rafting a successful witty, satirical political cartoon with only an image in a single pane accompanied by a phrase or a headline caption takes years of practice. Couple these skills with the cleverly indirect ways of Yoruba communication, and you have a consummate political cartoonist like Josy Ajiboye. With deft moves and agile wit, the editorial cartoon was Ajiboye’s épée of choice. Each of his single-panel drawings contains complex overlapping meanings and metaphor, revealing that he is Eshu. Disguised in his Egungun costume, he is the ultimate prankster critiquing modernity. Nigerians love good humor, a well-turned phrase, and biting satire. Indirect criticism in the form of puns, parody, proverbs, and parables is the preferred method for correcting poor behavior, both interpersonally and on a larger sociological and cultural scale. Here I will explore how Josy Ajiboye, in the form of the Egungun, affected the politics and cartooning traditions of Nigeria for approximately forty years, from the late 1960s to the mid 2000s. Further, through this essay I demonstrate that political cartooning has a place within art history because it provides unique glimpse into the psyche of the culture from the insider’s point of view.

As a political cartoonist working in the heady days of the petroleum oil boom in Nigeria between the 1970s and 1990s, Ajiboye excelled at first entertaining his audience by skewering the corrupt official and the wealthy tycoon for overly excessive displays of elitism, and then using his bully pulpit to bare uncomfortable social problems such as the ever-widening chasm between the rich and poor. Through spare imagery, he documented crime, the clash between Christianity and traditional culture(s), the malaise wrought by postindependence dreams that went unfulfilled, and the failure of government to provide basic services to its citizens. Using Western modernity, Ajiboye and fellow cartoonists (including dele jegede, with whom he worked) performed the role of the Egungun of the past for modern Nigerians. Much has been written in Western academic circles about the Egungun: who they represent and how integral they are to Yoruba society. However, not much is understood about how Nigerian cartoonists used the Egungun to perform for their audience, and not much has been written about the mantle and responsibility that is demanded of the cartoonist as Egungun when he performs in public. In exercising his responsibilities as cultural commentator, fear of reprisal was ever present.

The State of Research Concerning Cartooning in Nigeria

In the period since I first presented this material at the 2011 Arts Council of the African Studies Association (ACASA) conference, numerous articles have appeared in print and on the Internet, discussing aspects of political cartooning in Nigeria: Yomi Ola’s Satires of Power in Yoruba Visual Culture (2013) on the works of some of Nigeria’s leading cartoonists had its origin in his 2009 doctoral thesis, Ganiyu A. Jimoh’s The Role of Editorial Cartoons in the Democratisation Process in Nigeria: A Study of Selected Works of Three Nigerian Cartoonists (2011), a book that was similarly based on his 2010 Master of Arts thesis, and others. Over the years, sporadic magazine articles have been written about Nigerian cartoons. Before it folded in 2002, Glendora Review, a literary quarterly, published two articles about the state of Nigerian art and cartooning: “Storm in a Teacup: Artist Josy Ajiboye Looks Back” (Ajiboye 2001) and “The Traditions of Cartooning in Nigeria” (Olaniyan 1997). Since the 1990s, a number of essays, theses, and dissertations have been written about the role of political cartooning within Nigeria. None place exclusive focus upon Ajiboye. In 1983, the Daily Times, a local newspaper, published an incomplete compendium of Ajiboye cartoons; however, this book is not readily available, and neither Ajiboye nor the Daily Times have good archival records of these cartoons. Further research is required if there is ever to be a complete record of his work. Because computerized and digital records are still not commonplace in Nigeria, it is difficult to compile
complete archives for his corpus of work.

Little has been written in Western scholarly journals about the political impact of Nigerian cartoons; more has been written about the various graphic novel and cartooning traditions of South Africa and a number of other African countries. Perhaps the reason for this focus on work arising from South Africa has more to do with this country’s geopolitical standing in the West. Nigeria, despite its oil wealth, is still perceived as one of the more corrupt, mismanaged, underdeveloped “third world” countries. Massimo Repetti notes, “The comic in Africa has always been a child of its time” (2007: 27). He argues that in its first period, between 1960 and 1990, comics traditions, from strips to cartoons and more literary productions, came together to provide a graphic mirror of the political reality of nation building, which in terms of spirit and orientation underpinned the process of Africanizing comics’ subject matter and stories. Cartooning in Nigeria has evolved to include color and computerized technology, and it remains just as popular as cartoons created in the 1970s. Subject matter still includes commentaries on the government and society, and new subjects have added prosaic topics from television and the Internet. It is fair to say that today’s Nigerian cartoon artists draw with an eye towards global reception.

Repetti further states that perhaps the reasons why African comics are not well known outside the continent relate to stereotyped assumptions—assumptions that arise from recurrent themes such as witchcraft, simplistic references that are easily read by lay and academic audiences. I think the opposite is true. Each country in Africa has a complex history and unique political structures that defy generalization. Francophone West Africa cannot be conflated with the former colonies of the British Empire. French-styled colonialism was fundamentally different from British colonial rule and the modern African cultures that evolved under these disparate influences differ in many ways. The tendency has been to simplify Africa into easy categories and binary relationships of advanced cultures juxtaposed with less advanced cultures, Christian versus Muslim or animist cultures, corrupt systems of governance as opposed to a democratic “ideal.”

Though well beyond the focus and scope of this paper, there is another type of cartoon that circulated in Africa: colonial-era cartoons created by European artists. Some of these cartoons were geared to a francophone audience, others toward the anglophone audience. What united these cartoons was their singular theme of highlighting European superiority. They often depicted the African along specific tropes: an apelike subhuman or idiotic flaneur, a cannibal cavorting happily around a bonfire, a witch doctor, or a hopeless, stupid child. Africa was uncivilized, and it could not be modern. However, there was a third type of colonial cartoon that had global appeal; it did not matter where the character went,
they both worked during the 1970s, no one ever knew Ajiboye’s actual birthdate. Ajiboye has said that even he does not know his actual birthdate, but thinks it is ca. 1945. Inaccurate records were commonplace in those days. Nigeria is still not an electronic country where full digital records exist. Josy Ajiboye was born in Erinmope, Ekiti, during British colonial rule in the Western Region, now Ekiti State. Son of a local chief and travelling singer, he had a traditional rural Yoruba upbringing as well as a Christian education. An artistic child, he drew charts for the teachers at the local missionary school.

