

## “Tilapia Da Conceptual Blender”: A Cognitive Linguistics Approach to Ghanaian Political Cartoons

Grace Nana Aba Dawson-Ahmoah<sup>a</sup> , Lawrencia Agyepong<sup>b</sup>  & Eric Opoku Mensah<sup>c</sup> 

<sup>a</sup> Department of English, Faculty of Applied Languages, Institute of Languages, University of Media, Arts, and Communication.

<sup>b</sup> Centre for Global Education and Collaboration, University of Media, Arts, and Communication.

<sup>c</sup> University of Media, Arts, and Communication, Accra, Ghana.

### Abstract

This study analyzes the comic alternative to formal news in Ghanaian political media. Political cartoonists provide relief from formal political discourses. Using political cartoons created under the pen name Tilapia, this study discusses the pictorial representation of political issues, how cartoons are employed in Ghanaian media to allude to biblical stories, and the impact of humor on public and political discourse. This impact can be realized when such cartoons go viral and spark widespread public debates or political discussions. Specifically, by applying the Conceptual Blending Theory of meaning-making and a content analytical approach, this study unpacks how cartoons used in Ghanaian political news highlight social identities and representations of political figures. This study shows how cartoons induce a whole background of meanings by using relevant biblical stories common to Ghanaians. The analysis demonstrates that, in addition to their amusement purposes, political cartoons offer alternative ways of criticizing politicians. We observed that the conceptual connection between the cartoons and the projected background stories was coherent with the stereotypes, beliefs, and opinions of the political leaders depicted.

**Keywords:** Cartoons, Politicians, Conceptual Blending, Ghanaian Media, Biblical Stories, Political Cartoons

### Introduction

Tilapia Da Cartoonist is a famous Ghanaian daily cartoonist whose works are exclusively published at 3news.com. His political and social cartoons<sup>1</sup> reflect the current events and issues in

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#### Corresponding Author:

Grace Nana Aba Dawson-Ahmoah

Email: [gnadawson-ahmoah@unimac.edu.gh](mailto:gnadawson-ahmoah@unimac.edu.gh)

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<sup>1</sup> Displayed mostly on social media.

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Ghana. Tilapia's cartoons possess cultural information peculiar to Ghanaian political space. Using English, pidgin, or a mixture of English, pidgin, and Ghanaian local languages, Tilapia provided social commentaries on sensitive political issues. Generally, consumers of tilapia's cartoons view their work as sheer hilarious artworks designed by a gifted individual as a profession. This view of the sheer entertainment value of these cartoons suggests that such artworks should be situated outside of cognitive interpretations. Most of Tilapia's followers<sup>2</sup> on social media laughter and make amusing comments, rather than serious analyses of his cartoons. His incorporation of Ghanaian proverbs, idioms, slang, local dialects, and exaggerated images of known Ghanaian politicians resonates with his consumers on a comic level. However, through our background in conceptual representations in Ghanaian political discourse, it is evident that the creator of these imaginative constructions (political cartoons) draws on his cognitive and cultural resources to shape his cartoons into everyday understanding of reality., some criticscritics, have found Tilapia's use of sacred religious imagery for secular political stories offensive or blasphemous. According to these critics, using sacred religious imageries for secular political points can trivialize deeply held beliefs and show disrespect toward the Christian community.

Of course, there is a plethora of literature on Ghanaian political cartoons (Oduro-Frimpong, 2022, 2018; Ohemeng, 2020; de-Graft Aikins & Akoi-Jackson, 2020; Fiankor, Dzegblor, & Kwame, 2017; Rockson, 2011). Rhetoric studies on Ghanaian political cartoons have been concerned with recording social and political issues captured through critical entertainment (Oduro-Frimpong, 2018; Rockson, 2011), political health advocacy (de-Graft Aikins & Akoi-Jackson, 2020), and agenda setting (Fiankor et al., 2017). However, the potential of analyzing Ghanaian political cartoons with biblical undertones from a conceptual blending perspective has not been fully realized. In this paper, we employ Fauconnier and Turner's (1998) Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT) of meaning-making situated within the cultural context of democratic practices in Ghana, where citizens are free to visually criticize, to analyze the meanings of humorous political cartoons as ordinary citizens' commentary(s) on current political affairs.

