



The Relevance of Azeez Sanni and Segun Awosiyan Newspaper Cartooning in Nigeria

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Abstract. This paper articulates the relevance of newspaper cartooning in Nigeria through which, the forms, styles and character composition of selected cartoonists works were looked into. The study examined the works of Azeez Sanni and Segun Awosiyan who over the years have contributed their quota immensely in Nigeria newspaper cartooning. However, despite their impact in the study area, they are not known in scholarly works. Hence this study which purposively selected five works each from the two cartoonists with a view to looking at their cartoons impact on Nigeria socio-cultural and political issues, without jettisoning Government reaction on the embedded information's carried in their cartoons. In achieving this, descriptive, formal and expressive content was adopted to appraise the purposively selected cartoons of the artists.

Keywords: Pre-Colonia, Political, Cartoon, Newspaper and Socio-Cultural

1. Introduction

The word 'cartoon' was first used when an exhibition was held for a competition devised by Queen Victoria's consort, Prince Albert, to prepare designs for Frescoes for the new House of Parliament. The entries were naughty and ridiculous in subject matter. John Leech drew a series of imitations from *The Punch* newspaper in Britain; satirizing social and political abuses of the day (Popoola, 1983: 5). The word, cartoon, initially had different meanings. A cartoon was formerly defined as a rough sketch of a painting not yet executed, often produced in charcoal. It served as the painter's first draft that changed the pages of the British humor

magazine *The Punch*. In 1843, *The Punch* began running satirical drawings with caption, bringing to mind modern political cartoons. John Leech, the premier cartoonist, jokingly titled the pieces 'cartoons' to satirically lay claim to a higher sense of art. Since then, the name has come to stay. However, rather than satirically elevating Leech's magazine work, the word came down to his level, leading all subsequent art of its type to be called cartoons (Word Central, n.d).

Cartoons are also made up of drawings and copy writings; they could be a multi-produced set of illustrations in burlesque or satirical simulation. Such cartoons would be with or without copies or captions. However, cartoon drawing is also caricature or funny in outlook; images are hilarious in appearance, and are sometimes drawn to resemblance of persons, events, occasions, and happenings. The inspiration for cartoon is not limited to issues of the moment alone; it incarnates humour, satire, parody, lampoon, mockery, and criticizes the misdeeds of political and religious stalwarts; run socio-economic commentaries calculated to achieve socio-political fairness (Wehmeie, 2004: 217).

Duyile (1987: 12) maintains that cartoon is humorous, amusing or satirical which often deals with something of interest in the news. A cartoonist uses various icons which are symbol representing objects within a bordered object called a panel, or frame (Duyile, 1987: 12). Cartoons also utilize specific visual elements in order to replicate human communication. Sound (dialogue, self-talk, music, etc.) is created using words and symbols.



Plate 1: Some Basic Symbols and their meanings.
© Eleonu Chimene, 1995.

On the other hand, according to Everett (1974: 664-665), defining cartoons is tricky because there is not one widely accepted definition. Therefore, he proffers a definition based on an amalgam of current literature 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 programmes are also called cartoons; however, comics are mainly relegated to print). In this, cartoon can be far simpler in their presentation; they amplify what they want the reader to recognize and understand.

Historically in Nigeria, caricature, as a form of art, had been in existed for a very long time before the advent of the colonial masters, contrary to the belief that this form of satirization in Nigeria is a colonial innovation (Hosterman, 2002). It would be pertinent to note that the functional concept of cartoons has been embedded in some Nigerian traditional societies, which were used to satirize 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 *Ogene Ukwata* satire, *Oke Ibadan*, *Gelede*, *Efe*, *Bolojo*, etc. and sculptural mocking images on helmets and facial masks worn by the masked dancers during *Egungun* festivals of the Yoruba and the *Kwash-hir* theatre of the Tiv which consider the use of ridicule as a means of enforcing conformity with acceptable standards of behaviour in traditional cultures.

During the *Ukwata* Festival of the Emu people (an Ukwuani clan situated West of the Niger Delta area), youths of the community are usually seen dressed in funny ways heightened by the use of make-up and assorted costumes as a means of imitating someone

or a group that they are satirizing during the *Ogene Ukeata* Day activities by paying special calls to the homes of culprits who they ridicule with their songs, mimicry, make-up, costumes, and dance.

According to Adejinle, (1987: 10) the *Egungun* is a form of ancestral worship in Yoruba land; it is used as a form of satire ridiculing wrongdoers in the society. Another form of satirization 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. The actual ceremony commences with the *Efe* entertaining the elderly women in the society. In the course of this, the *Efe* mocks and criticizes the traditional rulers/government, and condemns notorious miscreants and criminals 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 different traditional motifs portrayed on the mask (Adejinle, 1987: 11).