He began his professional career in 1962, working at Niger Challenge Press, the publications unit of the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), as a trainee artist. The Press produced missionary pamphlets and other materials for the organization (Ola 2013: 134–35). Simultaneously, Ajiboye took art courses at Yaba Technical College, where he learned the art of illustration and creating color separations on one plate (Ajiboye 2001: 118). In 1968, he left the Niger Challenge Press. He was hired by the Daily Times in 1971, at first as an illustrator rather than a cartoonist. By the end of his twenty-nine year career at the Daily Times, he had become a leading cartoonist with an international reputation. For many decades, Josy Ajiboye published weekly cartoons, *Life with Josy Ajiboye* and *Josy Ajiboye on Sunday*, in a number of newspapers that included the Daily Times and Morning Post. He retired in 2006.

Every cartoonist develops a style that is uniquely his. Similarly, every jester and each Egungun develops their unique brand. It was during his work at the Daily Times that Ajiboye honed his style so that it was immediately recognizable. He states that it was in the late 1960s that he learned how to develop his artistic “hand” in this regard. Different in style from his contemporaries, Ajiboye used English to express a concept. He also used the single panel format with a caption that was more commentary than mere title. The image captured the spirit of the character or subject matter succinctly. I suggest he was following the work of 1940s colonial era pioneer cartoonists, such as Akinola Lasekan (1917–1972), better known as “Lash,” who used editorial cartoons to mock colonialism, parody officious British behavior, and prod Nigerians to question their complicity and complacency with the unequal power relationships they endured.

**CARTOONING’S EARLY HISTORY**

*Iwe Irohin Yoruba*, the first indigenous-language newspaper in colonial Nigeria, was established in Abeokuta, Western Region, in 1859. Targeted toward the newly repatriated African diaspora, who were educated and therefore part of the local intelligentsia, this newspaper captured the disillusionment the returnees felt with British governance (Ola 2013: 83). Almost immediately, the newspapers began to criticize colonial rule, its stereotypes, de-risive treatment of the indigenous, and the hypocrisies within Christianity. The *West African Pilot*, founded in 1937, and other early newspapers continued the direct criticism of colonial rule and its supporters—the Nigerian elite indebted to the British (Ola 2013: 65–67). The fact that the European found himself increasingly caricatured led to more censorship of the press. Before Lasekan began working for the *West African Pilot* in 1944, the British had, in 1941, strengthened their censorship laws in a vain attempt to squash growing popular anticolonial discontent.

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3 Josy Ajiboye  
Practice What You Preach  
Source: Ajiboye 2001: 120.

the local audience loved and followed him. *Tintin* was that third cartoon type. Created in 1929 by Belgian artist Georges Rémi (also known as Hergé), *The Adventures of Tintin* featured Tintin and his dog as they had many adventures across the globe. Tintin’s 1930 lark (rewritten in 1931 and again in 1946) was set in the Belgian Congo. In *Tintin au Congo*, racist disrespect reigned supreme in how the African was deliberately portrayed. One of the panels, for example, shows Tintin teaching native children about their Belgian fatherland. Really. Nancy Rose Hunt (2002: 91) argues that to the twentieth-century European colonial, the idea of African modernity was farcical. I argue that Ajiboye and his fellows did not find their desire for modernity a farce. They were not interested in synthesizing colonialist ideology to produce an intellectual space for the “good” semicivilized nonwhite colonial flunkie (Hunt 2002: 117).

**BIOGRAPHY**

I met with Mr. Ajiboye in 2012 and again in 2014. He has an infectious personality; his eyes twinkle as he talks about the cartoons that were such an important part of his life. His age is a mystery—even dele jegede says that at the Daily Times, where...
Lasekan effectively transformed the indirect use of satire innate to his Yoruba upbringing into direct criticism. He used the teaching methods of the talking drum and the Egungun masquerade to create his own drumbeat in the march to independence. His editorial cartoons of the 1940s were one of the instruments used in the movement to gain independence. In the 1970s, Ajiboye adopted Lasekan’s single-panel style and use of plain text within the image. Similarly, Ajiboye synthesized the iconography of the Egungun and Yoruba satire into his work.

It is important to briefly address how integral the masquerade is to our pranksters, a group whose leading rabble-rouser is Ajiboye. He has had a lifetime of experience with and understanding of the key concepts of Yoruba worldview: He knows that the image involves more than the subject; it also refers to the past and cultural memory; and although educated in Christian missionary schools, he is familiar with traditional Yoruba gods.

**THE EGUNGUN**

The Yoruba are prolific producers of the visual arts; the performative components of the masquerades are among some of the most spectacular. Earlier studies by Africanist scholars—Henry Drewal (1978), Margaret Thompson Drewal (1992), Robert Farris Thompson (1984), just to name a few—have documented a number of specific Egungun traditions. The Egungun are masked male dancers who, when fully clothed in the ensemble, take on the spirit of the ancestors they embody. They perform to the accompaniment of drums, praise singers, and most importantly, an attentive, appreciative, and fully engaged audience. A key aspect of the performance is direct communication with the audience, celebration, and the idea of spectacle; the emphasis is on the teaching story being told. Masquerades not only entertain, they exercise social control while negotiating with the existing power structure, be it the oba, colonial officer, or government official (Ola 2013: 31). Even though many of the visual arts have adapted to accommodate colonialism and modernity, the social functions of the masquerades remain. They are still held for important social occasions that include rite of passage ceremonies into adulthood, harvest festivals, funerals and other celebrations.

