

## **Analysis of the Cartoons and Illustrations of Three Artists from the Defunct *Daily Times* of Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*Cartooning and illustration flourished in Nigerian daily newspapers between the 1980s and 1990. The period brought to light great draughtsmen and comic geniuses. Unfortunately, many of these artists and their art remain undocumented. This research investigates the drawings of Jossy Ajiboye, Ola Abayomi and Victor Ekpuk, three avant-garde artists who practiced between the 1970s and the 1990s. Observing the rules of formalism and iconography, this study examined the formal, thematic and technical features of the drawings of the trio. The primary data were elicited from interviews of the artists and direct observations of their cartoons and illustrations. The paper observed the dogged adherence of Ajiboye to realism and his employment of assorted line thicknesses. Ajiboye is also observed to make use of heavy light and dark in a seemingly two-tone modulation. Abayomi is noted for his excellent portrait painting; he uses a combination of hatching and cross-hatching modulation to achieve photorealistic portraits. Ekpuk, the third artist is highly innovative in his use of almost pure abstract forms, and traditional forms and motifs that double as decoration and shading. Ekpuk's drawings indeed challenge our perception of how illustrations and cartooning should be.*

**Keywords:** *Cartoon, Daily Times of Nigeria, Illustrations, Jossy Ajiboye, Ola Abayomi, Victor Ekpuk,*

### **Introduction**

The word 'defunct' in the title of this paper induced the researcher to ask the rhetorical question, why does a present research has to go back in time to discuss the drawings by artists who no longer practice cartooning or illustration. Worst still, the artists under investigation operated within a newspaper house that is now defunct. The reasons are quite enthralling; one of which is the fact that the three cartoonists/illustrators under this study possess stylistic qualities of illustration and cartooning that can be used as case-studies for a sizeable number of cartoon and illustration styles that were part of the different newspaper trends of that period. Secondly, the fact that the *Daily Times*, where they practiced, is defunct and the history of how these artists operated needs to be properly documented. Also worthy of mention is the fact that the three artists under discussion have left cartooning for other forms of art and endeavours. Two of them are full-time studio painters in Nigeria and the United States of America. One has since risen to become a university professor of art history in America. Their experiences as cartoon illustrators can, therefore, be employed to draw a narrative of their evolvments in their present endeavours.

In the 1980s and 1990s, newspaper cartoons and illustrations flourished in an extraordinary tempo in Nigeria. Illustrations and cartoons were featured profusely in the daily newspapers. Three notable events appear to have strongly contributed to the success of this development. First, the period coincided with the evolution and importation of lithographic printing technology in Nigeria. Apple Macintosh computers with their graphical user interface features were also imported in large quantities into Nigeria and the web offset printing machines began to gain popularity. These technologies facilitated the effective rendering and printing of tones, colours and line drawings of cartoons and illustration in newspapers (Afolabi, 2015). Also contributing to the development was that art schools at that time had just begun to graduate artists in great numbers, as a result many daily newspaper houses could boast of two or more artists in their organisations as full-time or

freelance employees. The third reason for the popularity of cartoons and illustrations was the increased political consciousness and aspiration to have a voice in the turbulent political atmosphere occasioned by the military dictatorship at that time.

A considerable part of the period coincided with the time when the country's political power was held by a military ruler, Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, who ruled between 1985-1993. He claimed he had the agenda of handing over power to a civilian government. However, at a point, it became clear to the people that the military head-of-state was dribbling Nigerians and it appeared like he was not willing to hand over power. Nigerians were provoked and had a voice in Nigerian cartoonists and illustrators who yearned to express their displeasure with the government of the day. Cartoons and illustrations, therefore, became one of the few of the several tools that were used massively by the people to lend their voice to the ongoing political impasse. Cartoons, therefore, as conjectured by Cole (1985) and Ganiyu (2019) became the masks behind which the cartoonists indirectly air their personal political opinion or condemnation that would otherwise have been considered confrontational and unlawful, especially under a military government. This article presents the study of selected Nigerian cartoonists and illustrators of the *Daily Times of Nigeria*, who possess exemplary artistic inventiveness in the late 1980s through the 1990s.

