

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE METHODS OF CARTOONISTS AS SOCIAL COMMUNICATORS IN GHANA

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This study investigated how cartoonists used animated drawings to communicate their messages in the light of current socio-political developments in Ghana. One hundred and eighty cartoons (from January to June 2012) of three selected cartoonists, namely Politics and Politricks of the *Enquirer*, Akosua of the *Daily Guide* and T'Spoon of the *Chronicle*, (newspapers with pro-government, anti-government and neutral leanings respectively) were content analyzed. Content analysis, according to McQuail (2008), is a method of studying and analysing communication in a systematic and objective manner for the purpose of measuring variables. Ten of the cartoons were selected for emphasis and illustration in the study. The cartoonists employed the techniques of language, humor, camouflage, willful distortion and exaggeration of reality, symbolism, irony and satire to tease out the themes of the study. It emerged that the works of these cartoonists were influential as they contributed graphically to the ongoing political debate with their respective focus on corruption, the economy and other social issues.

Keywords: Cartoons, communication, camouflage, socio-political development

INTRODUCTION

The art of cartoon making, according to Ross (1992) involves an artist's exaggeration, distortion and falsification of issues in reality into vehicles of succinct comment and satire. Cartoonists then offer us models for the humorous redescription of the world. They satirize our present anomalies in society for the purpose of communication. Political cartoons are better understood when considered within the framework of humor as a medium of caricaturing. Additionally, it is evident in cartoon depictions that cartoonists intentionally depict the cartoon to appear humorous, contrary to the expectations of the audience. So it is this contrariness that

brings in the element of irony in cartoons. Cartoons help create meaning, comprehension, perception and appreciation in the depiction (Abdulla, Ali and Abdullah, 2012). According to Lynch (2002), humour is perceived basically as a communicative activity. It is an important aspect of social life. Humor in cartoons is also a universal and social phenomenon which is present in both tribal and industrialized societies (Apte, 1985).

Cartoons raise the general public's awareness about societal issues nationally and internationally. They stimulate the audience to think, reflect, criticize, provide insight, change and even form public opinion (Kaviti, 2010). A Czech editorial cartoonist summarizes this position well when he says "I prefer humor which doesn't kill and injure a person, but (instead) activates his brain ...imparts the positive approach to life and the world around (Szabo and Lent, 1994, p. 30 cited in Kaviti, 2010). Laughter has been described as 'a tranquilizer with no side effects... an exercise akin to internal jogging' (Maingi, 2006, p. 69). For Freud, the laughter in jokes results from an economy in inhibition, the laughter in comedy results from an economy in ideation and the laughter in humour results from an economy in feeling (Maingi, 2006). The case of humor involves the summoning up of energy for an emotional purpose which becomes superfluous. There is no doubt that the essence of humor is that one is spared one's self the effects to which the situation would naturally give rise and override with a jest the possibility of such emotional display Marmysz (2004).

In a politically polarized country where certain media houses, religious ministers, chiefs, geo-political regions are perceived to be for or against the government or opposition, the media and more particularly cartoons and the humor they create, become powerful instruments to provide instant, effective and new direction, readily conveyed, immediate communication; food for thought, artistic expression, a visual aid to better understand and clarify current issues (Szabo and Lent 1994:31). A number of the articles published in the newspapers and programs presented on the airwaves register very little or no impact on many people due to the high level of illiteracy and semi-illiteracy. Within such a situation, cartoons have a greater potential for reaching out to a vast majority of the people. This study fills a gap within the repertoire of cartoon studies in that it explores how various techniques of camouflage are used to tease out the issues that set the agenda for newspaper cartoons. We focus on how cartoonists use techniques such as satire, camouflage, irony, humor, language, symbolism and willful distortion and exaggeration of reality among others to speak to delicate issues which would have been very difficult to delve into were it not for the platform of the cartoons.

Theoretical Background

This study is set within the framework of the Agenda Setting of McCombs and Shaw (1972) who believed that the mass media have the ability to transfer the salience of items on their news agenda to the public agenda. The theory answers the question of how the media transfers the salience of items on their news agenda to the public agenda. The media agenda therefore dictates what should be the public agenda. The implication therefore is that either a negative or positive media agenda can influence a corresponding negative or positive public agenda which then could inform how and what judgments people make. This concept translates

into what Griffen (2009) says that we judge as important what the media judge as important. In other words, the public look to news professionals for cues on where to focus their attention. The theory has two main focal points. These are framing and mediation. McCombs and Shaw (1972) in the 1990s explain framing as a concept where the media do not just tell us what to think about but also influence the way we think. This means they select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and or treatment recommendation for the item described (Entman, 2006). The very act of the media considering some issues as newsworthy enough to merit coverage at specific times on the airwaves or to be given space in newspapers while others are not brings out clearly the issue of framing.