Yomi Ola (2013) writes that of the three major Yoruba masking traditions—Agbegijo, Gelede, and Onidan—only Agbegijo is wholly satirical. Gelede and Onidan maskers perform traditional rituals in addition to parody, and Onidan maskers play tricks (Lawal 1993: 6). Whereas the Gelede masker plays tribute to women, animals, and gender roles (Drewal 1974: 14), Agbegijo maskers caricature social vices within the community and outsiders, i.e., the non-Yoruba stranger (Ola 2013: 31). Further, because Agbegijo maskers’ concealed identities provided protection against retaliation, it was really the only Egungun who could get away with such criticism. The Yoruba view its members as outsiders and thus human (Adedeji 1969: 61). Foreigners fit into two subcategories. A member of the first is ethnically or closely aligned to the Yoruba worldview and thus portrayed as upholding Yoruba cultural values. The second is the outsider, who would never be considered anything more than a caricature of humanity due to their inability to behave with dignity (Adedeji 1969: 61)—hence, yet another category of masker, the Egungun Oyibo, which was created to parody the European colonizer. Egungun Oyibo and Gelede maskers satirize anyone who apes Caucasian mannerisms (Lawal 1993: 10; Drewal 1974: 17).

Even today, most Yoruba believe that a person must be dignified at all times. Therefore, elders and rulers are particularly expected to be decorous, calm, and never ill-mannered. In traditional Yoruba society, at least prior to the disruption that colonialism brought to existing sociopolitical systems of thought and governance, one of the ways rulers and leaders were held accountable for their behaviors was to publically witness their foibles recreated and ridiculed in Egungun ceremonies. The masquerade is still found throughout Nigeria—indeed, throughout Africa, many ethnic groups use similar public forums to air grievances. Doublespeak is a fine art in Nigeria, a skill that takes nuance and time to learn how to do well. Criticism is almost never direct—it is oblique and is often given in the form of a proverb. Sage proverbs become metaphors; sarcasm, praise, and ridicule are intermingled so skillfully that one has to...
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Listen carefully to understand the double entendre. But, even more to the point, criticism is delivered through an incredible variety of sources: the parent, any elder, folk tales, adage, and the Egungun prankster. On the surface this doublespeak looks benign or merely humorous; subtlety is key to good Yoruba satire, and unless given the necessary clues, one can literally miss the point. In other words, the audience must have the “inner-eye,” or oju-inu (Abiodun 1994: 73), to understand the larger moral or ethical message of the joke the artist appears to be telling. For example, one might have witnessed an Egungun ceremony in which an overly officious, rude colonial officer and his wife found themselves being parodied for their foolishness when a masquerader in slapstick aped their clothes, skin color, and supercilious mannerisms. The British colonial officer learned the hard way that direct and open speech was not a successful way to communicate or govern, but that indirect speech (through doublespeak and the use of intermediaries) was much preferred.

In a reversal of power, the Egungun used their authority to censor their communities and thus provided social corrective measures. In addition to rulers or political leaders, other targets of the times included the rich and adulterers. Frequent Egungun themes today include government and military rule, hunger, oil and electricity, greed, corruption, fear, intolerance, and stupidity. The political cartoonist continues the tradition of speaking truth, which has been the role of the Egungun for centuries. In many ways, they are Eshu—messengers, pranksters, and the public’s court jester, alive and well in the newspapers of today.

Ajiboye executes his pantomime in the scenes he creates. The music of the cartoon is the facial expressions, words, and gestures of the subject. Simultaneously, as Egungun, Ajiboye lays bare the inner problems of society, and as journalist, he uses the mask of the “Freedom of the Press” to express himself. But, unlike the Egungun who remain masked, Ajiboye signs his work. It is important to note the complex dance he performs. In our interviews, he reiterates that he does not directly identify his target; rather, he is careful to present a resemblance of his intended target. He relies on the audience to make the connection between the caption, context, and content and the satirical pun he makes. For many Nigerians, the political cartoon is just another Egungun, an extension of an enacted performance, only in print. For the non-Nigerian, the cartoon still performs, the joke is made, but the hidden meaning may not be as easily read. Ajiboye is not just a prankster; he is Eshu.

AJIBOYE IS ESHU

Aigba ire, ka ma gba ibi. (Anything good has some evil in it.) (Lawal 2008: 30)

In the Yoruba cosmos, the world consists of a gourd made of two halves or dualities. The top half of the gourd represents the spirit world—maleness—while the bottom half represents femaleness and the physical world (Lawal 2008: 26). Eshu or Eshu-Elegba, a god, is the divine messenger between these two halves: between man and the gods as well as between the pantheon of Yoruba orishas and Olodumare, the supreme being. Eshu, a trickster or provocateur, reflects Yoruba cosmology and the belief that the real, physical world is really composed of dualities such as male/female, good/evil, white/black, spirit/matter, the visible/invisible, and sacred/profane (Lawal 2008: 24). It is through this duality, the idea of twoness, or Nature’s way of providing balance, that Eshu becomes important in Yoruba cosmology. Like the Greek god Hermes, who inverts or upends any situation into its opposite condition, Eshu intentionally sows seeds of discord, upends a positive situation, and makes enemies of friends, just so that he can later play the mediator. Literally the orisha of crossroads, Eshu becomes both friend and enemy, life and death, prosperity and poverty. In Ajiboye’s case, Eshu is both the court jester and mischief maker who has the ear of the king or government official. If a man offends the gods, it is really Eshu who instigated the cycle of appeasement sacrifices meant to feed the [hungry] gods (Westcott 1962: 337). But, despite all these seeming paradoxes, most Yoruba believe there is no such thing as pure evil—there is always a good that emerges from the ashes.

Completely enculturated in the Yoruba worldview, Ajiboye does not use deceit or cunning; rather, he uses the Egungun to highlight social inequities and abuse of power. I contend Ajiboye deploys the prankster element within Eshu. Additionally, he is a prankster

Josy Ajiboye
Sugar Daddy
Source: http://www.africa.wisc.edu/politicalcartooningafrica/country_pages/Nigeria/index.html

5 Josy Ajiboye
Sugar Daddy
Source: http://www.africa.wisc.edu/politicalcartooningafrica/country_pages/Nigeria/index.html
because he deploys classic indirect Yoruba methods of ridicule and satire to expose man’s foibles. Unlike Eshu, he does not sow chaos; instead, he demonstrates man’s foolishness. He delights his audience with his subtleness on one hand, but bold satire in other instances where subtlety would be lost on the politician. He uses the political cartoon to highlight the fact that the portrayed topic represents a crossroad—will the problem resolve itself or become exacerbated by his retelling? Here is a double irony. Ajiboye uses the freedom of the press as his egungun, his mask to don yet another mask to express himself (artistic license) and not face reprisal. In fact, depending on the cartoon, Ajiboye performs as the Yoruba Egungun Agbegijo—the special category of masker who has the mandate to criticize. In other instances, he dons the Egungun Onidan when making prankster tricks, conducting parody or social commentary (Lawal 1993: 6).