### **The Problem**

As eventful as the late 80s and the 90s were for illustrators and cartoonists, it is regrettable, however, that scholars did not adequately document the lives and the works of the period's artists. Among the cartoonists and illustrators that gained popularity at that time are Dele Jegede, Jossy Ajiboye, Laobis Obilonu, Dada Adekola, Boye Gbenro, Muiyiwa Adetula, Aliu Eroje, Moses Osawe, Ebun Aleshinloye, Moses Ebong, Leke Moses, Albert Ohams, Peter Thomas, Peter Rock Onwuka, Yemi Adaramodu, Obe Ess, Sanya Ojikutu, Erapi G. E., Ebun Aleshinloye, Ola Abayomi, Akin Onipede, Victor Ekpuk, to mention some. Regrettably, however, enough scholarly attention has not been paid to the documentation of most of the work of these artists. Many were not even scholarly documented at all. Worse still, some have died and many are no longer practising the art of cartooning. Evidently, future generations will be deprived of the history and records of the artistic inventiveness of these artists. Although efforts were later made by upcoming scholars on cartooning to document the artistic oeuvre of some of the artists, such studies were in retrospect and do not capture the immediate thematic nuances depicted in the art. Therefore, lack the momentary lustre that connects the events to the drawings as capturing the mood of the moment in time.

### **Research Methods**

This employs a descriptive research method. It engages interviews, observation and perusal of the newspaper in its design, to identify the illustrations that exemplify the unique styles and messages of Jossy Ajiboye, Ola Abayomi and Victor Ekpuk who were notable cartoonists and illustrators of the 1980s through the 90s. A large portion of the fieldwork for this study was carried out in 1992 when the author was working on his Master's degree dissertation. At that time, the cartoonists and illustrators discussed were still in the active practice. However, for the reasons to update and confirm some of the author's findings that may have gathered dust, the author crosschecked facts and developments. So, interviews were conducted with the artists. In the years 2016 and 2017, the author discussed with Victor Ekpuk twice at his Eckington studio in Washington DC. Also, in 2016, the author met Ola Abayomi at the College Art Association of America conference, the very occasion that took the author to Washington. The duo relocated from the conference centre to a nearby coffee shop, Connecticut Street, for the convenience of discussions. Jossy Ajiboye, the third artist, lives in Lagos, Nigeria, where the author also reside and strike conversations frequently.

This study peruses the history of the *Daily Times* to locate the narratives of the ingenuity of the artists within the context of the historical excellence on which the *Daily Times* of Nigeria was established. It further identifies the intrinsic qualities and graphic peculiarities of the cartoons and illustrations of Jossy, Ola and Victor of the *Daily Times* in 1992; it examines and compares their drawing styles and

techniques. The socio-political and economic iconology of the cartoons and illustrations were elicited from the drawings and interviewing the artists. This was to reconcile and synthesise the pictures with the veracity of the satirical statements they claim to make.

The artists are considered prolific, great draughtsman and some of the best that the *Daily Times* employed. They possessed unique individual styles that amount to complementary variety within their cluster when they were together in the employment of the newspaper house. Important to note is that this research does not pretend to present them as representational of all the stylistic trend of cartoonists and illustrators of the *Daily Times*. The three artists dictated the trajectory of the cartoon and illustration tradition of the *Daily Times* for more than 15 years. Jossy Ajiboye joined the *Daily Times* in 1974. Ola Abayomi was employed by the newspaper house in 1989, while Ekpuk joined the organisation in 1991. As of 1992, all three were in the service of the newspaper when the main fieldwork of this research was carried out.

### Survey of Literature

To better appreciate the paucity of scholarly attention and literature on cartoons and illustrations in the 1980s and 1990s in Nigeria, it is important to briefly discuss the few works of literature available on the subject. At that time, a few universities and polytechnics offer art at the tertiary level and the schools were just beginning to graduate students in art in relatively sizeable numbers. Therefore, there were not many scholars of art in Nigeria. Apart from a few academic theses such as those of Emi (1980), Oyo (1983), Adeniran (1984), Akande (1992) and a few others in journals and unpublished university research theses in the art schools, four publications stand out. The four publications were published by *The Daily Times* newspaper house. They are on the cartoons of Jossy Ajiboye and Dele Jegede. The ones on Jossy Ajiboye include the *Romance of Life* (1985) and another one titled *Jossy Ajiboye on Sunday*, this has two volumes. That of Dele Jegede (1986) is titled *Kole the Menace*. The publications are selections of cartoons by the artists in the *Daily Times* over a period of time. The publications simply present cartoons without any literary analysis. The audience is left to make meanings from the cartoons as they were originally intended in the newspapers. The publication seems to have been meant for the enjoyment of readers rather than critical academic scholarship.