McQuail (2008) elaborates on the related concept of mediation when he explains that it provides a frame of reference that enables the media to connect with society. This suggests that the media mediates between public policy and social discourse by providing their audience (readers, viewers and listeners) with a supply of information, images, stories and impressions, sometimes according to anticipated needs, sometimes following the motives of other social institutions such as advertising, making propaganda, projecting favorable images as pertains in public relations or just sending information (McQuail 2008). By so doing, they can extend our view of the world in an open-ended way or they can limit or control our impressions. Griffen (2009) says White (1973, p.245) commenting on the limited ability of the media to influence what people think about using the Kennedy-Nixon presidential contest in 1960 asserted that “the power of the press ... sets the agenda of public discussion; and this sweeping political power is unrestrained by any law. It determines what people will talk about – an authority that in other nations is reserved for tyrants, priests, parties and mandarins.” Thus agenda-setting theory posits that the media construct our view of the world in that they set the agenda where those items they deem important is identical to the public agenda, or what the public deems important.

The core idea then is that the news media indicate to the public what the main issues of the day are and this is reflected in what the public perceives as the main issues. The social implication of this study is that whereas previous related studies on the theory have mostly been on newspaper text and pictures, this study is charting new grounds in that analysis of the text and graphics as in the cartoons within the current socio-political context sends a stronger and more effective message to both the rulers and the ruled. In the study we examine how cartoons are used to set the predominant agenda on political, economic, religious and social issues.

Political cartoons are defined as “graphic presentations 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). Cartoonists often use humour or irony to point out shortcomings or hypocrisies within the political system. Many studies use the terms “political cartoon” and “editorial cartoon” interchangeably but this study would use the former. Using imagery, metaphor, symbolism and other rhetorical devices, cartoonists define political situations and attempt to interpret them visually in a way that is both amusing and thought-provoking. The figurative devices used are often ‘powerful’ and they mainly serve to maintain power relationships in a given political structure. Evidence suggests that cartoons can be used as a means to influence cultural, intellectual - and social change by reinforcing positive practices such as public accountability with respect to government officials (Kaviti 2006). Political or editorial cartoons are like the “iron fist in a velvet glove” that hammers the editorial message home in a

gentle and humorous way (Kaviti, 2006, p. 69). Benoit et. al., 2001 explored the influence of political cartoons on public opinion concerning Clinton-Lewinsky-Starr affair about the impeachment trial proceedings of President Clinton. Aina (1985) examines cartoons in four Nigerian newspapers to test the influence of ownership on their respective cartoons and provide a form of balance between the government and privately owned newspapers. The results show unfavourable comments on the government and reveal a lack of understanding between the cartoonists and their audience.

Methodology

This is an exploratory study that looked at the work of three selected newspaper cartoonists. These are Akosua and T'Spoon from the *Daily Guide* and the *Chronicle* respectively as well as Politics and Politrics of the *Enquirer*. Content analysis is used. The population was 180 newspaper cartoons studied within the period of January to June, 2012, a time which precedes the presidential and parliamentary elections in Ghana. Sixty cartoon panels were systematically sampled. Cartoon texts were the units of analysis. The main variables of interest employed by the cartoonists in their depictions to foster effective communication are humour, language, willful distortion and exaggeration of reality, metaphor, irony and satire.

For the purpose of effective elaboration in this report, ten cartoons which forcefully conveyed the cartoonists' messages were used to illustrate the techniques being investigated. Using the documentary review method, the techniques were analyzed and interpreted in relation to the images in the cartoon panels to determine how they reflected on current sociopolitical issues within the society. In selecting these newspapers, we were conscious of the need to balance the ideological equation: *Daily Guide* is generally perceived to be against the reigning government; the *Chronicle* tries to be neutral; whereas the *Enquirer* does not hide its pro-government leanings.

In decoding the message, we started from the known to the unknown i.e. from the familiar to the unfamiliar. The known elements were two-fold the caption, the verbal commentary and the non-verbal comments (ideograms). The caption may directly or indirectly drop hints likely to point to the meaning. But it could also be a decoy calculated to mislead the unsuspecting reader for a purpose. The verbal comments reinforce hints already dropped by the caption but they are sometimes full of irony. The language could be correct, broken, pidgin or an indiscriminate mixture of indigenous and foreign languages. Bad syntax, autography, clumsy expressions, a semblance of illiteracy – are all useful parts of a carefully hatched scheme – “camouflage”- whose function is to mask reality. The non-verbal comments are made up of animated drawings with willfully distorted humans and animals. We scrutinize every single sign or symbol in search of any feature likely to help our interpretation. We pay special attention to exaggerated or distorted features, the verbal and non-verbal components to arrive at a plausible interpretation, for these are the aspects that are often loaded with meaning