WHEREFORE ART THOU, ART HISTORY?

Art history in general, and African art history in particular, has typically ignored the editorial cartoon, despite the fact that this art form often powerfully and accurately captures the pulse of its community. In addition, editorial cartoons offer profound insight into cultural belief systems and expose underlying social, ethical, and moral problems. It was not until the latter part of the twentieth century that some of the artificial barriers that separated the fine arts from the new media (such as film, graphic arts, and photography) started to tumble. While the discipline of art history now tends to ignore the rigid high-art/craft divide, remnants of this division probably lie at the root of why the political cartoon does not merit the same level of analysis as the work of a studio artist. Tracing backward in art history, Francesco Goya (1746–1828) is one of the few artists whose satirical work, Los Caprichos, art history fully acknowledges. Centuries later, Goya’s biting social commentary and imagery continue to be reinterpreted in the works of contemporary artists; Yinka Shonibare, for example, has mined the ideas Goya presented. Like Shonibare, contemporary African artists also mine their culture, sifting through it to develop particular storylines, in addition to appropriating drawing styles from the West as they create work specific to their culture or nation. They rework the recurrent narratives so that parallels are drawn between the injustices and inequities of colonialism and the grim realities of modern nation building.

Our Egungun made political cartoons intended first for the Nigerian audience and then, by extension, the rest of the continent. Clothing, physical features—in other words, the iconology—reflected the Nigerian community more than a Western-styled cartoon. It is critically important to understand and accept that Nigerian political cartoons are not Africanized Western cartoons, but a new, unique form of expression that not only draws from Western and indigenous idioms but transcends both systems of aesthetic sensibilities to become its own modality. Art history as a discipline of study maintains categories that are neatly defined and delineated. So, if an African work cannot be clearly defined by the criteria of “postcolonial angst,” “pan-African Modernism,” or a twenty-first century version of “universalism,” new work being created in countries such as Nigeria is omitted from the discourse. It is my premise that there simply cannot be a singular African modernism; fifty-five countries on the continent make that an impossibility.

INTERTEXUALITY

For a cartoon to be successful, both Ajiboye and his audience must have insight into the subtleties underlying the subject being discussed. The viewer must have the inner eye, or oju-ina, to apprehend the meanings of our prankster’s strong visual images that capture the many-layered spirit of a message within one panel. Yet,
on several concurrent levels, the seasoned reader who has greater knowledge of Nigerian visual culture (whether innate or learned) appreciates both the overt and the nuanced message. In other words, this degree of discernment is accessible once the reader becomes aware of the multiple juxtapositions of Western and non-Western systems of knowledge. Just as the Egungun trickster’s costume swirls open in his dance to reveal more essential and profound layers of his story’s meaning, the visual layers of the editorial cartoon offer insight into the subtleties hidden within the commentary. For example, a lavishly dressed individual is widely understood to be a wealthy person, but an elaborately embroidered outer robe, such as an agbada, might indicate a Yoruba man of high social standing in addition to wealth. The gobi or fila, a hat, is another example of subtlety and nuance that only an insider can readily discern several concurrent levels of meaning. The fila worn with the agbada may just look African to the outsider, but the way it is worn, its shape, and how it is drawn tells the audience if the wearer is Hausa, Igbo, or Yoruba. The non-African sees wealth portrayed, but misses the nuance layered within the image. Similarly, an image identifying particular Nigerian modes of transportation, such as a danfo (a minivan) or a motorcycle taxi (an okada), does not bring to the outsider the same level of mirth and derision felt by the Nigerian who has been at the mercy of their drivers. As Egungun, Ajiboye serves a number of roles in society—one role is to criticize, and another is to entertain. Just as the masked Egungun’s identity is known within his community, the drummers and singers who accompany the Egungun can be understood to be the words in Josy Ajiboye’s cartoon panels—indeed, the drummers and the words direct the Egungun and Ajiboye around in their dance, inviting the participants to think more deeply about the message being conveyed.

AJIBOYE’S WORK AT THE DAILY TIMES

There were other Nigerian artists working as editorial cartoonists at the same time as Josy Ajiboye. They included Ayo Ajayi, dele jegede, Cliff Ogiugo, and Bisi Ogunbadejo; their work in the 1970s through 1990s made them pioneers. The newspapers that many of these artists worked for included the Guardian, the Daily Times, Punch, and Concord. The next generation of cartoonists emerged during the latter part of the twentieth century; however, most still draw heavily upon the work of the cartoonists of the 1970s–1990s, with the additional twist of Western modern cartooning styles. Ajiboye credits Akinola Lasekan (Lash), the first Nigerian cartoonist who worked during the transition from colonialism towards independence, as his primary influence. In the beginning of his tenure, the editorial cartoons that Ajiboye drew at the Daily Times were a mix of political and social commentary. Gradually, as the economic prosperity generated by Nigerian oil exports faltered, corruption soared, and governmental provision of basic necessities such as potable water, electricity, and roads became extremely problematic. Ajiboye traced these ills directly to both the military and civilian governments.8 He used familiar tropes of the generalized “them,” which included the iconic military despot, the berobed wealthy tycoon, the oversexed woman/schoolgirl, and the hapless individual. Other topics frequently included armed robbery, bribery, and problems with traffic jams. All of the tropes were easily recognizable for the unspoken intended target, but even more importantly, the audience could identify themselves as part of the prank. I agree with Ola’s conjecture that when the Daily Times became government owned in 1975, the barbs were not as direct or as pointed (2013: 100). Unlike the Daily Times, Punch was privately owned, and thus would level more acerbic assaults against the military leaders. Like jegede, who developed serial characters such as Kole the Menace, Ajiboye similarly created a serial character, Little Joe, who appeared in the Daily Times (Medubi 2009: 202).

