

NEWSPAPER CARTOON AND POLITICAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: THE ARTISTS' IDEAL

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Abstract

This paper sets out to identify the qualities of a cartoonist as an artist in the business of political education. The paper observes that the true meaning of any man's action could be understood when conscious efforts are made by the message recipients to read beyond the lines. However, the encoder requires certain skills, especially as an artist, to pass his message across to his audience.

1.0 Introduction

The demand for news about our sophisticated world today is on the increased, but the available news media seem to lack the effective means of effective news transmission. News media have several means of disseminating information and other ways of putting news in perspective for their listeners or readers. On radio, for instance, apart from the straight news reporting, commentary or news analysis is used as a means of putting news in perspective while the newspaper utilizes editorials for achieving the same purpose. The importance of news analysis cannot be overemphasized. News informs, entertains and educates the readers, viewers or listeners.

On the editorial page where the newspaper's opinion, mostly about political events, is reflected, there is a cartoon. The editorial cartoons often times perform the same function as the written editorial, but with the use of pictures or drawings on similar or separate issues. Thus, the artist, hereby called the cartoonist, is saddled with the duty of transmitting the same knowledge or information in a unique perspective as the editorialist. Simply put, he has to explore his creative power. The cartoonist owes his newspaper reader the duty of putting

news events in a lighter perspective. Thus, the cartoonist needs knowledge on events around his world, especially political events that affect him and other citizens. He needs knowledge about his medium as well as knowledge on what the readers should understand about the message.

However, many readers of newspaper editorial cartoons have shown that the editorial cartoonist explores his creative powers but in vain. Thus, they study the artist's work but fail to understand the political information transmitted through the editorial cartoon. Those who are well knowledgeable about happenings within the society on the other hand find it easier to decode the opinions of the newspaper through the cartoons. Whereas, the editorial cartoonist feels satisfied as he expresses his message, little does he understand that expressed messages must undergo certain procedures to be understood.

Wilbur Schramm's model of communication shows that communication requires three elements namely the source, the message and the destination through some channels where message is received and decoded. Schramm points out that for understanding to take place between the source and destination, they must have something in common, if the source's and destination's field of experience overlap, communication can take place. If there is no overlap, or only a small area that is common, communication is difficult (Ike, 2000). In essence, the editorial cartoonist that wants "to succeed in the communication process must put political information in perspective in order to educate the readers, but the readers need to share a common ground of experience with the artist before education can occur. :

Education is the end-product of the cartoonist's objective of communicating to the readers. Education generally requires acquisition of skills and knowledge on the part of the 'teacher' and the 'learner'. It is in the light of this that this paper seeks to determine the ideals or qualities of the artists' efforts in educating the readers on political matters within their environment.

2.0 Significance of Political Education

Education is always discussed as ways in which people learn skills or gain knowledge and understanding about the world and about themselves. It is a process that occurs in a formal setting, informal setting or non-formal setting. Education is practiced at different levels. On the *general level*, education aims at producing intelligent, responsible, well-informed citizens, and transmitting a common cultural heritage rather than training specialists. *Vocational* education aims primarily to prepare individuals for job while *special* education provides opportunities for handicapped or gifted people. *Adult* education may be general or vocational but it is for adults.

Political scientists now hold it that a prominent stand in democratic theories is the assumption that education is a requisite of a democratic order, and as such, education is necessary for both progressive leadership and an enlightened followership. The success of any political dispensation is dependent upon modern education. Every political dispensation seeks to bridge the gap between the ruling elites and the less modernized masses in order to bring about changes in attitude and one way of achieving this is through general education.

Education is therefore the means for political socialization, that is, the process of acquiring attitudes and feelings towards the political system and their role in it (Asuquo et al., 1995). Education is also indispensable for political and social integration that is the development of social sensitivity and synthesis and social synthesis and the widening of circles of loyalties beyond the ethnic or parochial group. The success of democracy as the government of the people by the people depends largely on popular and enlightened participation in public affairs. All over the country, inefficiency and corruption abound in public offices and the enlightenment of the citizens about these vices is necessary for a desired change.

Education is a means of political mobilization and participation. Education, through expression and acquisition of knowledge, creates awareness about political matters and how they affect the citizens and make them active. This is the underlying assumption in political participation (Fagerlind and Saha, 125). Education is the conserver of the political order. Education can also be an agent of change in the political system. However, what education does, either as a conservator of the national political system or agent of change within the existing political order depends on how it is organized, who organizes it and the purpose to which it is put.

3.0 Editorial cartoons

One of the functions of the mass media is education. The newspaper, being one of the mass media, educates the readers, not only with words through written articles but also with pictures and drawings. Editorial cartoons educate meaningfully. Cartoons are light-hearted illustrations that employ humour, satire, caricature, exaggeration and symbolism as a subtle propaganda weapon which mobilizes the audience in harmless laughter (Omini and Ajibade, 1953). Cartoons are believed to entertain, to advise, to preach or to make political and social comments. Many papers feature political cartoons. These single frame cartoons are editorials in pictures and therefore are most often found on editorial pages. The illustrations show political or "message" cartoons from newspapers (Shrank, 116).