Drawing on the analytical lens of Conceptual Blending Theory, we argue that humorous political cartoons and political linguistic blends involve similar mental procedures, because both are based on the cognitive endowment of the human mind (such as providing default background information for comprehension) to make sense of events. (Forceville, 2022; Ansah, 2017; Emmot & Alexander, 2014). Second, we argue that political cartoons that prompt readers to retrieve biblical stories from their long-term memory can frame the public perception/opinion (s) of the political leaders the political cartoons intend to depict. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides an overview of the Conceptual Blending Theory. Section 3 discusses the role of CBT in

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<sup>2</sup>  Tilapia Da Cartoonist 120K followers;  @Tilapia\_gh 32.7k followers;  tilapiadacartoonist 17.4k followers

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the creation and understanding of political cartoons. Section 4 presents an analysis of examples of political cartoons applying conceptual blending theory.

## 2. Blending Theory

This theory, developed by Fauconnier and Turner (2003), establishes the idea that meaning is the result of blending elements from various input sources that play fundamental roles in the construction of meaning in everyday life. Conceptual blending involves establishing mappings between elements and relationships in different spaces (Coulson & Oakley, 2000). This theory, like the domain-mapping theory of metaphors, includes cognitive mappings of elements between different concepts to produce novel concepts depicted in a new mental space. Cognitive linguists (Kövecses, 2020; Radden, Kopcke, Berg, & Siemund, 2007; Brandt, 2004) have identified conceptual metaphors, conceptual blending, conceptual metonymy, and mental space as major guiding principles in meaning-making, because elements in all these theories refer to objects in speakers' mental representations, whether fiction or otherwise.

Three operations were involved in constructing the blend: *composition, completion, and elaboration*. Stage 1 comprises the blend from the element of input spaces; for instance, we can integrate an element such as 'dinner' with a frame such as a birthday party. In this scenario, a novel meaning has been arrived at based on the contextual accommodation of a concept from one domain (source), which has been applied to an element in a different domain (target). The second stage is characterized by a range of background conceptual structures; that is, the completion of the blend may cause us to predict the outcome of a situation based on our schema about a situation. The third stage develops the blend through imaginative mental simulation. At this stage, Fauconnier and Turner cite the butcher and the surgeon scenario – "once the connection to long-term knowledge about operations and butchery have been made, we can imagine a lot of scenarios which can unfold..." It is important to note that each of the operations involved may create space for the emergence of a novel meaning or new content in scenarios. The blending model is well-suited for analyzing political cartoons in this study. Therefore, the theory guided the analysis of cartoons as containing frames, knowledge, and specific scenarios from several Ghanaian political stories.

According to Kövecses (2015), understanding humorous scenarios (in this study, political cartoons) involves closer analysis of the context in which the scenarios are generated. Most often, our cognitive ability to produce specific conceptual blends is largely influenced by real discourse situations at the time of production. For example, a society with an interest in religion will employ RELIGIOUS schemas to conceptualize everyday human activities, such as politics.

### 3. Data and Methodology

The data for the present study comprised fifteen (15) purposively sampled political cartoons via 3.com's Facebook page<sup>3</sup>, a station noted for uniquely generating and publishing cartoons on national issues on its social media site. However, the analysis was based on six selected cartoons that provided sufficient data. Adding more cartoons would have resulted in data saturation, as political cartoons exhibited similar characteristics. Scholars in the field of humor discourse (Deus, Campos, & Rocha, 2022; Ahmed, Maliha, Xiaosu, Nimisha, & Grepin, 2021; Müller & Cienki, 2009) have suggested the use of qualitative procedures for analyzing cartoons. The findings from these studies reveal that the qualitative approach can account for the meaning, interpretation, and audience reception of humorous political cartoons, unlike quantitative methods that focus on numerical data. Qualitative methods help unpack the deeper meanings of humor in specific cultural and political contexts (Attardo, 2024). In the context of this study, the qualitative approach is the most appropriate method because the images created by tilapia are peculiar to the Ghanaian socio-political environment. For instance, the context is evident from the mention of peculiar situations in Ghana and references to Ghanaian politicians.

The selected cartoons were found on Tilapia's social media pages. The cartoons were collected between December 2016 and August 2022. The periods were chosen because they marked periods when political situations in Ghana could be likened to biblical stories. The cartoons were selected based on two major factors. First, the content of cartoons must contain the caricature of a well-known Ghanaian political figure. Second, the content of the image alludes to a well-known biblical story.