Both comic strips, which followed the escapades of two boys, served as Nigerian versions of Aesop’s Fables. Nigerian folktales and folklore serve many purposes. They socialize the community toward acceptable behaviors in addition to transmitting religious
and moral beliefs. The pedagogic nature of morality tales also serves the purpose of demonstrating consequences of human frailties, or deceit. So while the tortoise, a frequent Yoruba trickster figure, occasionally outwits his adversary, more often than not, his machinations do not succeed, his deceit fails (Owomoyela 1989: 165). Thus, while Ajiboye used the single-panel format to tell a fable, I suggest that the complex layerings of image, iconicity and text actively plumb cultural memory. Figure 4, *The Real Father*, for example, not only contains multiple narrative scenes within a single frame, it also refers to events in the past. Most importantly, a trick is about to occur. The calendar tells Ajiboye’s audience that time has passed; the way the woman is dressed and her age also confirms to the viewer that she is a mistress. If she was a wife of either of the men shown in the background, there would not be a fight.

In the following analysis I look at four specific topics: social issues, military rule, corruption, and ineptitude. Within the topic of social issues lies the uneasy terrain of hypocrisy, gender politics, infidelity and income disparity. Figures 3 through 5 pick at the scab that covers the ideal Nigeria—at least, the image that its inhabitants wish to portray to the outside world. Nigeria’s problematic political past and military rule is the second area I explore in Figures 6 through 8. Corruption (Fig. 9) and failure (Figs. 10–11), which became rich, neverending fodder for the political cartoonist, respectively form the third and fourth areas. These themes underscore some of the variety of dances our Egungun had to perform.

**SociAl Issues**

Like all political satirists, and with the barbed wit of an Egungun trickster, Ajiboye tackled hypocrisy and complained about double standards. Figure 3, *Practice What You Preach*, issued in the *Sunday Times* in 1974, pictures two men wearing clerical collars. One of the men is holding a poster that exhorts him to “Practice What You Preach” as he exclaims to the second clergyman, “Look at what some naughty fellow pasted on my pulpit!” The bombastic clergyman, we are to assume, has, like so many Nigerian pastors, preached against extramarital sex and now finds himself ridiculed for his polygynous practices—adulterous by strict Christian dogma. Digging deeper into the layers of meaning this cartoon presents, one must take into account that in a polygamous society, Nigerians understand the roles of multiple wives, the Church (it really does not matter which denomination), and extramarital sex. Therein lies the conundrum: If a man has multiple wives, how can he be a Christian and not be considered an adulterer? If the clergyman preaches against adultery, but lives in the proverbial glass house, he cannot throw stones. What gives this cartoon its wide appeal is that it requires no insider knowledge to appreciate the overt meaning but, in Nigeria, where polygamy exists, the cartoonist is taking on an even more subtle irony and also arguing that with multiple wives, the husband should not have the need to stray outside his compound and, on an even deeper level, pointing out the irony of a Christian husband wanting the same benefits of Muslim or traditional non-Christian men who have no such moral dilemma because each can have multiple wives.

As Egungun, Ajiboye addresses Nigeria’s obsession with male children, one of the major unspoken problems of all classes of Nigerian society, but particularly within the wealthy, educated elite. Nigeria, across all ethnic groups, is overwhelmingly patrilineal and, because girls are not as valued, the viewer is expected to assume that the battle in Figure 4 is over a male child. Unpacking a Nigerian cartoon is a complex task. Ajiboye rarely uses “pidgin” English, just as the Egungun does not play down to his audience—he respects that they understand the drumbeat. *The Real Father* depicts two men fighting. In the background, objects fly through the air, a table has suffered, and an overhead light bulb is broken. This is a fight to the finish, and Ajiboye wants us to know that both men are desperate to win. But, quietly in the foreground, seated at a table are two women having a conversation. The older woman, the mother, dressed in traditional clothing, holds a baby, and the other woman appears to be answering a question. It appears that
the younger woman is telling her mother that she is not certain who the real father is, and that she is checking the dates to work out her truth. It is obvious to the Nigerian reader that the battle is over who is the progenitor of the male child. The fact that these men know that they are each other’s competition is not the problem. It is also beyond question that this baby is the product of an extramarital affair. One way some women create a permanent attachment to an older, wealthy man is to bear a child. Is this an age-old, universal story? Of course, but it is told in this context with a particularly Nigerian twist.

In *The Real Father*, Ajiboye exposes the fear of the official wife (not pictured) that a young, fertile usurper will destroy the balance of her family and upset the status quo. We as the audience do not need to see the official wife—we know her private pain, and on many occasions have witnessed her public humiliation. Her husband just might be foolish enough to bring another woman and their son into her home. One could argue that Ajiboye is making a reference to the Sarah and Hagar story of the Old Testament. Abraham was desperate for a son to build a nation upon; so, Ajiboye exposes the uneasy relationship between Christian and non-Christian values and juxtaposes monogamy with traditional polygamy. But unlike Sarah, the official wife (felt but not seen in the image) knows the child will never be exiled to the proverbial desert. This young woman and potential interloper plays one lover against the other as she checks the date of conception. Ultimately, she will select the date to catch/trap the more “suitable” and profit-able provider. More to the point, Ajiboye says indirectly, the male child is a commodity to be bought and sold to the highest bidder— the fathers, often older, are in this literal sense pawns and fools because they are so easily manipulated.

In Figure 5, *Sugar Daddy*, Ajiboye depicts a prosperous, balding, middle-aged man strolling along the beach with two young women. We know he is prosperous—note the well-fed, rotund stomach, the cigar and fancy shoes, lace clothing, and heavy jewelry. Thoroughly versed in Yoruba symbols of representation, Ajiboye knows that the audience will use their cultural memory to recognize that the distended stomach directly harkens back to ancient Yoruba iconography, where a rotund stomach demonstrates wealth. It almost seems superfluous for the artist to have included the caption, “I hope you don’t get the idea that we fall for you only because of money,” but he clearly wants there to be no confusion in meaning. Again, the theme is foolishness and narcissism. Perhaps one of these women will be fortunate to give birth to a male child; perhaps she becomes the woman depicted in the previous cartoon. I agree with Tejumola Olaniyan, who writes that at times Ajiboye’s heavy use of words undermined the message of the image, which resulted in an unbalanced cartoon. Neither the image nor the caption is strong enough to stand on its own and therefore they are forced to become conjoined siblings, but not necessarily twin messengers (Olaniyan 1997: 99).