Modern cartoon in Nigeria started about seven decades ago (around 1954), but they were not documented. In the contemporary times, cartoons have become very prominent in most Nigerian newspapers. They have now become regular features because of their attributes to readers, publishers, governments, and members of the public in general (Nwanne, 1989: 14). 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 (Olaniyan, 2002:5).

The contributions of cartoon to the socio-political life of people are enormous. It has created great impact on Nigerians by educating, correcting, informing, sensitizing, amusing, entertaining, healing, condemning ills, and changing the needs or aspiration of the people since Nigeria's independence (Duyile, 1987: 16). Be that as it may,

the laudable roles of cartoon in any society are highly manifest in the socio-political and economic ills (Onwuchekwa, 1986). It helps the public to recall or re-sharpen views on current events, traditions, beliefs, and socio-economic or political trends. It is, therefore, important in reforming positively the attitudes of the society. It helps to reform lives, and sometimes to change the needs or aspirations of man for the better. Cartoons function as a key indicator of democratic health (Hammett, 2010: 2). They are a barometer of press freedom, government tolerance of freedom of speech and critical thought, and of resistance to dominant power relations. Cartoons are often able to expose a certain kind of essential truth which can encourage readers/viewers to see things from new angles. The suggestive nature of the genre also allows cartoonists to be more forthright in their criticism than would be acceptable in journalistic writing. It has also been one of the most powerful weapons used to lampoon political dictators. This simply implies that political cartoons are more potent than the atomic bomb. No totalitarian government can afford to be ridiculed (DeSousa and Medhurst, 1982: 202). Also, more life as well as fun has been injected into the newspapers for the readers. Economically, the introduction of daily cartoons in some newspapers has increased their sales because some readers buy them purposely to read and collect good cartoons. Some cartoon fanatics go to the extent of making cartoon albums from their cartoon

collection for self-amusement and entertaining their visitors (Popoola, 1983: 31).

The growth of editorial cartoon in Nigeria was due more to the efforts of the individual editors than to any editorial policy. Adekanmbi (1997: 4) observes that the press as at the early 70s 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 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 provision for the training of the cartoonist.

The exploits of Akinola Lasekan with his editorial cartoons in *The West African Pilot* in the 1940s and 1950s reflected colonial life and also depicted the struggle for nationhood which later culminated in Nigeria's independence in 1960 (Adekanmbi, 1997: 8). Lasekan was the daily cartoonist of *The West African Pilot* from 1948 to 1961; he was appointed the acting Head of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. This headship was taken from him in 1962 and thereafter, he remained in the department as an instructor (Ogumor 2008: 160-161)



Plate 2: Akinola Lasekan, *Kwame Nkrumah*.
© Deji Adebolajo, 1995.

The cartoon in Plate 2 reflects the state of nationhood in Ghana; one of the poor African states depicted by Akinola Lasekan in the struggle for nationhood from Kwame Nkrumah's perspective, that later led to their independence in late 1950s.

Most of Lasekan's cartoons push the need for freedom and political emancipation. These were part of nationalists' tool of political resistance of colonialism. The period saw 'LASH' as a political cartoon genius. Most of his well-known cartoons came from *The West African Pilot* published in Nigeria. However, this is an art form that strongly influences the newspapers' readers in running through cartoons to acquire information. It is limited in textual contents, relatively small size and coupled with simple drawings or images. Indeed, many lovers of cartoons

patronize newspapers because cartoons were incorporated to produce a desired result thus influencing the reader's interest (Adeyemi, 2019: 9).

Eko (2007: 30) states "Political cartoons often provide, within and beyond the African continent, visible manifestations of resistance to the abuses and excesses of power by governments and other elites."

There are numerous notable Nigerian cartoonists today: Josy Adenuga, Denise Ajayi-Williams, Olu Ajayi, Wale Adenuga among others; but Azeez Ozi Sanni and Segun Awosiyen, mentioned in the preceding are considered in this research work. The duo are preferred because, examining their visual representations critically, they have same focus and thoughts toward the society especially in the area of politics and economic stagnation. Summarily, the artists, work as full-time cartoonists with various newspapers and magazines publishing companies established in the country.

2. The Political Cartoons of Azeez Ozi Sanni

Azeez Sanni was trained as a graphic artist/lithographer by the Nigerian Army. Azeez Sanni's career as a cartoonist is as follows: he started as a graphic artist and cartoonist with the Nigeria Army 2nd Mechanized Division Press Publishers of *Tiger Magazine*, in 1989; he moved on to Sketch Press Ltd, Ibadan as both graphic artist and cartoonist in 1992; then to *The Monitor* newspaper, Ibadan as a cartoonist in 2003; *Comet* newspaper, Lagos as editorial cartoonist and illustrator in 2005, and finally to *The Nation* newspaper, Lagos as both cartoonist and illustrator till date.