Editorial cartoons, otherwise called political cartoons, are among the distinguished types of cartoons. Others are comic strips, panels and comic books, gag or magazine, illustrative and advertising and animated. Editorial cartoons do what editorials do in words. They encourage the reader to develop an opinion about someone or something prominent in the news. They mostly appear on editorial pages of newspapers as single drawings with or without captions or titles. They may support main editorial of the day and may deal with some events in the day's news. Most editorials use a form of caricature to make fun of well

known people by exaggerating their physical characteristics or facial expressions (World Book Encyclopedia 217-219). Editorial cartoons tell a story or express an opinion, entertain, teach or comment about a person, event or state of affairs.

Editorial cartooning, also called political cartooning, can be a passionate business and a full political spectrum. Editorial cartoons provide depth to the illustrations and enabling viewers to delve deeper into the topic in question. They create awareness about the world with stories being told through the eyes of the media. Editorial cartoons have value in educating the citizens who are the readers. The cartoons help the citizens to recall or build new experiences. They provide the citizens with the opportunity to appreciate the reality of the situation. Editorial cartoons help the readers to search for facts, to recognize half truths and misleading information and to acquire the ability to form valued judgment. Editorial cartoons also invite participation of citizens in the political system (Ajelabi, 173-174).

3.1 Brief Historical Origin of Political Cartoons

The history of political cartoons varies, yet with the invention of printing and pictorial satire to a large public, artists began to make caricature of possible forms of controversy and this laid the foundation of modern political cartoon. Great events and great figures were needed however, to provide the impetus which would establish conventions for the new means of expression. In the early 16th century, the Reformation, Martin Luther and Pope Alexander VI supplied these needs, and the passion engendered in theological conflicts so extended the range and scope of the prints that controversy-by-picture became an accepted feature of public life (Encyclopedia Americana, 728). Artistry and imagination were gained with the rise of Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1520-1569), the painter-satirist of Flanders.

Political cartoon was on its way when graphic moralities, full of fantastic invention and rollicking symbolism, as well as mythological allusions and heavy allegory came from Italy. In Italy in the 17th century, it was unsafe to be too openly critical of authority, therefore

to survive, political satire had to be ambiguous or disguised. In France also, Cardinal Richelieu, who dominated the government, severely discouraged comment in caricature. His successor, Cardinal Mazarin, was less sensitive and under his regime the social and political prints multiplied, though their quality remained dull and mediocre (Encyclopedia Americana, 728).

The early political cartoons and of course those of today form the melding of two elements. The first element is the caricature and the allusion. The second element is context i.e. subject matter which is widely known. The caricature will parody the individual and the allusion will create context. So, the political cartoons will exaggerate individuals' features and bring out that individuals' inner self creating satire. Initially, these caricatures and allusions were merely curiosity and not viable artistic productions.

3.2 The Nigerian Newspaper

The history of Print Journalism in Nigeria began with the installation of the Printing Press at Calabar by the Presbyterian Mission in 1846 (Akpan, 13). The presence of the printing press had a religious undertone and other cultural interests. Other missionaries and religious inclined business conscious men took a cue from the Calabar experience. Reverend Henry Townsend, a missionary Journalist established a printing press in Abeokuta in 1854. Five years afterwards, *IweIrohin* was founded as a missionary paper.

The next phase of newspaper development in Nigeria was the period of the alien-dominated press where non-Nigerians enjoyed the freedom of publishing newspaper for Nigerians. Consequently, papers like *Anglo-African*, *Lagos Times*, *Gold Coast Colony Advertiser*, *Lagos Observer*, and *The Weekly Times* among others evolved. The period of indigenous press witnessed the emergence of *Nigeria Pioneer*, *African Messenger*, *Nigerian Daily Times*, *Mirror*, *West African Pilot* among others.

The modern Nigerian press began during the period of independence in Nigeria and years afterwards. The Nigerian newspaper then was nationalistic in nature. The Nigerian newspaper played several roles until during the period of the Nigerian civil war, even then a few newspapers survived. From the early 70s till date, most of the early newspapers disappeared while new newspapers emerged. Famous among the current papers in Nigeria today include *Punch*, *Vanguard*, *The Sun*, *The Guardian*, *Tribune*, *This Day*, *Daily Independent*, *Mirror* among other state owned papers.