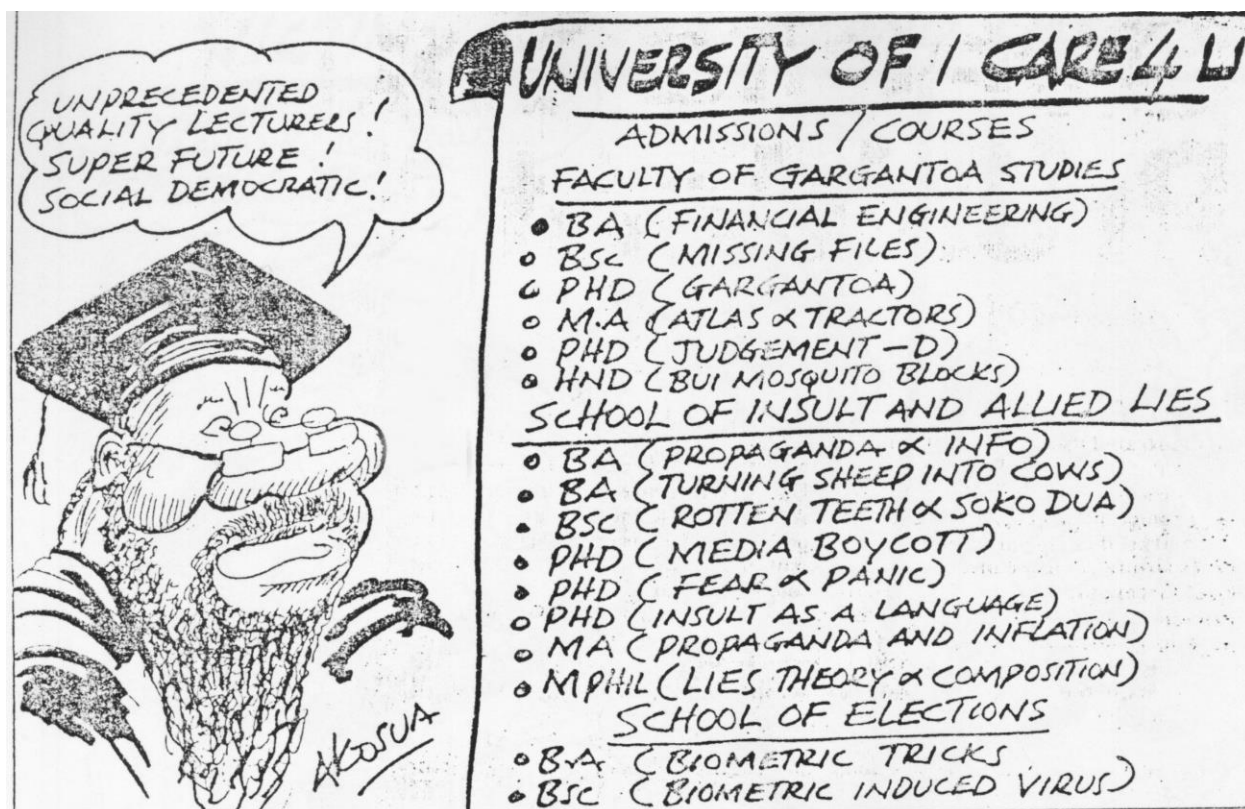
Findings

The entire creation of the cartoonist is shrouded basically in camouflage. The cartoonists use various strategies including humour, language, willful distortion of reality, satire and irony as well as symbolism as a disguise to present their messages on politics, the economy, religion and on social issues. Out of the sixty cartoons analyzed, ten of them were selected for greater analysis and illustration of the major thematic areas of the study. The findings have been summarized in the matrix below.