As at today, Azeez Ozi Sanni had over 25 years' experience as a cartoonist, and he has several works to his credit such as book cover designs and illustrations of *The Juries*, *Prudence of Corruption*, *Compendium of Laws Relating to Economics and Financial Crimes*, *The Spider Web of the Law*, *Itoha* by Ogundipe, *Executive Immunity* by Barr. A. Muhammed among others. Azeez uses ball pens and water colours as his media (mixed media). His choice of techniques and styles include caricaturing, comical style, shading, colouring, and symbolism. His works primarily have themes focusing on government or politics and current affairs.

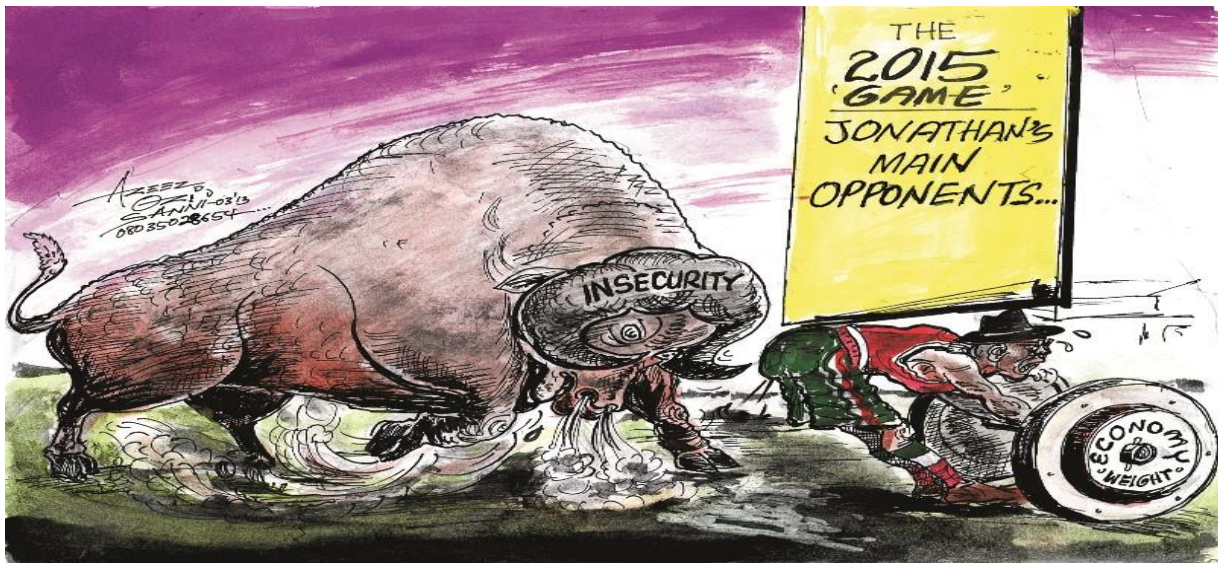


Plate 3: Azeez Ozi Sanni, *Insecurity*.
© *The Nation*, March 27, 2013.

The above Plate 3 is Azeez's social political cartoon on "Insecurity". The cartoon (Plate 3) portrays the main problem of Nigeria as a nation which was insecurity which are started since 2015 during the former government of President Goodluck Jonathan; and this propelled his political opponents. The said problem was tied round the economy of the nation as a weight while the former President Goodluck Jonathan was the weightlifter. The issue of insecurity is portrayed by a bull or buffalo while the weightlifter is practicing in to solve the danger facing country's economy as the head. This cartoon calls for caution, as well as charging the leaders in various cadre to wake-up and rise to their responsibilities. Here the cartoon expects Mr. President to proffers solution to the problems facing the nation economy.