Whereas the early papers had cultural, religious and later commercial objectives, the newspapers that survived the pre-colonial era were nationalistic. The present generation of newspapers accord politicians their prime means of reaching national audiences. It is fair to deduce that the primary motivation for producing a newspaper in Nigeria is political rather than commercial, even though the commercial motive cannot be ignored. This explains why the editorials are necessarily political opinions of the newspapers. The editorial cartoons gained prominence in the Nigeria newspapers since the injection of the political motive in the publication of the papers. The Nigerian newspaper editorial now reports politics, though satirically, the reports are put into perspective and presented in an interesting and attractive manner as to attract the readers.

4.0 The Cartoonist or the Artist

The cartoonist are artists who create cartoon-style illustrations for newspapers, advertisements, magazines, films, televisions, books, newsletters and greeting cards (Ike, 33). Thus, the cartoonist tells a story, provides social commentary or reflects public opinion. The cartoonist is a teacher in his own respect. He teaches the reader how to understand what was reported in writing better. The editorial cartoonist is also a watchdog of the society who has learnt his trade of educating through drawings in a formal or non-formal setting. While

educating, the editorial cartoonist informs and entertains. His impact is immediate and momentary.

In his efforts to promote political education, the newspaper editorial artist or cartoonist must learn and possess certain ideals.

1. **Idealization of the imperfect:** Joshua Reynold is a major proponent of this ideal for the editorial cartoonist. Apart from being a painter, Reynold was an accomplished academic (Wikipedia, 1). His theory which depends on the idealization of the imperfect states that artwork, conceived in the mind of men, people or living things is made communicable to other men, people or living things with the assessment of the artwork recipient for the communication cycle to be completed. Thus, the editorial cartoonist must ensure that his drawings communicate. He must devise a way of evaluating his art work to know from the readers if his cartoons are well understood.
2. **Educational Requirement:** Many successful cartoonists are self-taught but educating the citizens on national issues that are important as they affect their lives demands learned skills in the profession. To educate his readers politically (basically on political trends and their implications), the editorial cartoonist, apart from learning and acquiring formal art training and computer skills, should possess a strong drawing background and demonstrate knowledge of political history of his country or state. He must keep up to date with publicity and political trends. Fine art or basic art training and visual communications programme can provide a good foundation for the editorial cartoonist who must excel in political education.
3. **Illumination:** Cartoons remind us of all that beneath the righteousness lays humanity, beneath the dogma, certain skepticism. The editorial cartoonist must perceive truisms in an original light. About political events in his country or state, the editorial cartoonist must make an effort to reveal mankind to itself and to penetrate artificial

armors. He must expose hypocrisy within political systems and deflate pomposity of political figures. To educate his citizens, the editorial cartoonist must put every information in perspective; replace sham with truth, debunk false allegations against individuals and groups and slowly destroy pretension through honesty.

- 4. Practice, evaluation and personal style:** Editorial cartoonist must practice to develop and improve upon his skills. The best critics of an editorial cartoonist's artwork are the readers. Readers of the paper may criticize a cartoon based on content, context, or form. They question the educational value of the editorial cartoon that seeks to educate. Cartoonists or artists should seek for constructive criticism from people or critics of his artwork. He should also develop his individual style that is recognizable and which can build his reputation as editorial cartoonist.
- 5. Creativity and editorial input:** While he educates, the editorial cartoonist must remain creative in his visual or pictorial drawings. He gets his inspiration from many places and often keeps a sketch book or diary of ideas for future use. In drawing, he makes pencil sketches of his ideas or use computer software to draw cartoons. The editorial cartoonist, when in doubt, discusses his idea and initial drawing with an editor or publisher before finalizing them.

5.0 Conclusion

An editorial cartoonist performs three functions: to inform, to entertain, and/or to educate. He may combine two or more of the aforementioned functions. The Nigerian citizen has the right, by law, to be exposed to political education of his country through channels of communication. The channels of communication have various ways of educating their citizens. The newspapers could use written words through news writings, articles, interviews, pictures or cartoons. Cartoons could appear on any page of the newspaper; but cartoons that

appear on the editorial page of the newspaper, expressing most often, political opinions of the entire newspaper, are entirely the business of the editorial cartoonist.

It is quite interesting to note that the dramatic turn of events in Nigeria, since the commencement of the second republic in Nigeria, accorded the Nigerian newspaper and opportunity to explore its editorial prowess. Since then, editorial cartoons have, in addition to entertaining and informing, criticized political anomalies and tried to put news in context in order to educate Nigerian citizens. Meeting the educational or learning needs of the diverse readers or citizens requires a level of skill on the part of the editorial cartoonist. These skills are referred to as ideals. The editorial cartoonist must provide a common ground for his readers to understand his message. His political cartoon must communicate the message as theorized by Joshua Reynolds. He will excel if he possess a level of educational qualification that would warrant him to practice his trade. He must practice his drawings; evaluate his cartoons to know if the purpose of educating the readers is achieved. He should develop a personal style that would distinguish his level of creativity from others. He should solicit for editorial input where necessary.

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