Matrix on 10 selected cartoon panels

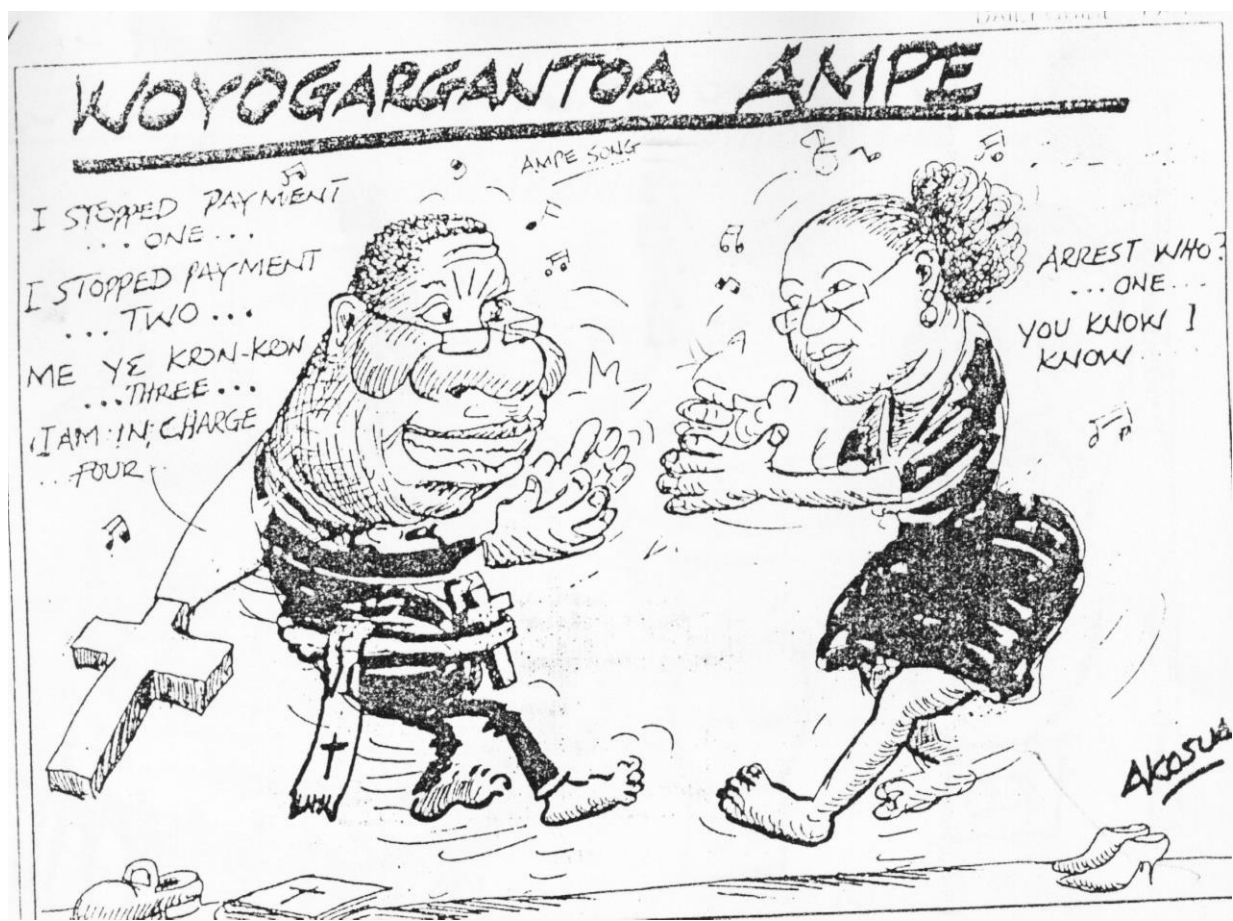
Newspaper	Cartoon Panel Title	Techniques used	Theme
<i>Daily Guide</i>			
1.	University of I care4U	Exaggeration, humor, language	Politics, Corruption & the Economy
2.	Wayogargantoa Ampe	Humor, symbolism, exaggeration	Corruption in politics with religion
3.	2 nd wife age palaver	Humor and exaggeration	Politics, love and the law
4.	2008 Promises – Fulfilled4 2012	Symbolism	Politics and failed promises
<i>Chronicle</i>			
5.	Poris Promotions Jump Over	Humor	Politics and job promotion
6.	Insults, Lies and Reward	Symbolism, Humor	Politics, sycophancy, religion
7.	The State of Kenkey	Symbolism, humor and exaggeration	Politics, and corruption, economy
8.	Atemuda Bitters Lab	Humor, symbolism	Public education on health
<i>The Enquirer</i>			
9.	By-force demo	Humor, distortion of facts	Politics and social unrest
10.	In the abundance of water the fool is thirsty	Politics	Politics and policies