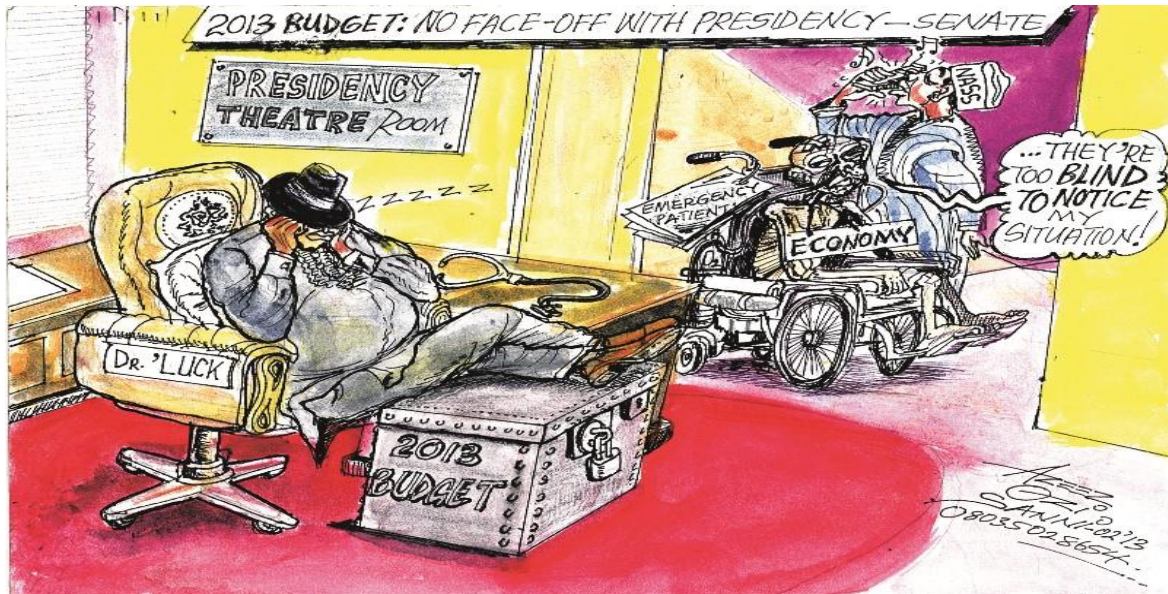


Plate 4: Azeez Ozi Sanni, *Budget*.
 © The Nation, March 4, 2013.

The cartoon Plate 4 above by Azeez Ozi Sanni portrays a swift passage of 2013 Budget at the Senate, without looking thoroughly at the economy position of the country (Nigeria) whether it was in line or not with the budget presented by the President. The nation economy is sick and need urgent attention. The cartoon tags the economy as an emergency patient. Those to treat him were blind, not seeing that the economy was sick. The pot-belly man designates former President Goodluck Jonathan doing nothing only to snore in order to salvage the economy. This shows that the former president does not feel concern for Nigeria economy.



Plate 5: Azeez Ozi Sanni, *Dividends of Democracy*.
 © The Nation, March 6, 2013.

“Dividends of Democracy” (Plate 5) is Azeez’s political cum economic cartoon. The cartoon portrays problems associated with the Presidency, leaving economy issues unresolved, and thereby, the dividends of democracy not reaching the people. The cartoon tags the economy as an emergency patient and those to take care of it were blind, not seeing that the economy was sick. The cries of all various newspapers felt on the president deaf ear. He clamoured that “all the major obstacles had been cleared! ...what’s next?” The former president sat down in the air - conditioner office doing nothing to the economy that is dwindling on daily basis without remedy.