Both *Real Father* and *Sugar Daddy* depict women from a distinctly male point of view. From the 1960s through the 2000s, the period in which Ajiboye was active, women were (and are still) frequently depicted in Nigerian cartoons as either rapacious manipulators or over-sexed seducers of hapless male victims. The female student typically traded sex for a better grade—indeed, Ajiboye created cartoons using this trope. In this, Ajiboye finds good company. Enculturated as a Yoruba, Ajiboye would have been thoroughly versed in its folklore, in which women are frequently stereotypically depicted as either morally licentious and manipulative or greedy. Several tropes dominate: the witch, the harpy wife, the meddlesome relative, the oversexed young lady, and the evil home-wrecker (Okiriguo 2016: 37–39).

It is important to acknowledge that gender bias is endemic throughout Nigeria as a whole, but particularly within the Yoruba patriarchal culture. Nigerian customary laws still prevent women from spousal inheritance and also turn a blind eye to spousal abuse (Okeleye 2015: 95). That Nigerian law does not allow women to enjoy equity in the law is not surprising when women do not receive parity in folklore and proverbs. Across all media, including print, television, Nollywood, radio, and the Internet, women are either erased, marginalized, or paradoxically presented as sainted, postsexual, virtuous mothers.

What is left out of the cartoons are the social concerns that
women have in Nigeria. Despite modernity, Nigerian women still have gendered roles of wife and mother. Yes, many women are educated and have professional careers, but nevertheless, elite and poor women alike converse about the practicalities of being the “first wife” as opposed to becoming a junior wife. Polygamy and its system of cowives in an overwhelmingly patrilineal society remains one of the realities that Christianity has not changed. Women and children are most likely to live in poverty, particularly if the mother has no education and is entrapped in a polygamous marriage. Poverty, neglect, and in-fighting amongst cowives remain the primary reasons why many families break out into full-scale war after the husband dies.

**MILITARY RULE**

Abuse of power and corruption are frequent subjects of many cartoonists. All over the African continent, it seems that once the military took over governance, its leaders would not leave office. During its fifty-seven years of independence, Nigeria has had approximately twenty-eight years of civilian governance. The military has ruled Nigeria in seven regimes and created several interim governments that were ostensibly intended to transition towards civilian democracy (Jimoh 2011: 35). In each case, disappointment grew as the promise of democracy went unfulfilled. Repetti writes that Africa went from hope to living a lie, and finally to living the truth (2007: 22). Each move towards civilian rule led to ever increasing corruption, election rigging, and press censorship.

Ajiboye and many of his fellow cartoonists used satire and doublespeak to skewer the military government of the day. Cartoonists worldwide face censorship, arrest, and sometimes death simply because they dare to print public sentiment and hold their country’s government to a higher moral and legal standard. Each successive military regime claimed that they would correct the ills brought on the populace by the previous regime—only to make bad matters worse. Successive civilian governments were ousted with military coups, one after another. 9

In *Nigerian Press* (Fig. 6), published in the *Sunday Times* in February, 1992, Ajiboye depicts an imprisoned journalist wearing an armband that looks similar to a mourner’s band. Jimoh (2013: 15) notes the ironic juxtaposition of the caption to the prison’s dismal “ambience.” I think that it is interesting that with a direct reference to “Say It Loud,” a popular song of the 1960s civil rights movement in the United States, the cartoon not only conjures James Brown, but connects this anthem to the plight of the Nigerian press and, by extension, the universal press. Saying it loud directly caused this journalist’s imprisonment.

With great certainty, I think that Ajiboye had the “Amakiri Affair” in mind when he created this cartoon (Seng and Hunt 1986: 90). In 1978, Amakiri, a reporter, ran afoul of a state governor. He was beaten and tortured during his detention. Though the reporter was later awarded damages for his pain and suffering, Ajiboye must have felt in 1992 that the press was still in peril. In my opinion, this panel is perhaps one of the most directly sarcastic commentaries our Egungun artist makes against the Nigerian government. The rich texture, created by the use of the civil rights struggle, imprisonment, and the interweaving of iconic Western music, provides great insight into globalism and transnationalism.

This cartoon is the reason why art history should include the study of the political cartoon as a medium. Unpacking this type

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11 Josy Ajiboye
*Black Bomb (Sango)*
of cartoon would provide tremendous insight into unfamiliar cultures. Many of the scholars who write about Nigerian political cartoons include a section about suppression of the press. They note that the “government” deployed numerous tactics—murder, imprisonment and kidnapping (Akande 2002: 73–75, 79, 97)—to curtail journalists. Beginning in 1903 with the British and continuing roughly to the years Ajiboye was active, every colonial, civilian, or military government enacted decrees to limit, curb, or muzzle the press. For example, in 1966, under the military rule of Major-General Yakubu Gowon, the military government enacted Decree No. 44 (The Defamatory and Offensive Publications Decree), which made it an offense for the press to publish defamatory stories about the government. The next year, in 1967, Decree No. 17 (Newspapers-Prohibition of Circulation Decree) specifically gave the government the power to ban the circulation of any newspaper it deemed dangerous or inimical to its interests. By 1984, government paranoia rose to the point that it did not matter if a publication was factual, exaggerated, or false; if any government official felt ridicule, newspaper publishers and their employees were, at times, obligated to appear before specially convened tribunals to defend themselves (Seng and Hunt 1986: 90, 95).