Much more recently, several scholars, though still relatively small in number, whose interest in cartoon transcends the thematic and pictorial characteristics of cartoons to the investigation of its capacity to serve as a measure of popular opinion to its use as an instrument of setting social agenda and as an evidential source for historical narratives. Some of the scholars include Jimoh (2010) who worked on the roles of editorial cartoons in the democratisation process in Nigeria. He surveyed the political landscape of Nigeria between 1983 and 1999, focusing on the cartoons of Jossy Ajiboye, Adeboye Adegbenro and Akin Onipede. He concludes that the cartoon played a critical and documentary role during the period. Recently, in 2020, at a conference in Chicago, the author witnessed Jimoh (2020) presenting a paper on the possibility of the use of archival cartoon and illustrations as evidential material in the authentication of history. Saniet *al* (2012) surveyed 50 cartoons of the *Daily Trust* and the *Vanguard* between the period 2007-2010 to prove cartoon as a potential tool for reorientation and set the social agenda through repetitions and continual emphasis. Mohammed (2014) examines the effectiveness of cartoons in the Nigerian print media. He notes that although cartoon is a means of recreation and may mistakenly and easily pass as 'trivial,' they relay very crucial messages that can only be passed across under the guise of cartoons. This, he observes, was especially so during the military regimes in Nigeria. Also, in 2014, Adesanya and Falola (2014)<sup>1</sup> wrote on the personage and works of art of Dele Jegede, they discussed in details his current paintings as well as his cartoon strips when he was at the *Daily Times* of Nigeria. Jimoh (2019) and Salisu and Tairu (2016) are among the scholars whose work feature cartoons in Nigerian dailies. The authors studied the use of satire as a form of imagery to depict the socio-political situations in cartoons; they

observe that the images of the cartoons in Nigerian daily newspapers depict cruelty, brutality, corruption, failure and suffering, to mention just a few.

The work of Jewell (2016) is remarkable in the study of Victor Ekpuk, one of the artists under this investigation. Jewell studied the embedded *nsibidi* inscriptions and characters in the cartoons of Victor Ekpuk between 1989 and 1998. The period covered by Jewell's research was when Ekpuk was an artist in the employment of the *Daily Times*. The work attempts to link the early cartoons of Ekpuk *nsibidi* symbols, thereby establishing the possibility that Ekpuk started with *nsibidi* symbols as far back as his days at the *Daily Times*. The present research on the thematic and graphic features of the cartoons of Victor Ekpuk and two other cartoonists and illustrators of the *Daily Times* avails readers the pleasure of interacting with the cartoons and illustrations of the artists.

A much recent publication on Victor Ekpuk is a comprehensive one; the entire volume is dedicated to Ekpuk. The publication, titled *Victor Ekpuk: Connecting Lines Across Space and Time* (Falola, 2018), is a collection of writings from esteemed scholars of art history on the life and art of Victor Ekpuk. Notable among the collection's contributors is Okediji (2018). Perhaps no one is likely to understand the development and evolvement of Victor Ekpuk's art better than Okediji. Okediji taught Ekpuk all through his university days and, indeed, he was Ekpuk's main teacher and mentor in his years 3 and 4 - the final years when Ekpuk specialised in painting. This article stands bold to say that Okediji is one of those who strongly mentored Ekpuk in becoming what he is today. The author says this audaciously because he was a year behind Victor Ekpuk in the same school and studio. In his writing, Okediji equates the process of the performative art of Ekpuk to the spontaneity and extemporisation that characterise the scribbling of a playing child in the sand. He also observes that Ekpuk's performative paintings create a dialogic experience where the painter engages the painting in the process of execution and enjoys it for as long as it lasts, but the engulfing memory of it persists ever after.

Filani (2018) associates the evolvement of Ekpuk's art with his attendance of the Obafemi Awolowo University (Ife Art School) background and his experiences in the school with the *onaism*. An art concept and movement which employs indigenous Yoruba forms and motifs in art. In her essay, Adesanya (2018) envisions Ekpuk as a 'cryptographer' and an 'image scribbler.' She considers him a cryptographer because of his deep understanding of the cultural *Nsibidi* symbols and his ability to extemporise a once-sacred artistic form into canvas drawing. Again, she considers Ekpuk as an image scribbler because of the image status and transition he bestows on what ordinarily is writing. However, much earlier than all these writings, Akande (1992) is perhaps one of the earliest writers to observe that Victor Ekpuk's drawings and illustrations, if framed up, could as well serve purely aesthetic functions, detached from the stories they originally elucidate. He points out that the illustrations have inherent individual stories devoid of any accompanying stories.

### **Theoretical Framework**

For the most part, this study is concerned with the formal features of the illustration and cartoons of the artists under investigation; this study therefore, strongly inclined to adopt the formalism theory in the interrogation of its data. The study delves into the dissection of elements such as line, shading, pictorial elements, composition, shape and texture, which are all fundamental ingredients of formalism (Gocsik and Adan, 2019). Formalism is indeed a theory of art that attempts to define what a work of art is as different from what it is not. However, without mentioning it, this research will engage with the analysis of the works of the artists under this study bearing in mind a subliminal conception that illustrations should ideally be realistic. Rather than praise its preconception, it considers deviation from the norms an innovation. It is this researcher's opinion that such innovations are welcome as they usher in the evolvement of new traditions.