Cartoon Panel 1: Politics, corruption and the economy



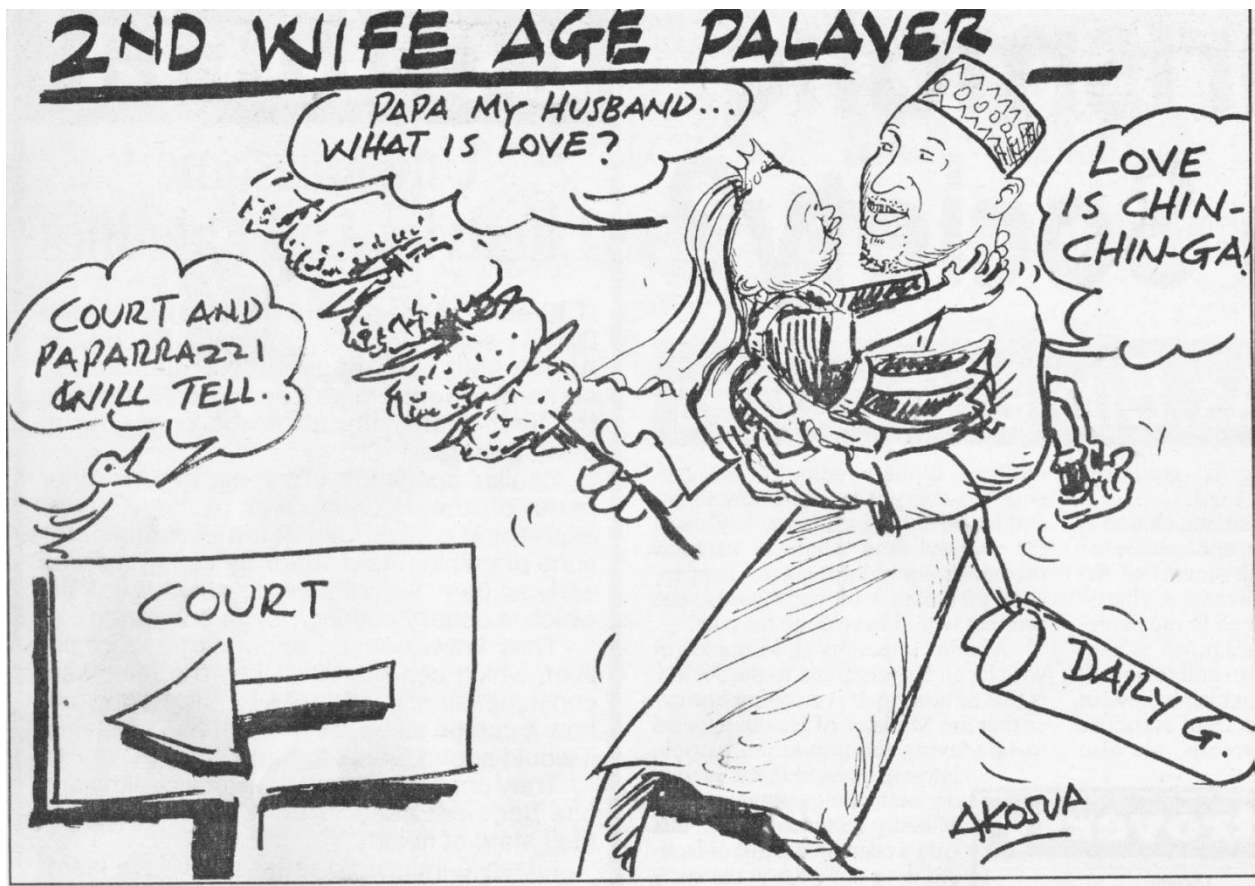
Cartoon Panel 1: Source: Daily Guide, March 22, 2012 titled: **University of I care4U.**

Cartoon Panel 2: Politics and Religion



Panel 2: Saturday 3rd March Daily Guide's Akosua, 2012 titled: "Wayogargantoa ampe"

Cartoon Panel 3: Politics, Love and the Law



Panel 3: Saturday May 19th 2012 Daily Guide titled 2nd wife age palaver

Cartoon Panel 4: Politics and Failed Promises



Panel 4: Monday March 19 2012 edition Daily Guide's Akosua titled: '2008 Promises – Fulfilled 4 2012'

Cartoon Panel 5: Politics and job promotion



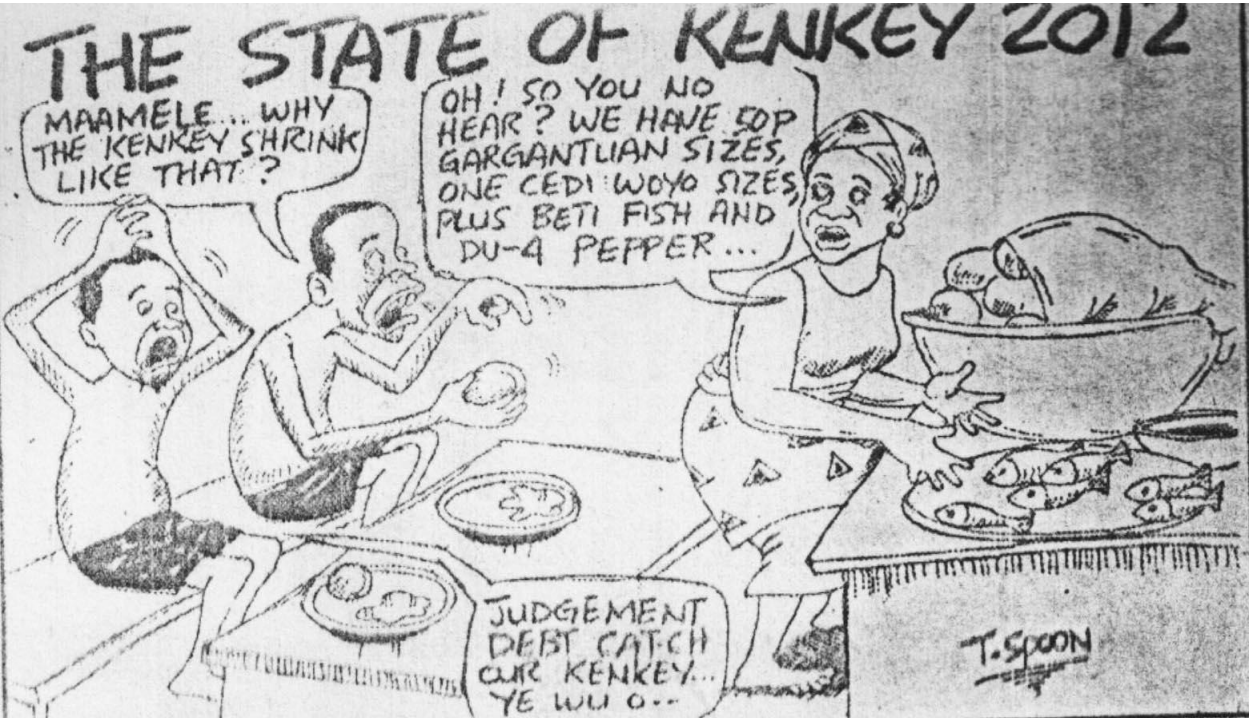
Cartoon Panel 5: Source: Chronicle titled **Poris Promotions Jump Over**