Other cartoonists, careful to use resemblance under the guise of the freedom of the press and their Egungun mask, similarly took well-known physical features, such as a gap between the teeth (General Ibrahim Babangida), or an affectation, such as the wearing of dark sunglasses identifying a particular military general (General Sani Abacha), to skewer an unnamed target (Rotimi 2007: 23). Jonathan Goodluck’s caricatured feature was his hat, and Muhammandu Buhari’s includes his Northern-style hat, or fila, and wire rimmed glasses. I suspect that within a short period of time, the gap in his teeth will be added. The very iconicity of a feature carries the entire message. Nobel Prize-winning author Wole Soyinka coined the term militrician by contracting the words military and politician into one word (Rotimi 2007: 23). This word refers to the tendency of retired military rulers and police officers to reinvent themselves as civilian presidents or party chairmen: General Obasango (1976–1979) became civilian President Obasango for eight years (1999–2007), and General Buhari (1983–1985) was elected President Buhari in 2015.

At times, Ajiboye used misdirection or sleight of hand to make
his point when he parodied the “interim” ruler who becomes ruler-for-life, at least until illness or another coup removes him forcibly from office. Figure 7, I Now Proclaim ..., depicts an iconic African military general, heavily epauletted and standing on a stool, exhorting his subjects to lend him their ears. This general, identified as the putative emperor Jean-Michel Bokassa of the Central African Republic, is drinking from a bottle of power that seems to perform doubly as a microphone. Throughout the continent, post-colonialism brought about the likes of Idi Amin and Mobutu Sese Seko, who, with Nigeria’s dictator du jour, became the literal face of corruption and abuse of power. This is the Africa that remains etched in the minds of the average Westerner. Indirectly, by using Bokassa in this image, Ajiboye is targeting the Nigerian military. His diminutive size is exaggerated by the hat and stool. The double entendre of this image is the stool. In Nigeria, as with many other countries in Africa, the stool is literally the seat of power. Powerful kings, obas, sit on their stool (which functions as their throne) to speak. Because obas are considered divine, it is understood that they possess the necessary dignity not to have to shout, and their thrones literally set them above their subjects. In direct contrast to the behavior of a true oba, this dictator, suffering from a Napoleon complex, must stand on a stool to be seen and shout indecorously in order to be heard. Ajiboye deftly inserts another iconic reference, as Napoleon was eventually exiled. Finally, the ground is littered with empty bottles, which implies that Bokassa, drunk with power and imitating a divine oba, believes he is god.

Democracy (Fig. 8), issued in 1979, uses the metaphor of the cat and mouse. Thanks to its oil wealth of the 1970s, Nigeria flexed its power and was known as the mighty lion of Africa. Our Egungun, however, portrays Nigeria not as a lion but as a fairly harmless tabby cat. The mouse (notice the shriek) drips misused oil, and democracy is in a death-grip in the jaws of the current dictator. Though created in 1979 to address a specific leader, this cartoon, in my opinion, is emblematic of every Nigerian military leader, and indeed, most of Africa’s military strongmen, who cannot release their stranglehold and return to civilian life.

Digging further, in the 2001 Glendora Review interview our prankster Ajiboye describes the circumstances that caused him to create Democracy. In 1979, Nigeria was mired in a transition from its third military regime under Lieutenant General Obasanjo towards civilian rule (Akande 2002: 59). The election between civilian candidates Shehu Shagari and Obafemi Awolowo ended up in court because there was no clear winner. Shagari won. It was during this period that the government purchased a controlling interest in the Daily Times (Seng and Hunt 1986: 90).

Ajiboye recounted an incident where he might have felt a direct reprisal from his criticisms of Obasanjo (Olaniyi 2001: 121). In 2001, he stated that his passport had been seized during the handover of power from Obasanjo to Shagari, but, when I asked him about this story in 2014, he equivocated. Deploying classic Yoruba misdirection and avoidance of direct criticism, he asked me not to refer to the 2001 interview, but instead write that when he went to pick up his passport, he was told to reapply. He preferred to imply that it was the fault of the passport office more than any one individual, or at the behest of an unhappy politician. Interestingly, yet another version of this story recently appeared on the Internet (Utor 2017). He and three other journalists were to travel overseas for training, but he was the only one to be denied a passport. He reconfirms the original 2001 interview. Nevertheless, regardless of which version of the story actually spurred Democracy, the fact remains that this cartoon was an instance where his Egungun, “Freedom of the Press,” did not shield him.
CORRUPTION

Corruption is my third area of study. The problem Ajiboye highlighted in many cartoons was that corruption continued to reach new heights in the police, with politicians as well as with the banking and finance industries. Austerity measures were enforced in name only, presidential elections were nullified, and nepotism reigned supreme. Corruption permeated even the simplest of transactions—getting a bank transaction completed, bribing elected officials and police—anyone with authority. Figure 9, titled Bank Chiefs, demonstrates that Nigerians can and do make fun of themselves. Looting still occurs at every level of business and service. The bribe may be called a gift, it might be labeled a commission for services rendered, or called dash to get past a police checkpoint. Our Egungun prankster did not need to plumb deeply to find examples to highlight: from the corrupt bank official to the police officer and customs agent who demand extra enumeration. Bank Chiefs is but one of the many cartoons that Ajiboye published excoriating the public about individual and corporate greed.

BLACK BOMB

In the Yoruba religion, Sango is the god of thunder and lightning. A well-known member of the pantheon of gods, or orisha, he is worshipped globally in many guises. Sango (Fig. 10), commissioned in 1964, was sculpted by artist Ben Enwonwu. It is the emblem for the Nigerian Electrical Power Authority (NEPA). Satirical puns are common literary devices in Nigeria. The well-known acronym NEPA has for decades meant No Electric Power Available. This statue is located in front of the headquarters for NEPA, currently called Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN). Ironically, this newer acronym has devolved to have a snide meaning as well: Power Holders Company of Nigeria.