In the process of analysis, this paper might, inadvertently, transit from formalism to iconography and from iconography to iconology. Of a truth, there is a thin line between these theories. A description of the formal features of a piece of art, especially such as the one discussed in this paper, without

some references to iconic forms and their socio-political and economic meanings may appear inadequate. References made to iconography and iconology are, therefore, not totally unavoidable.

### Analysis

#### A Brief History of the *Daily Times* of Nigeria

A brief historical background of the *Daily Times* of Nigeria becomes necessary to profile the history of the newspaper organisation where the three artists worked. The *Daily Times* was established in 1926 (Olagunju, 1996). It was originally a private newspaper, a brain conception of Messrs. V. B. Osborne, L. A. Archer, R. Barrow and Adeyemo Alakija in June 1925 in Lagos. Its founders conceived the newspaper as one that should not be touched by the various politicking and agitation for self-government and other nationalist activities that were the concern of the media at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Nigeria (Uche, 1989). The founders aimed at tailoring the newspaper to take after the *Times of London*, the successful British newspaper based in London, and it was to be read by "serious-minded persons" (Awogbemila, 1991). Indeed, the colonial government considered the paper "responsible" for its non-partisanship (Akpo, 19865).

The newspaper was a four-page column newspaper. The printing house was at 172, Broad Street, Lagos, and Mr Ernest Ikoli was its founding editor. On the first of June, 1926, an edition of the daily newspaper (a tabloid) sold for one penny per copy (Awogbemila, 1991). It had a four-page column with the name *The Nigerian Daily Times*. The establishment of the *Daily Times* was timely in that at the time of its establishment, the British colonial government was planning to scrap its overseas foreign news service in Nigeria (Awogbemila, 1991) and, therefore, Herbert Macaulay's *Lagos Daily News*, another local newspaper publication, would have been left with no keen competition and would have dominated news reportage in the country. However, different from the *Lagos Daily News*, the *Times*, as it was fondly called, was in origin not aimed at antagonising the colonial regime, which was the trend followed by most newspapers in the country at the time. At that time, fighting colonialism was journalism's first task in Nigeria and it was how newspapers got their popularity and acceptance. Interestingly, over time, the *Times* grew to be the largest circulating newspaper in Nigeria because of its objectivity, non-partisanship and political neutrality (Uche, 1989p.101).

The *Daily Times* has passed through a series of ownership changes. According to Akande (1992 p.7), 'in 1935 Mr. R. B. Paul bought it from its original owners but resold it to the *Daily Mirror Group (DMG)* London in 1947.' In 1968, the arrangement to buy the establishment from DMG by the Nigerian Government started on May 30, but this did not materialise until 1974. When the Nigerian government bought over the times, it was one of the most successful private businesses in Africa. Alhaji Ismail Babatunde Jose was the first African managing director of the newspaper. Duodu (2008), quoting Babatunde Jose, states that "the acquisition of the "Daily Times of Nigeria" by the Nigerian Government made it a national newspaper to be sold and distributed nationwide as well as respected and quoted." In the 80s through the 90s, the *Daily Times* newspaper happened to be one of the bestselling newspapers in the country and had in its employment some of the best cartoonists and illustrators in the country.

In 1992, a section of the editorial room of the *Daily Times* office was partitioned and used as the "Art Studio". In this enclosure, there were artists ready to take on the illustration of stories from the editor's desk or are working on cartoons to be published in the days to come. The administrative procedure is that stories were submitted on the Art Editor's desk, which, depending on his schedule, might take up the task of illustrating the story himself or pass it to one of the artists in the studio. He, however, has the final say on the suitability of illustrations. The writers themselves are most of the time not consulted to ask how they want the story or news to be illustrated, indeed, on occasions, writers of stories may not be known to artists. The illustrations were simply generated or derived from the story lines written by reporters or feature writers.