Like multimodal metaphors, one cannot easily retrieve multimodal blends using an automatic or semi-automatic methodological approach, (Stefanowitsch, 2006) or a standardized procedure for identification(Pragglejaz Group, 2007; Reijnerse, Burgers, Krennmayr, & Steen, 2018). The present study recognizes the value of these approaches and intends to replace them by no means. In essence, we attempted to use the following procedures: a choice must be made regarding which image best fits the first input image (input space 1). The first input image must have a high conceptual similarity scale with the second input image; in other words, the first input image must be viewed to connect to the image in the data. The conceptual similarity index in this study refers to the value assigned to a set of images (input image space 1 and input image space 2) based on the similarity of their pictorial concepts, from which the similarities could be extracted. The counterpart connections and partial mappings were also identified immediately.

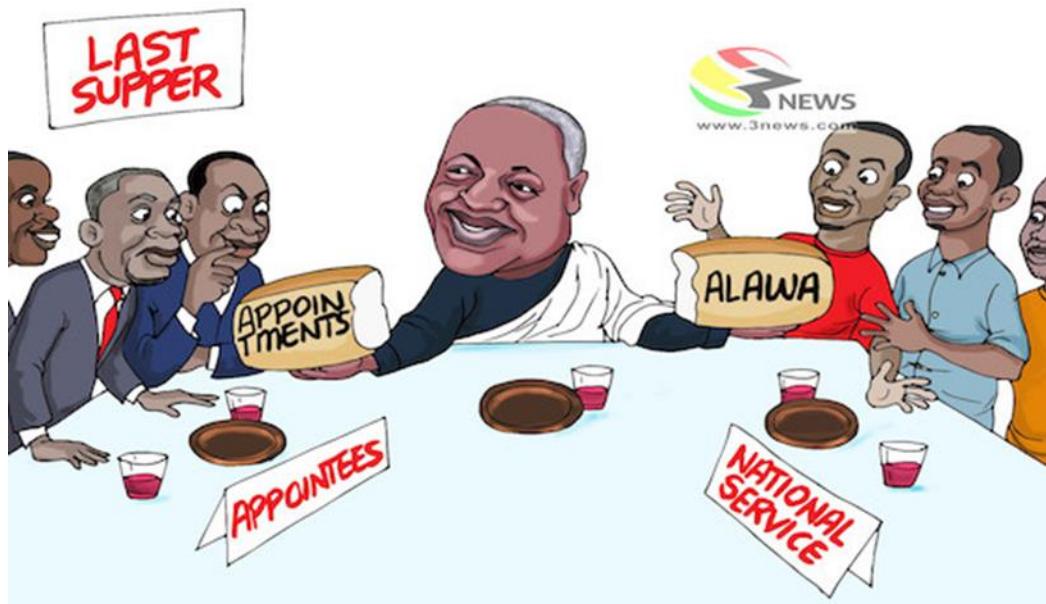
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<sup>3</sup> Permission was sought from the official Facebook page of the original creator of the cartoons, and he granted us permission to use his content on condition that we cite him.

## 4 Analysis

### 4.1 Cartoon 1 (C1)

**Figure 1a:** Mahama's late appointments as the last supper



Source: 3new.com. December 20, 2016

#### 4.1.1 Description of C1

This cartoon depicts a man sharing bread, accompanied by the inscriptions "APPOINTMENT" and "ALAWA." The man in the center, holding the broken bread, bears a resemblance to former President John Dramani Mahama, while those to his right resemble public officials receiving political appointments. On the left are National Service Personnel, whose allowances have been increased or paid.

#### 4.1.2 Background of C1

During Mahama's last days in office, he made several unpopular decisions, such as awarding contracts and appointing officials to key government offices. The outgoing Mahama-led administration's appointments, awards of contracts, and release of funds for payment of allowances left the incoming NPP government unhappy. This act was discussed extensively in Ghanaian media, and the cartoons produced concerning this issue capture the act parallel to that of the biblical last supper of Christ with his disciples before his crucifixion (Matthew 26:26–28, Mark 14:22–24, and Luke 22:17–20). The "Last Supper" imagery is used to highlight the idea of a leader or figurehead distributing benefits (the bread) to their chosen followers ("Appointees" and

"National Service"). The term "Alawa" is a Ghanaian term for "allowance" or some form of payment, further reinforcing the idea of the distribution of benefits.

A few weeks before he officially handed over power in 2016, former president Mahama performed the activities outlined above. He approved and swore a new Commissioner for the Commission of Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), a new director for the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), a new Auditor General, and finally increased the allowances of service personnel by sixty per cent. John Mahama was heavily criticized by a section of Ghanaians for this act. According to this story, Mr. Mahama's actions were described as malicious and unpatriotic<sup>4</sup>.

