little or nothing to them. Their everyday game is targeted on how to further pad their profligacy that has left the nation in abject penury. They come into the office empty, haggard, deflated, and penurious, but leave the same office paunchy, brawny, and with a cargo of naira capable of feeding at least, one-third of Nigeria populace. Tyrants and mean fellows!

Toluwani and Shobukonla (2023) have noted that cartoon illustrations are employed to parody political and public figures, using exaggeration and sarcasm to express the artist's opinion about their bad behaviour, foolishness, and blunders. The figure below best describes two fellows - an out-going and an in-coming political officers.



© Ali., 2022

Fig. 7: Outgoing and Incoming Officers

The former is carrying a huge bag of naira bigger than himself, looted from the Federal treasury, while the latter is carrying just a light empty bag into the office. Whereas the out-going officer is depicted by the artist as bloated with ephemeral possessions illicitly acquired, the in-coming officer has little or nothing except his little hand bag. However, by the time his one tenure elapses and is set to leave, his bag shall have become laden with the public fund grossly embezzled.

4. Conclusion

It is now obvious from the various cartoons analyzed in this study that numerous socio-political problems precipitated by the Nigerian politicians have constituted a trudge in wheel of the nation's progress. Such problems as embezzlement, fraudulence, falsehood, lawlessness, and other vices orchestrated by the ruling class, have been critically expressed through satires rendered subtly and graphically in pictorial formats. Where it is not safe and advisable to make direct criticism of the above atrocities, especially in a despotic government, cartoon offers a better option that has provided security to the artist. This has been one of the cardinal functions of cartoons since its inception in 1843. A nation like Nigeria is currently experiencing general retrogression in all facets of her existence especially education, governance, economy, morality, conduct and comprehensive wellbeing of her citizens; and this regression is also documented through various cartoons.

5. Recommendations

- a. Artists should employ more cartoons to denounce the evils that are the scourge of the nation, and that have kept it stagnant.
- b. Various newspapers and magazines editors should endeavour to procure more spaces for cartoons. This is because a small cartoon perched on a small portion of the newspaper or magazine is capable of providing an instant comprehensible information at a mere fleeting look.
- c. More artists should train to become illustrators who garner the ingenuity to explore on cartoon production.

Author Contributions

The sole author was responsible for all aspects of this study.

Funding

No funding support was received.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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