On one of the researchers visit to the ground floor studio of the *Daily Times* in 1992, he asked Ola Abayomi, who was the cartoon and illustration editor of the studio, where he visited, as there was

another studio upstairs occupied by Jossy Ajiboye and one Adewale Adenle (a youth copper), and asked if there were specific style or technique in which the drawing should be rendered. Ola Abayomi explained to the researcher that he allowed artists to express themselves freely but he reserved the right to comment on the suitability of the drawing for the stories. On technical features, such as style, shading technique and others, he leaves the artist to use his/her discretion. In Abayomi's own words "I may comment on arrangements and the use of space and sometimes how well the theme elucidates the story, I seldom question the technique used by the artists." He acknowledged that every artist has his own technical identity; as such, they can express themselves freely. It is difficult to establish if what Ola Abayomi said actually represented the policy of the newspaper house, or it was his personal disposition. But since their cartoons were published daily without objection from the editors and directors of the newspaper house, it may as well be assumed that he was in the right. However, if the styles of Abayomi and Ekpuk, for example, are compared with that of early cartoonists of the *Daily Times*, they show a remarkable difference in style and differ greatly from the realism traditions established by Jossy Ajiboye and Dele Jegede.

### **Analysis of the Cartoons and Drawings by Ajiboye, Abayomi and Ekpuk**

The individual styles of the artists vary widely; even though they worked in the same newspaper house, their works show no appearance of influence on one another. Jossy Ajiboye, the oldest of them in age and the establishment is consistently a realist cartoonist. His figures are usually almost proportionally accurate and his lines are modulated in tune with the fall of light and shade on objects and figures (see plate 1). He draws with a wide variety of lines from very thin to very thick. The shadow areas on his figures are rendered with very thick lines to reflect their positions. It appears the artist executes the lines with sable brushes rather than drawing pens. He uses heavy darks on the hair and draperies. When figures or objects overlap, he employs heavy contrast of light and dark to project visibility. In some of Ajiboye's drawings, the middle tones are intentionally taken out, thus leaving a dark and light heavy, sometimes disturbing contrast. In some other drawings where the middle tones are suggested, they are hatched-in after the mass darks (see plate 2).

Ajiboye's compositions are usually simple, although this is not always the case, but more often, they are composed of three to four figures (plates 1 and 2), concentrated on the foreground are the main characters of the narrative. The themes of Jossy are mostly on politics, but he occasionally does cartoons that tell the story of the intrigues of men as husbands and women as wives.

In the case of Ola Abayomi, basically, his style of cartooning can be categorised into two, the first being the ones with realistic and identifiable faces of personages, and when he does this, the torso is intentionally stunted at the expense of an overblown head (see plate 3). Abayomi employs this style when depicting personages or popular political figures, such that can be recognised by an average newspaper audience. In the drawings in this category, Abayomi combines cross-hatching, hatching, solid darks and the white picture plane as highlights to achieve a strong illusion of depth and reality. He employs this unique style by oscillating the dark with heavy cross-hatching, the middle tone with a little bit of cross-hatching and more of hatching and then transit these hatches into plain picture plane; a remarkable technique which the artist used to create strong three-dimensionality. In the second category of his style (see plate 5), the shading techniques are almost the same with that of the first category, except that sometimes in the execution of this style, he employs solid darks (see plate 5); the figures are totally comical and obviously the creation of the artist. In his drawings with this style, the figures appear comical and have no resemblance to any known person. His compositions are simple and concentrated on the actors in the narrative and, sometimes, just a single figure. The themes of Abayomi's cartoons vary; they cover politics, economics, social life, education but rarely purely comical.

Victor Ekpuk, the third artist uses a style that is more difficult to characterise. It appears his drawing style does not suit what one may perceive as a regular illustrator's style. The drawing style and techniques vary depending on the subject of the drawing. Sometimes he employs only extreme dark

and light to achieve his aim (see plate 6), and at other times, he adopts the cross-hatching and hatching, in combination with mass darks, to create three-dimensionality (see plate 8). One inventive feature of many of his drawings is the use of decorative motifs to pattern and, at the same time, to serve as shading or tone on the drawings (see plates 9). His compositions vary from realism to semi-abstract to almost abstractions (see plate 6). The themes of his works cover religion, culture, socio-economic life, education but rarely politics. However, for the reason of compactness, the illustrations of Victor Ekpuk analysed in this essay fall into two categories. The categorisation is based on the artist's use of drawing elements to achieve three-dimensionality. The first category is the drawings with hatching, cross-hatching and solid darks, and the second category is the drawings with hatching, cross-hatching, solid darks combined with decorative motifs. In the next section, this paper will carry out the thematic and formal analysis of the cartoons and illustrations of the artists. Jossy Ajiboye, the artist in this consideration, is the producer of the cartoon in plate 1. The cartoon shows two young children discussing in a setting that appears like a home, there is a blind and a television in the background. The children comment on the 'Better Life for Rural Women's programme of the Ibrahim Babangida regime in Nigeria. It lampoons the popular social welfare programme as more of a mantra than reality. Huge money was spent on it but the results were not seen nor felt. Worse still, the office of the wife of the military ruler was in charge of the programme. Many Nigerians, Ajiboye inclusive, saw the programme as a means to siphon tax payers' money by greedy rulers.