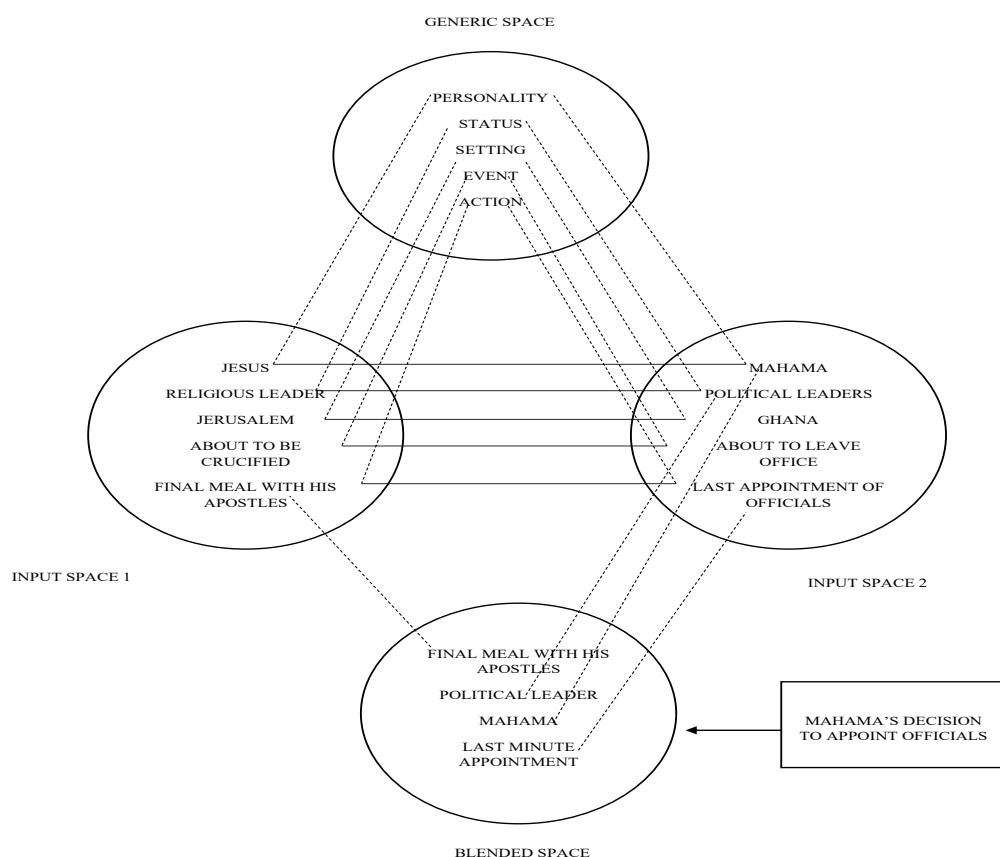
**Table 1:** Sources reporting the story of Mahama's last-minute appointment in 2016

News Outlet	Publication Date	Headline	Key Details Reported
Citifmonline	December 29, 2016	'Last-minute' appointments in Ghana's interest – Mahama	Reports on Mahama's justification of his last-minute appointments
Modernghana	December 21, 2016	President John Mahama's Last Midnight Appointments, Contracts and Recruitments	Criticises Mahama's late appointments
Daily Guide Network	December 30, 2016	Mahama Justifies Last-Minute Appointments	Mahama justifies his last-minute decision to make appointments to certain key departments and agencies, saying he had not broken any law.
Myjoyonline	January 5, 2017	Mahama's last minute appointments 'nonsensical' – Sam Okudzeto	Legal luminary and former President of the Ghana Bar Association (GBA) Samuel Okudzeto described President John Mahama's last-minute appointments as a blatant violation of the Transition law.
GhanaWeb	December 31, 2016	Issues of President Mahama's CHRAJ appointment	Critiques the legal basis for Mahama to appoint people for the incoming NPP government to work with

<sup>4</sup> Table presents a summary of some sources that reported on the Mahama's last minute appointments in 2016

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The intended humorous meaning of this cartoon is constructed in a four-space integrated network comprising a generic space, two input spaces, and a blended space. The first input space contains Jesus Christ and his preparation for his death. This input space also includes Jesus's last activity with his disciples before he was arrested for being crucified. Input space two, on the other hand, contains John Dramani Mahama, the President of Ghana in 2016, and his act of giving out appointments and wages<sup>5</sup> he initially vowed not to sanction. This act of Mahama during his last few months in office is conceptualized by the cartoonist as synonymous with Jesus's last feast with his disciples.