Cartoon Panel 6: Politics, sycophancy and religion



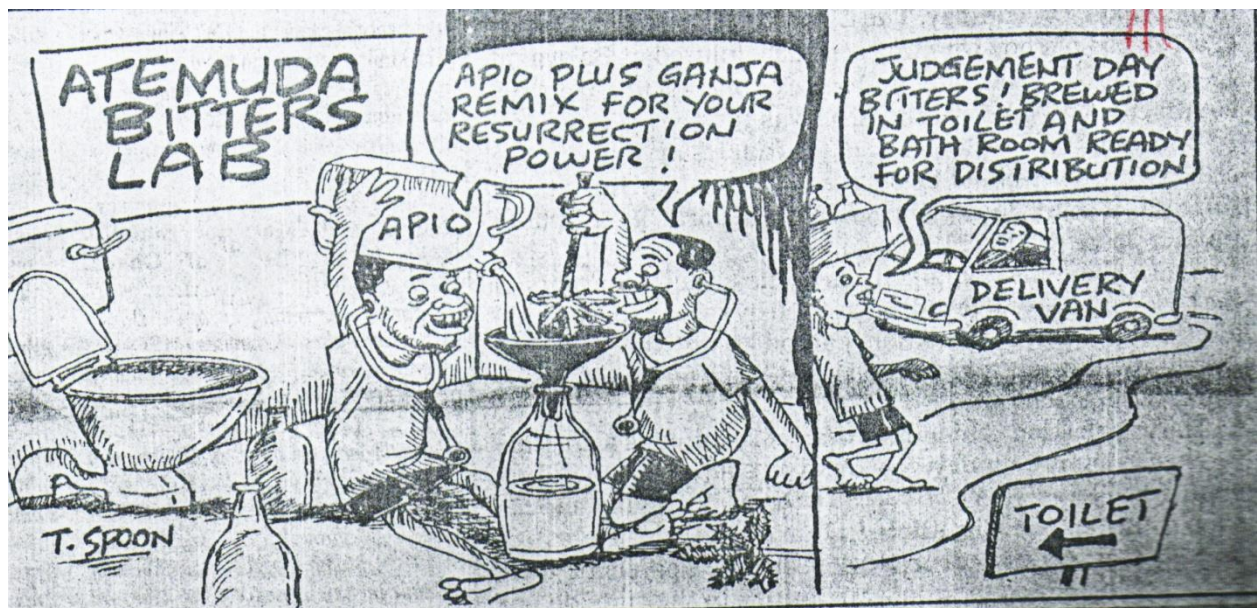
Panel 6: Source: Chronicle titled: **Insults – Lies and Reward**

Cartoon Panel 7: Politics and the Economy



Panel 7: Thursday 23rd February 2012 of the Chronicle titled: **The State of kenkey**

Cartoon Panel 8: Public education on health



Panel 8: Source: The Chronicle titled: **Atemuda Bitters Lab**

Cartoon Panel 9: Politics and social unrest



Panel 9: Wednesday 25th January 2012 edition of the *Enquirer* tilted: 'by-force demo'

Cartoon Panel 10: Politics and policies



Panel 10: The Enquirer 26th April 2012 edition titled: **In the abundance of water, the fool is thirsty**

We set out to explore how various techniques are used by cartoonists “Akosua” (*Daily Guide*); “T-Spoon” (*Chronicle*) and “Politics and Politricks” (*Enquirer*) to project the sociopolitical agenda of the newspapers. The cartoonists use humour and camouflage to predominantly project the theme of politics, corruption and religion and their impact on the economy and the citizenry. Akosua and T-Spoon’s cartoons as well as that of the *Enquirer*, aim at provoking laughter by deliberately exaggerating the negative traits of people, objects and situations being criticized. But beneath the laughter and hilarity, the real issues are unearthed in the themes expatiated below.

Theme of Politics, Corruption and Religion

In panel one, the theme of corruption in politics is played out in the phrase *PHD in Gargantoa Studies* to connote the spate of extraordinarily uncontrollable corruption in government. The period for the publication of this edition coincided with the ‘judgment debt’ saga in Ghanaian politics when the term ‘gargantoa’ became a cliché for extraordinarily massive corruption (designated ‘PHD’ in the cartoon) by some members of the ruling party. Specifically, it refers to the alleged judgement debt of 51 million Ghana cedis incurred by the state in connivance with one Alfred Woyome. The name of the university (University of I care for you) and grading of the issues (degrees) as ‘HND, BA, BSc, M.A., MPhil or the PHD to typify the quantum is hilarious. In panel five titled “Poris Promotions Jump Over”, one finds that politics is perceived to project people into prominence, i.e. to give them undeserved and premature job promotions while other people slave and toil and yet are not promoted if they are not party affiliates. Thus party loyalty is rewarded whereas hard work is not. The result of this injustice and inequity is that competence and efficiency are sacrificed on the altar of political loyalism. By implication, we could be having square pegs in round holes where ill-equipped personnel are rewarded with ill-prepared positions.