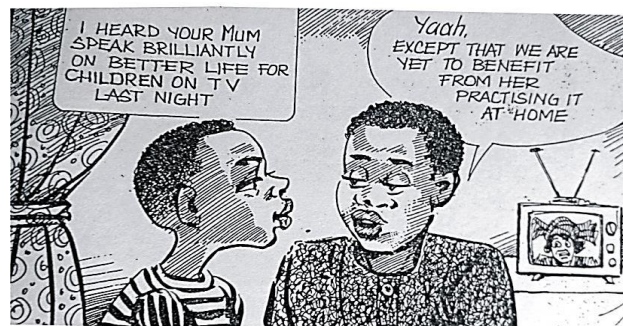


PLATE 1, Artist: Jossy Ajiboye, Title: Better Life Programme, Medium: Pen and Ink, Size: 7cm. x 12cm.

As usual with Ajiboye, the composition of the drawing is simple, with just two main figures. The figures are proportionally accurate and are placed in the foreground. They do not possess much comical appearance. The lines appear more likely from sable brushes than pens. The artist employs thick and thin brush lines to delineate the dark sides of the figures from the light areas. He employs the hatching shading technique throughout and incorporates surface motifs to depict realistic patterns on the draperies.

In plate 2, Ajiboye depicts a rural farmer on the left-hand side of the picture, facing the picture of the then head-of-state, President Ibrahim Babangida. The farmer appears very wretched; he has a machete under an armpit and a hoe in one hand. The farmer is depicted pleading with the president that he should also consider that rural men are equally suffering as the women. This picture speaks the mind of rural men who implored the government to consider their plight, just like it had established the 'better life for rural women' programme which catered to the basic needs of rural women.

The figure of the farmer is in a profile, this time appears very comical. It will be observed that a similar pattern can be observed in Ola Abayomi's drawings. He also depicts unimportant figures with strong comical features. The figure of the president in this drawing is realistic and indeed a portrait of the president. This drawing style is also observable in Abayomi's drawing, plate 3.



**PLATE 2,** Artist: Jossy Ajiboye, Title: *Why not Better Life for Rural Men?* Medium: Pen and Ink, Size: 7cm. x 12cm.

Plate 3 is a cartoon drawing by Ola Abayomi; it is a social commentary on the activities of Dele Jegede, a renowned Nigerian artist who was at that time working on the restructuring of the *Society of Nigerian Artists* (SNA), a society to which Jegede himself belong. The story that inspired this drawing is the laudable efforts of Dele Jegede, the president of SNA between the early 1990s to 2005, who greatly transformed the artists' society into one envied by all.

The drawing style used by Ola Abayomi for this drawing falls into the first category of the two drawing styles, the author observed him use frequently. It can be observed in the drawing that the personality of Dele Jegede is identifiable, but his torso and other parts of the body are rendered stunted, thus making the entire figure look comical. A complete comical style is used for the two figures behind the figure of Jegede. Abayomi does this to less-important figures in his cartoons. In the illustration, Dele Jegede is depicted executing a painting on a canvas mounted on an easel. Behind the drawing of Jegede are two stunted totally comical figures, that appear intentionally hastily sketched, to create an illusion of depth as they are far off, further enhancing the atmospheric effect on them. The figures are drawn with astonishment on their faces as they observe and wonder what Jegede is doing to the image of the 'SNA' on his canvas. The on-lookers, attempting an interpretation of Jegede's painting, interchangeably pass several comments: "Looks like cubism!" "No, no, no, it's more like futurism!" "It's, Em... Impressionism." "Arrh! It is surrealism!" And finally, the Jegede figure replied emphatically, to correct the figures, by saying: "No way! It is dynamism."



**PLATE 3,** Artist: Ola Abayomi, Title: *Dele Jegede and the Society of the Nigerian Artists (SNA)*, Medium: Pen and Ink, Size: 10 cm x 18cm.

Another of Abayomi's cartoon similar in style with that in plate 3 is in plate 4. In plate 4, Abayomi depicts the erstwhile military head-of-state of Nigeria, President Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, in his military regalia; in one hand, Babangida stretches out a piece of paper on which his paramount agenda is written. It reads *economic reconstruction, political re-orientation, social justice*. The picture appears to be an artistic soliloquy by Abayomi. Without writing the message in the balloon, it seems to ask the question of how far has these items on the agenda been realised by General Babangida.



**PLATE 4**, Artist: Ola Abayomi, Title: General Ibrahim Babangida's Political Agenda, Medium: Pen and Ink, Size: 15cm x 21cm.