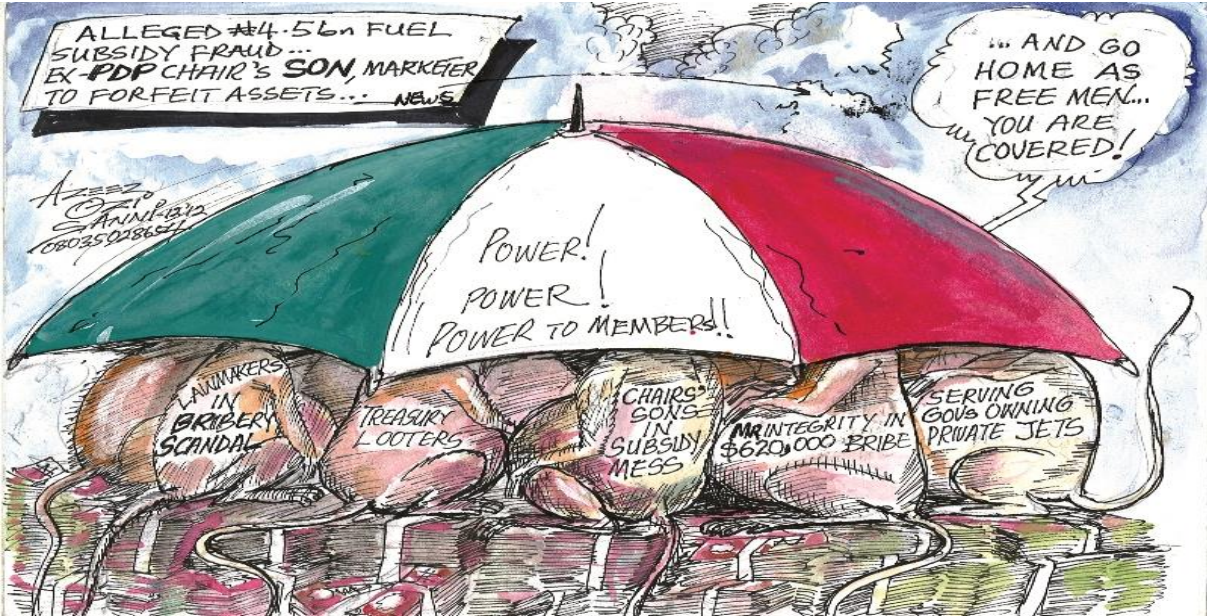


Plate 6: A cartoon of political shield - People Democratic Party (PDP).
 © The Nation, February 20, 2013.

“People Democratic Party” (Plate 6) is one of Azeez’s political cum economic main cartoon. The cartoon above portrays alleged #4.5bn fuel subsidy fraud traceable to ex- PDP chairs’, son, marketers, who were to forfeit their assets. They are shielded and covered by the mantra of the party: “Power! Power! Power to members!”. The looters subsequently go home as free men. Instead of Power! Power! Power to the People, what obtains in their own case is Power! Power! Power to the members! The looting is of various magnitudes, ranging from lawmaker in bribery scandal, treasury looters, subsidizing mess, integrity of member and serving Governor owning private jets. All these were free meal to PDP members then, with PDP umbrella symbol covering them all.



Plate 7: Azeez Ozi Sanni, Abuse of Power.
 © The Nation, March 25, 2013.

Plate 7 above is another Azeez’s political main cartoon. The cartoon portrays abuse of power to pardon anyone by the Presidency. The president covers up through the policy of operating high tolerance level for corruption. President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (GEJ) claims that his hands are clean. But his shadow hand shows “High Tolerance level for corruption” which means that he cover-up those corrupt officer under the pretext of high tolerance. For this Aid for Nigeria through Bill-Gates was void by Roger ahead an abort-mission.

Assessment of Visual Elements: Creatively, a good number of the cartoons of Azeez Ozi have vibrant colours, these are clearly depicted through warm colours (Plate 3, 4 & 6); thereby making the cartoons to be catchy. Also, the colours are adequately blended to give the forms, the intended meanings. Heavy use of black, especially for backgrounds, coupled with uneven use of space (asymmetric balance) are evident. In the same vein, a reflection of creativity brought about an image being manipulated with black colour especially for the silhouette effect. Azeez is a watercolourist, an expert who uses ballpen with watercolour as his media.

The deliberate use of animals is a conspicuous feature of Azeez's cartoons. The characters, whether humans or animals are also projected, in some design concepts through exaggeration/ distortion of forms while texts are used either sparingly or copiously to complement the visual forms. The human caricatures are creatively produced to be suggestive of its target and not with direct visual implications; yet, the intended meanings/ messages are cleverly articulated. It can thus be summed up that the visual presentations, logically, showcase the skills of the cartoonist which are more of "fluid" i.e. the cartoonist is not rigid but flexible in his approach to cartoon design. The dynamic approach aided a sort of variance in the artistic styles with the use of space, forms and colours among other visual attributes.

3. The Political Cartoons of Segun Awosiyan

Segun Awosiyan was born on 12th April, 1968 to the family of Chief Michael Johnson Oluwafayo and Mrs Segilola Awosiyan, in Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria. His father had three wives while his mother was the second wife among them. He is the fifteenth child out of sixteen children of his father. Segun attended St. Stephen's Primary School, Ile-Ife, Osun State between 1974 and 1979. After his primary school education, he proceeded to Seventh Day Adventist Grammar School, Ile-Ife, Osun State

between 1980 and 1984 for his secondary school education. He later proceeded to The Polytechnic, Ibadan for National Diploma, in 1989, to study Fine Arts, and he graduated in 1990. For Higher National Diploma, Segun specialized in painting at Yaba College of Technology, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria, between 1994 and 1996. He wrote his dissertation on cartoon as his final year project at Yaba College of Technology, and this made him discover his talent in cartoon illustration; the experience which later became useful as a youth corps member (NYSC) which he observed at an Imo state newspaper tagged, "Statesman".

Segun Awosiyan started out as an illustrator and cartoonist for *Heart Magazine* in 1996, and also as a contributor to *Vanguard* media before his employment as a senior editorial cartoonist in July, 1999. He participated in an exhibition tagged "Recountre internationale de dessin De Press" during International Press Cartoon meeting in France in 2002. In the field of cartooning, the following are his role models: Wale Ogunyomi, Josy Ajiboye, Obe Seinde, Adenle Adewale, and Emulemu while in Art generally, he sees Abiodun Olakun of Yaba College of Technology, Yaba, Lagos as his role model. Mr. Coker and Biodun Olaku are some of the lecturers at the Yaba College of Technology who did a lot to encourage him professional wise, because they always thought of him as painter with prospect.