Panel two uses satire and humour to play out the game of gargantuan corruption dubbed: “wayogargantoa ampe.” It is about how politicians collude as in a game to commit heinous crimes that border on massive corruption leading to the impoverishment of the ordinary people. What is startling is the conspicuous presence of the cross dangling on the neck of the corrupt politician. In panel two, there is a subtle attempt to mingle politics, corruption and religion. Since the first two themes have been adequately discussed above, more light would be thrown on the

third concept – Religion. Ever since Jesus Christ died on the cross to redeem mankind, the cross has become a symbol of supreme self-sacrifice, symbolizing altruism at its highest, promising salvation. In pursuance of this promise, an innocent person had to undergo excruciating pain. All these considerations have made the cross a symbol of piety and sanctity. In our analysis of the symbolism of the cross, we take into consideration all the above mentioned virtues which make the cross the most eloquent symbol of the Christian faith. For this reason, the cross features prominently in all Christian churches, not forgetting that the Clergy display it conspicuously in one way or the other.

The vital question to ask is: to what extent does the cross bearer in “Akosua’s’ and ‘T-Spoon’s’ cartoons come near these virtues associated with the cross that invariably dangles around his neck? Whiles the Cross Bearer might be using the symbol to blindfold his people thus preventing them from seeing the ominous reality, T-Spoon and his ‘sister’ Akosua feature the cross prominently to expose the lie between appearance and reality. Wherever the cross appears, some foul deed is being perpetuated. When Karl Marx described religion as the “opium of the people”, little did he realize that ideology is another form of opium. Religion, ideology, alcohol, drugs become most efficacious in this regard. This is related to the depiction in panel four where politicians open the lid of their promises and instead of the heaven they promised, they unleash fear, panic and hell in their saucepans scaring the expectant citizenry away. Evil is thus made to look virtuous while virtue is made to look evil. The snake’s venom that symbolizes torture, hardship, fear and panic for the disappointed citizens all point to the fact that the good intentions in the ‘2008 promises’ is nowhere near its fulfillment or the reality in 2012.

Still on the game of “ampe,” it is an all- girls’ game. Besides, it is meant for little girls not adults. So how do the Cross Bearer and the lady qualify to play this game if not for a sinister reason. We are made to understand that it is no ordinary ampe but an ampe with gargantuan proportions associated with the financial saga. So, are they friends or foes? In principle Christianity, symbolized by the cross, preaches modesty and selflessness, ‘thou shalt not ... thou shalt not covet ... your neighbor’s donkey’ (Exodus chapter 20:16-17). In principle Gargantua is cleverer than an armed robber. He does not steal; all he does is to conjure like a magician a chunk of the nation’s cake. However Gargantua believes in sharing his ill-gotten gains with friends who matter.

Panel three – “2nd Wife Age Palaver,” uses humor and exaggeration to once more play out the game of politics in relation to love and the law. It depicts the moral decadence within the society where politicians use state funds to spend on minors. This and the other depictions actually made news as the media alleged that the gentleman in question, a popular politician, had taken an under aged girl as a second wife. The humor and exaggeration in this panel is rather great but it forcefully projects the theme of love, moral decadence, the law and how they play out in politics. The depiction also lashes at old men who marry underaged women for their beauty and youthfulness and the youth who also marry elderly men for financial gains. So the bird chirps that the courts and the paparazzi would tell.

Effects of politicians' corruption on the economy and the citizenry

T-Spoon in panel seven talks about 'the state of kenkey.' The satiric depiction here is that ordinary citizens use large amounts of money to buy only a little. In that, they are unable to afford even a balanced meal of kenkey (boiled cornmeal made into round sizeable balls for consumption) and fish and so are forced by the harsh economic conditions to buy a dwindled size of kenkey without fish. Thus others feed themselves fat with state funds whilst hardworking citizens are rewarded only with kenkey and pepper. The economics in the title, 'the state of kenkey' is sarcastic as it is usually 'the state of the nation's address' delivered by the president. Panel eight "Atemuda Bitters" is on social issues such as the unhygienic conditions for preparing herbal concoctions and demonstrations respectively. The "Atemuda Bitters" depiction draws out the theme of sustenance and the need for survival at any cost. The location for manufacturing the herbal remedy is an obscure 'toilet facility and only God knows what kind of water is used to prepare the mixtures. But all of this points to the fact that the citizens are living in poverty but in spite of their conditions, they need to survive. Thus a natural consequence of the frustration of the citizenry is what has been captured in panel nine – "by force demo," where the demonstrators claim "we are ungovernable." Although, this is given a political slant as being attributed to the opposition loyalists, the question to ask is why are they demonstrating if not for their plight?