The Cartoon in Plate 5 by Abayomi depicts a robust figure wearing a cap on which the inscription "Gov" is imprinted. The inscription is an indication that the figure satirises the governors of various states in Nigeria. The robust figure is shown large, standing tall and holding a sceptre of office; its overblown image covers up the small figure of the deputy governor standing behind. The picture lampoons the overbearing office and powers of the governors over the position of their deputies. At that time in Nigerian politics, the deputy governors were rendered redundant and over-shadowed by the governors in most of the federating states of Nigeria.

The style used in this cartoon falls in the second category of Abayomi's cartoon and illustration styles. The governor figure bears no resemblance to any known Nigerian governor; it is indeed very comical and is not meant to be a portrait. It is simply meant to be comical. In the artist's usual manner, cross-hatching and hatching shading techniques are employed.



**PLATE 5**, Artist: Ola Abayomi, Title: Governors Overshadowing their Deputies, Medium: Pen and Ink, Size: 7cm. x 12cm.

The third artist, Victor Ekpuk has a radically incomparable style with the first two artists. Victor's drawing in plate 6 comments on the social life in Lagos, Nigeria. The drawing is a strong semi-abstract and strictly speaking, it may not pass as a conventional illustration. Little wonder, Victor Ekpuk himself corroborated this assertion that he tries to draw his illustration just like the subject of his canvas paintings (Okediji, 2017). In plate 6, the artist deliberately uses up the entire picture plane. The covering up of the entire picture plane in itself echoes the congestion and chaotic struggle for space in Lagos; the very message of the painting. In the backgrounds, there are skyscrapers, rendered in linear forms, a drawing technique extemporised to show the distant location of the buildings in the picture. The next set of skyscrapers is rendered in solid white over blacks, which puts them in the middle ground of the painting. At varying intervals within the buildings are square-like cells with the

images of people squatting with their necks, waist and knees bent to be able to occupy the spaces. This actually characterises the living unavailability of accommodation space to live in Lagos, and when people find a space to live in, it is usually terribly small. In the foreground of the picture are drawings of people struggling to board a *molue*<sup>1</sup> bus, a popular commercial bus and a popular means of transportation in Lagos. In the buses, one can see more passengers standing than ones sitting. The bus-stop shows more people waiting endlessly for the buses to come. In the picture, amidst the congestion and confusion is an exquisite three-seater limousine moving majestically through the crowded street. Depicted in the car is just one 'big man'<sup>2</sup> sitting in a corner and having all the room within the luxury car to himself, while a host of others struggle outside for a chance to stand in a *molue*. The message here is while some live-in luxury, many live in abject poverty, even in the same neighbourhood. The illustration captures the wide social stratification; the hallmark of a capitalist living that pervades Lagos.



**PLATE 6**, Artist: Victor Ekpuk, Title: *Congestion in Lagos*, Medium: Pen and Ink, Size: 10 cm. x 18 cm.

In another illustration by Ekpuk (plate 7), the drawing depicts the debauchery of Lagos social life. In the picture, a woman is drawn seated but crouching, and beside her is a can on fire; she is cooking a meal right outside on the streets. Beside her are two children and in the foreground is another one playing. This picture speaks volumes in the narrative of the social structure in Lagos and it is a pictorial example of the several families living under overhead bridges and on the streets in Lagos. The children are nude, with big heads and very slim bodies, a strong indication that they have kwashiorkor. In the background, at the top are skyscrapers signifying that the location of the family under the bridge is right in the heart of the city. The drawing is another social satire resulting from economic depression and, therefore, blatant social class stratification in Lagos in particular and Nigeria as a whole. The picture also speaks to the narrative of pathetic poverty and the accommodation problem in Lagos.



**PLATE 7**, Illustration, Victor Ekpuk

This paper intends to carry out one more analysis of Victor's drawings in which, the author is particularly impressed at the masterful compositional ingenuity and masterful cross-hatching shading displayed by the artist. Perhaps the author is in love with the emblematic African arts ensemble in the picture. The drawing (see plate 8) is an illustration of a feature story about culture.

Ekpuk combines a variety of techniques; he demonstrates a mastery of the use of solid darks, hatching, cross-hatching, thick and thin lines. With the addition of traditional motifs, a feature that the paper opines that he learnt from the *Ona* group (Filani, 2018). He has been able to put the motifs into conceptual use by utilising them to achieve solidity and the characteristic decorative patterns found on Yoruba woodcarvings and batik cloths.