Segun's philosophy of life is that "If you are not fruitful, you may not be his friend." That is, he who goes to equity must come with empty hand. Segun had staged several exhibitions; he is a registered member of the Cartoonist Association of Nigeria (CARTAN) since 2002, and he remains an active member of the Association up till date. The need to contribute his quota to reshape the country is what made him to temporarily abandon a lucrative and colourful career as a professional painter to being a cartoonist. He said someday, he would go back to painting. He is fulfilling his heart's desire and having fun with his cartoon strips.



Plate 8: Segun Awosiyan, *June 12 Annulment*.
© The *Vanguard*, December 8, 2000.

Segun’s political cartoon portrays a tablet labeled as June 12 with a chain holding a military man to it (Plate 8). The military is seen holding a tattered umbrella over his head to protect him from the torrent of rain falling. There are inscriptions pasted on the halls behind him. One of the inscriptions reads: Structural Adjustment Statecraft, while the second reads: Democratization Statecraft. The military man is seen holding a paper that reads ‘Annulment’. A white ghost is seen emanating from a lamp on the June 12 stand. The cartoon also portrays June 12, 1993 Annulment of the general elections which voted Chief M.K.O. Abiola by Gen. Ibrahim Babagida the then military Head of State. This implies that the Head of State employed Structural Adjustment Statecraft and Democratization Statecraft policies in the annulment process, to silence the populace who might revolt against the annulment. Despite this measurement taken, there were lot of chaos and crises within the nation in 1993 then.



Plate 9: Segun Awosiyan, *Dividend of Democracy*.
© *The Vanguard*, November 21, 2003.

Segun Awosiyan cartoon titled “Dividend of Democracy?” (Plate 9). The cartoon portrays a stand labeled ‘Naira’ with an empty plate and spoon in it. A poverty-stricken man standing before the stand with tattered or severely patched pants is seen emptying his pocket definitely in search of money. Nothing is seen coming from the empty pockets. The empty plate on the table labeled naira shows that nothing is coming from the so-called money table. It also shows there’s no food for the man, he has no means of getting food inside the plate because he has no money. However, the man could unsuccessfully handle the spoon placed inside a plate on the stand. Thus, indicating that the dividend of democracy gets to few selected nobles of the society excluding the poverty stricken member of the populace as depicted by illustration of the man.

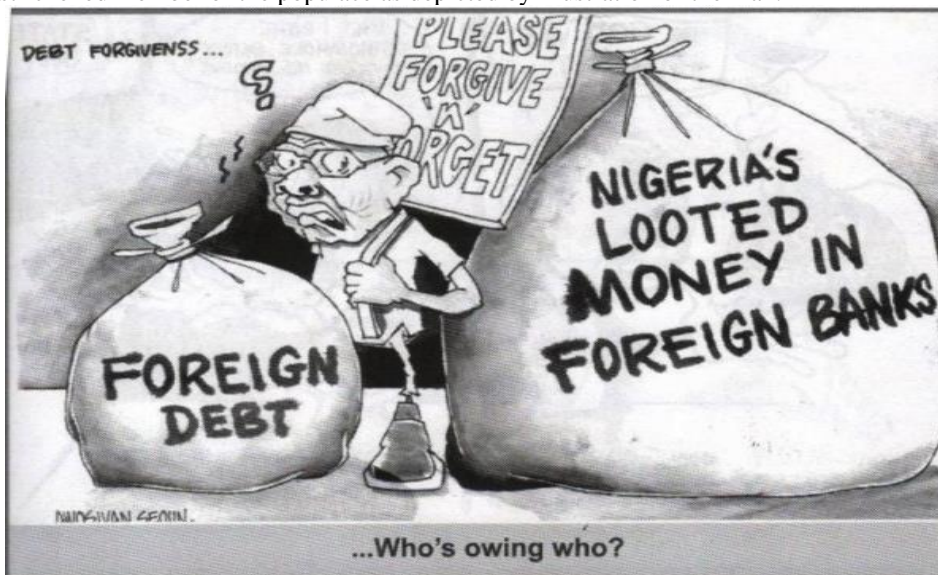


Plate 10: Segun Awosiyan, *Debt Forgiveness*.
© *The Vanguard*, June 25, 2005.