Ben Enwonwu’s Sango was an inspiration to Ajiboye. By the late 1950s, Enwonwu had already reached iconic status internationally as well as within Nigeria. In Figure 11, published by the Sunday Times in 1987, Ajiboye pays homage to Enwonwu (Fig. 10). In both interviews, he mentioned how much he was indebted to his mentor.10

Black Bomb (Fig. 11) is loaded with a wealth of idiom and overlapping symbolism. The double-headed axe (Fig. 10) is the symbol for Sango. But, instead of wielding the axe, Ajiboye inserts a kerosene lantern; his Sango looks bewildered rather than strong and powerful; there is a candle flickering atop the headdress. This candle replaces the medallion of the crown worn by the oba. Ajiboye is relying upon cultural literacy, pun, and irony to make a heavily layered, complex read. He took the NEPA acronym and combined it with Ben Enwonwu’s sculpture, Sango, to comment on the endemic problems with the provision of electrical power throughout the country, as well as Nigeria’s failure to improve either the infrastructure or its delivery systems for the common man. Deepening the power of the image and revealing further complex meanings is the fact that, for almost five decades, beginning in the early 1970s through to the present, electricity has been either intermittent or nonexistent. If anything, electrical services are unbelievably worse now than any time in the past century, and yet amazingly, electrical bills for (non)service are still regularly sent.

Black Bomb also refers to social inequities of class and society. The wealthy, even though they can afford to create their own individual power with the use of generators, use this power sparingly due to the cost of diesel oil, which has become a precious and expensive commodity. Since the average lower-class household cannot afford city-provided electricity nor privately generate their power, they are reduced to using kerosene. Diesel oil, the fuel of choice, becomes the symbol of power that replaces the double axe. It is a fairly common sight upon flying into Lagos at night to see entire neighborhoods in total darkness, save for the few souls who choose to generate their own electricity. For those who can afford it, the kitchen is equipped with both gas and electric stoves. It is a reality that these problems are caused by the mix of rebel insurgencies that destroy pipelines, a crumbling infrastructure, and pipeline syphoning. Sadly, the final pun of the image is that even though one can individually evoke Sango the god of thunder, the collective power of the Nigerian government is hopelessly inept.

Black Bomb and Bank Chiefs, unlike Nigerian Press, in my opinion, are the easiest type of cartoon to create, primarily because no specific politician is the target; rather, it is the plural and anonymous “they.” No one is immune because everyone in the collective suffers. Similarly, satirizing corruption that exists at all levels of society merely reminds the audience of their own individual experiences. Nigerian Press, conversely, represents the second type of political discourse, which could reverberate back onto the journalist. The discourse thus becomes personal, and the debate is no longer about “them,” the anonymous, ambiguous subject. The journalist’s mask, his Egungun, might not be strong enough to protect the prankster.

Cartoons about income disparity and class inequality are not controversial subjects, and while income disparity is frequently debated, gender inequality is not. I assert that railing against universal subjects such as class and income inequality makes for standard cartoon fodder. Goya complained, years later, that during the French Revolution, Honoré Daumier also complained about press censorship. African political cartoonists are no different. Hypocrisy, in Practice What YouPreach (Fig. 3), is another universal theme that Ajiboye frequently drew on.

The more difficult topics such as gender inequity and Nigerian women’s rights are not discussed on a national level. Yes, I argue that if Ajiboye or any of his colleagues had addressed gender equity, there might have been a national conversation. But, to be fair, during the 1990s, gender inequity was not widely discussed, nor acknowledged as being problematic for women. The mirth and sarcasm shown in The Real Father and Sugar Daddy (Figs. 4–5) are not the same as advocacy. Just the opposite: They help to maintain and reinforce specific tropes. Josy Ajiboye is not alone—virtually every Nigerian cartoonist and scholar writing about Nigerian cartoons is male, and not surprisingly, the woman’s point of view is neither depicted nor mentioned—with the sole exception of Olaniyan, who writes that in the “radical discourse of the 1970s and 1980s, a campaign against class oppression is often waged with complete inattention to gender inequality” (1997: 95).

FINAL THOUGHTS

When Josy Ajiboye talks about each cartoon, he becomes living history. In my interviews with him, I saw him reliving his thoughts and creative process, and I could visualize how he created the images and how he pared down the words. Living history should
be documented. Art historians should listen to what he and other cartoonists saw, what they lived. Political cartooning is a part of art, an indispensable component to better understanding the cultures we study. Ajiboye talked with me about his belief that not only is it important that Africa tell its own story, but that Africa can tell it better. While I agree with the idea that Africa can tell its story better than an outsider, criticism must be a part of the narrative, for the perspective of an outside critique can provide insights difficult to see from inside the story. Unbeknownst to Ajiboye, he actually echoes Olu Oguibe, who wrote that Africans must not be mere stagehands in the discourse nor be used for fortuitous sound bites, but instead, narrate these stories themselves (1993: 22).

Josy Ajiboye and his fellow generation of cartoonists still occupy a place—nostalgic, perhaps—within the hearts of many Nigerians decades after their work appeared. Admittedly, he is more remembered by people who were old enough to have lived the trauma and turmoil of the twentieth century. The topics they satirized remain just as relevant, perhaps more so. This is why, however sardonically, to use a colloquialism, Nigeria continues to laugh and shake her head. It is because these cartoons are just as funny as they were when originally printed that my interest in Josy Ajiboye continues. Is it possible that he is the Nigerian Goya? Perhaps—only time and further study will tell.

As educators we tell our students that if they want to understand the arts of a culture, they should garner information on how that culture thinks (from many diverse sources) so that they are not limited by the study of the tenets of its politics alone. Understanding difference is a key component to the evolution of true knowledge. Yet cartooning, an artistic discipline that examines and interweaves history, cultural mores, and the struggles of modern life, that wrestles with areas of growth and change in society, remains largely undiscovered in our arts curricula.

These days, our Egungun, Ajiboye, works out of a small studio, painting (Figs. 12–13). He no longer draws cartoons. Ajiboye paints an updated version of traditional/neocontemporary Nigeria: scenes that invariably combine flora, palm trees, calabashes, and “African” print with partially clad female nudes (Fig. 14).

Notes
I am indebted to the anonymous reviewers of African Arts whose comments helped me edit this essay. Their insights are valued and their suggestions turned what began as a conference paper into an essay that seriously considered the role of political cartoons in Nigeria.

6 British satirist William Hogarth (1697–1764) painted two series, Marriage a la Mode and A Rake’s Progress, that poked fun at elite eighteenth century ethics in a manner also arguably similar to Ajiboye’s cartoons.
9 Detailed information on press censorship is beyond the scope of this paper, however I included enough contextual detail to have a nuanced understanding of the politics underlying the cartoons.

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