It is important to note that the forms depicted in plate 8 include identifiable traditional forms that have been established as cultural icons. At the lower part, on the extreme left-hand corner of the picture is the representation of Yoruba *opon* Ifa (divination tray). The top section of the *opon* Ifa, the part captured in the illustration bears the representation of *oju* Esu, which is usually located at the *oju opon* (Pogeson & Akande 2011). The *oju* Esu is iconologically emblematic of the of the mythological relationship between Ifa and Esu (Akande 2020). Another iconic figure is placed directly over the *opon* Ifa. This is the *ekpu* figure; a representational wood carving of ancestral figures among the Oron people of the Akwa Ibom state of Nigeria (Eyefoki 2004). On the lower right-hand side of the same picture are the depictions of two *akwaba* dolls. *Akwaba* dolls are wooden images used among the Fante people of Ghana as idealistic representation of beauty for young women and an attraction of fertility for pregnant and newly married women. Apart from the iconic images found in plate 8, the artist also utilized iconic traditional motifs from Yoruba tie-dye batik in plate 9 (Areo and Kalilu 2013). The usage of traditional forms and motifs as central images or tonal values in the illustrations of Ekpuk's are signatures of his drawings.

As earlier pointed out, another illustration of Ekpuk that bears decorative motifs in place of shading is plate 9. The picture on this plate is that of an under-aged girl who probably had an unwanted pregnancy. The upper part is liner semi-abstracted forms of people forming a crowd, the crowd themselves form a tone in the shading extemporisation. At the top central position is a large circle achieved by leaving out white space in the middle of the series of lines that make up the crowd. At the lower end of the picture plane, Ekpuk employs sumptuous traditional motif decorations in solid black and white to serve as the background for the figure.



**PLATE 8**, Artist: Victor Ekpuk, Title: African Cultural Images: Divergence and Overlaps, Medium: Pen and Ink, Size: 7cm. x 12cm.



**PLATE 9**, Artist: Victor Ekpuk, Title: Underage Pregnancy, Medium: Pen and Ink, Size: 10 cm. x 15 cm.

## **Conclusion**

Clearly, the three artists presented have their individual styles which are distinct from one another. The compositions of Jossy Ajiboye and that of Abayomi are usually simple, not entailing more than a few protagonists in the foreground of the drawings. Ekpuk sometimes equally approaches his composition with similar simplicity, but in most cases, he creates much more complex compositions that include city crowds, onlookers or passive audience who simultaneously serve as the background of the composition. At times, the crowd in Ekpuk's drawings is subdued in the background, appearing like surface embellishments than human beings as exemplified by the picture in plate 9.

Of the three artists, Ajiboye employs the largest variant of lines. He works from very thick, almost shadow size lines to extremely thin lines. His figures are at all times more realistic and proportionally accurate, they are rarely comical. Ajiboye combines hatching and cross-hatching to achieve the effect of depth in his drawings. In very many cases, he employs mass dark against direct white highlights in a two-tone modulation. Abayomi is a master of hatching and cross-hatching shading technique. He employs various grains of pen strokes to modulate light and dark to achieve an undoubtedly photo-realistic three-dimensionality. Abayomi's patience and mastery of lines set him over and above Ekpuk and Ajiboye in portrait drawing. Looking at plates 3 and 4 he seems to be the best portrait painter of all three. His lines are meticulous, calculated and precisely positioned on figures to portray life-like facial appearances. Ekpuk is a line extemporiser. He uses traditional motifs in the place of known shading techniques to modulate two-dimensional surfaces into three-dimensions. Victor Ekpuk sometimes romanticises his lines, as seen in plate 7, to the extent that they appear like 'the lyrics of music.' The smoke from the fire and the undulations of the bridges in Ekpuk's drawing, in plate 7, emit the rhythm of a musical movement that is almost 'danceable.' It must again be pointed out here that the drawings of Ekpuk are particularly unique in that, though meant as illustrations for stories, they can as well stand independent of the associated stories as decorative pictures.

Arguably, Ekpuk's inclusion of iconic cultural forms and images into cartoons and illustrations has expanded the frontiers of cartoon and illustrative drawings. In times past, such motifs and images are uncommon in cartoons and illustrations. Undoubtedly, Ekpuk's redefinition of the principles of drawing appeals to the viewers' native knowledge. Therefore, the subject matter of his drawings can be understood by the viewers from cultural standpoints.

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**NOTES**

- i. 'Big man' is a local appellation used in referring to very rich people in Nigeria.
- ii. *Molue* buses are large buses, built to commute people *en masse* from one bus-stop to the other in Lagos. It was very popular in Lagos as it was the cheapest means of transportation. At rush hours, it is usually filled from the front doors to the back doors. More and more commuters are admitted into the bus until there is almost no space for movement in the bus. There were usually more people standing than sitting.