The use of Language in Politics

Another notable observation in the depictions has to do with the cartoonists' use of language. Akosua, T'Spoon and the Enquirer invariably use Pidgin English, spiced with bits and pieces of local languages (Ewe, Akan) to communicate. Panel six – "Insults, Lies and Rewards" is on the use of insinuations in politics under the pretext of religion to describe the politics of insults and lies culminating in ministerial appointments or promotions for sycophants. This panel merges local languages (Akan and Ewe), English and pidgin. The choice of this medium can be explained by the need to widen readership to include semi-literates and hopefully some illiterates. Besides, Pidgin English is a language that cuts across all mother tongues. We are not surprised that in Nigeria some academics argue for its adoption as the official language. Although the drawing may be provocative, the language is devoid of insults, aggression and acrimony. The message may thus appear harmless, but to the serious observer it could be subversive. Rarely do we come across vulgar, obscene or swear words in the cartoons.

Discussion

Political cartoons are like the "iron fist in a velvet glove" that hammers the editorial message home in a gentle and humorous way (Kaviti 2006). Panel four uses the velvet glove of satire and humor to unwrap the iron fist of gargantuan corruption dubbed: "wayogargantoa ampe." This is related to the depiction in panel eight where politicians open the lid of their promises and instead of the heaven they promised, they unleash fear, panic and hell in their saucepans scaring the expectant citizenry away. In "wayogargantoa ampe," humor and satire are used to project the theme of politics and corruption as powerfully as a game. This imagery is befitting and concurs with Szabo and Lent's (1994) assertion that cartoons provide instant,

effective and new direction, readily conveyed, immediate communication; food for thought, artistic expression, a visual aid to better understand and clarify current issues. Sometimes, the objects are so incredibly distorted that one has difficulty recognizing them. This is the essence of caricature, which is a willful departure from reality. What is special about them is that the cartoonists invariably select some conspicuous feature or lifestyle of an individual which they distort incredibly through magnification to facilitate identification. The belly of the 'balloon-bellied' man in panel six is exaggerated to connote corruption.

The cartoonists use humour and distortion of facts to craft the social theme that highlights sanitation and demonstrations. This finding is in line with Kaviti's (2010) assertion that cartoons raise the general public's awareness about societal issues nationally and internationally. Similar observations were made by Griffen (2009) when he says that the mass media have the ability to transfer the salience of items on their news agenda to the public agenda and that we judge as important what the media judge as important. They (newspaper cartoons) stimulate the audience to think, reflect, criticize, provide insight, change and even form public opinion (Kaviti, 2010). We are inclined to agree with Kaviti (2010) as the depiction of the insanitary conditions under which the herbal bitters are prepared as well as the portrayal of demonstrators as social deviants stimulate the audience to think, reflect, criticize, provide insight, change and even form public opinion leading hopefully to a change of attitude.

Conclusion

The main methods used by the cartoonists are satire, metaphor, irony, exaggeration, humor and language. As they set the social agenda, they address issues on politics, corruption mingled with religion and their effects on the economy as well as on the day to day living conditions of the citizenry. In terms of the effects of politicians' corruption on the people it emerges that the acts and practices of the former reduce the people to penury and poverty so much so that they are unable to afford a balanced meal a day and have to resort to deplorable illegal activities in order to survive. In terms of their orientation, it is noticed that while the *Daily Guide* cartoonist (Akosua) lashes out at politicians and their insatiable corruption as well as the frivolities that they engage in at the expense of the impoverished people, the *Chronicle's* T-Spoon speaks on social justice and other socio-political issues such as the dynamics of how politicians' political games are played out and how the ripples debase the citizenry to paupers who can barely survive. They draw attention of both the rulers and the ruled to these issues in order to remedy them. For the ruled, the cartoonists aim at raising public opinion, reflection and education on what is going on in the society to prompt the people to demand that the right thing be done by the rulers. The humor alone in the cartoonists of these first two is enough to keep readers glued to the depictions. For the *Enquirer*, the cartoonist does not greatly impress readers either thematically or with regard to his methods. The cartoons are lackluster and do not seem to have any hidden meaning beyond the literal meaning of the text. Notwithstanding, cartoonists are necessary social critics whose works of art cannot be ignored. All in all, it emerges that the cartoonists (Akosua, T'Spoon as well as Politics and Politricks of the *Enquirer*) used the illustrations and the text as powerful transformational instruments (humor, satire, camouflage etc) for warning, criticizing, advising and correcting the ills within the society. Even though the focus of this study has been to examine the methods used by cartoonists to convey the social agenda, the second part of this study will further delve into the mission of the cartoonists and

whether they are achieved. The cartoon industry in Ghana is growing with regard to the methods the cartoonists use, the themes they discuss and the skill, artistry as well as how well they are able to drive home the implications of their messages.

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