The political cartoon Plate 10 above shows a man depicting the past president of the Nigeria with a placard standing between sacks of different sizes. The placard reads ‘please forgive ‘n’ forget’. He is seen facing a sack labeled ‘Foreign Debt’ yet eyeing a bigger sack behind him labeled ‘Nigeria’s Looted Money in Foreign Banks’. The man seems confused with the question tag on his head. The caption beneath the cartoon reads ‘...who’s owing who?’ The cartoon also portrays the Federal Government of Nigeria under President Obasanjo then, who travelled

far and wide to foreign countries asking for forgiveness of Nigeria's debts. However, there are foreign debts owed by all tiers of government, and looted money from Nigeria were deposited in foreign banks.

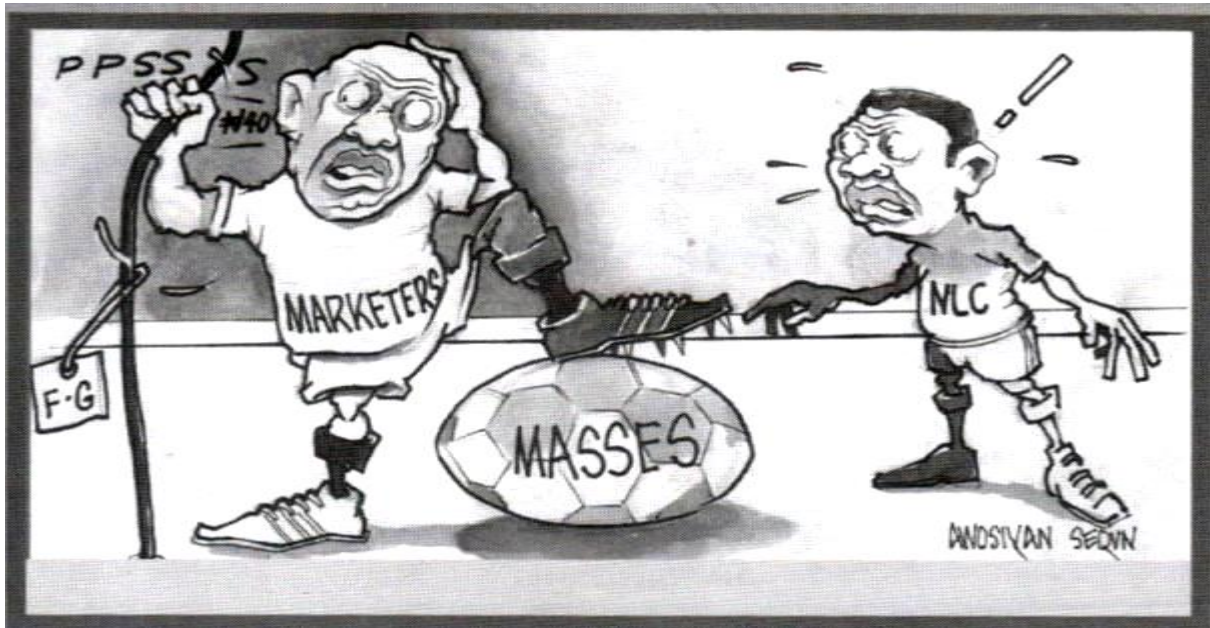


Plate 11: Segun Awosiyan, *Marketers Versus NLC*
© *The Vanguard*, October 19, 2003

This is Segun Awosiyan's economic main cartoon "Marketers Versus NLC" that portrays two footballers of different sizes. The bigger one labeled 'Marketers' and has football spikes of different features. One with flat football boot and the other with long spikes (Plate 11). The leg with the spike boot is placed on the masses signified by the round football. The other man representing the NLC who is afraid of the hard spike shoe has flat football shoes and doesn't seem to be ready to compete with the other man. The big man is seen holding a pole labeled F.G. The pole is bent by the big man and seems to be listening to something coming from the pole. It portrays Petroleum Products Marketers is listening to the federal government at expense of Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and the masses could not play along with the marketers on the field very well.

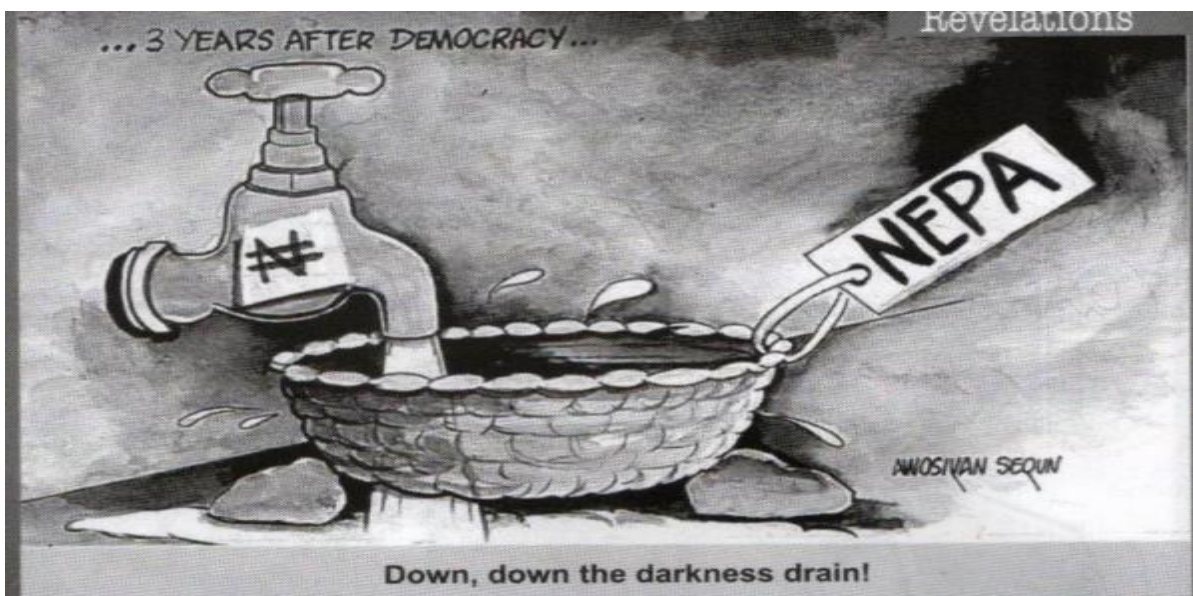


Plate 12: Segun Awosiyan, *Down the Darkness Drain!*
© *The Vanguard*, August 23, 2003.

Segun Awosiyan's economic cartoon (Plate 12) tagged "Down the Darkness Drain!". The cartoon portrays a water tap and a basket on stones. The basket is tagged 'NEPA' while the water tap is labeled 'NAIRA'. Water is shown to be running down into the basket from the tap, the resultant is the direct leak of water going in from the tap into the basket on the floor. The interpretation is that the Federal Government of Nigeria which pumps billions of naira and hard currencies into NEPA, the electricity company of the country, for good three years without any success. It was power failure across the country. The power sector has failed, and the country is plunged into darkness. This indicated all funds pumped to NEPA were misappropriated, squandered and looted as reflected in the tap water dropping into the basket which is drained away without retaining a single drop. This signifies a very big failure that is, huge spending on NEPA without a success till date. All the money poured into making the national electric power authority work out goes into oblivion. The caption underneath the cartoon sums up the message of the artwork.

Assessment of Visual Elements: Awosiyan's cartoon are caricature in nature to mimic subjects, the style used is a semi-naturalistic form. By virtue of aesthetic and relevance, His cartoons are the selling point for Vanguard newspaper. This is evident because his cartoons inform and create awareness about happenings in the society. This is something that the public are interested in, hence leads to more patronage of this print media – 'the Vanguard'. Awosiyan's creativity has no boundary because he gives new ideas to the situations he presents. His cartoons are wittingly meant for targeted audience which gives strong and needed information to the readers. This revered cartoonist is skilled in the use of ball pen for creating cartoons. Concurrently, he is also a professional with poster colours, bringing a sort of aesthetics for visual appeal to his informative cartoons in both 2D and 3D. The coloured cartoons are in different series of Vanguard newspapers while there is a compendium of his cartoons (strictly in black and white). The collection was duly accessed for this study.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the origin of cartoon in Nigeria began with the exploits of Akinola Lasekan (1916 - 1972) with his editorial cartoons in the *West African Pilot* in the 1940s and 1950s. His cartoons reflect colonial life, and depict the struggle for nationhood which later culminated in Nigeria's independence in 1960. He was also detained in prison for two years for one his political cartoon made during colonial era. Cartoons continued to evolve with the emergence of more newspapers in Nigeria. The study identified two Nigerian cartoonists: Segun Awosiyan (b. 1968)

who is well-known for his semi-naturalistic, ball-pen cartoons and Azeez Ozi Sanni (b. 1962), a watercolourist who uses ball-pen and watercolour as his media;

This study reveals the significance of cartooning in the society. Political cartoons are indispensable features of editorial pages; they influence public opinion and serve as a rhetorical object in lampooning the excesses of the political class in Nigeria. Cartoons comprise textual elements and visual imageries that are significant in stimulating the interest of readers both in descriptive and analytical communication.

The cartoonists under study employ different visual elements drawn from several allusions in disseminating information to their readers. These allusions are found to be effective in the editorial news discourse due to their persuasive nature. Most importantly, the cartoonist as a satirist should manage to display a thorough knowledge of the history that has led to current crises without resigning himself or herself to complete hatred.

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