**Figure 1b.** The Conceptual Integration Network for the cartoon Mahama's Last Supper

In the composition stage, the generic space provides roles and values to the two input spaces, which enables the cross-space mappings that link Jesus, the head of the twelve disciples in input space 1, to John Mahama, the 2016 outgoing President of Ghana in input space 2. Furthermore, what Jesus shared with his disciples on his last day with them in Input Space 1 and how Mahama gave out

<sup>5</sup> popularly referred to as 'alawa' the clipped form of allowance

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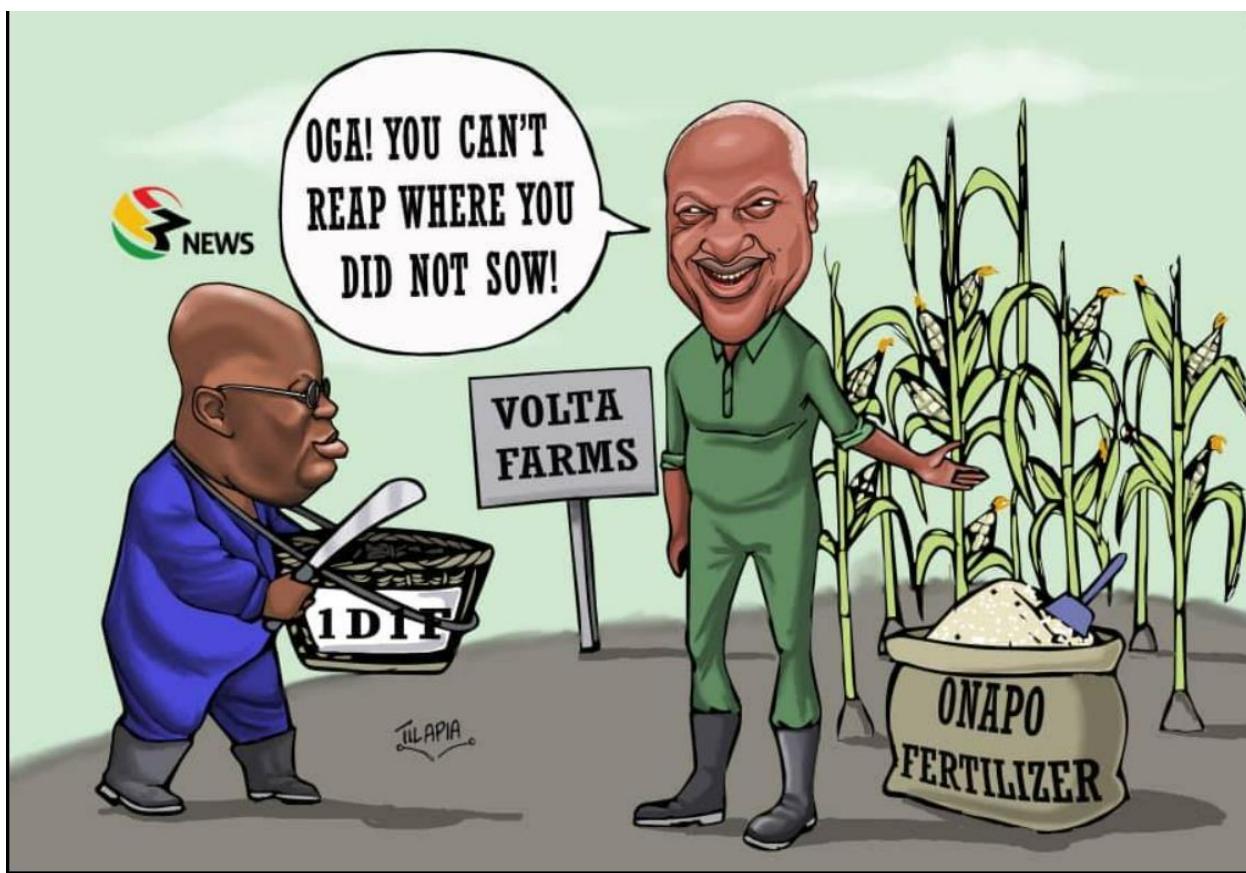
new appointments and allocated funds for paying allowances in Input Space 2 are connected by cross-space mappings, as they are similar activities. The blend inherits the overriding frame from two input spaces. Projected to the blend from Input Space 1 is Jesus's last act of dining with his disciples before his crucifixion. The blending process shows Mahama as an outgoing president, but not one who is going to die, as Jesus did. The incongruity that produces the humorous effect in this blend arises from our ability to interpret Jesus's sharing of bread with his disciples as synonymous with Mahama's questionable act of distributing contracts and allowances during his last days.

#### **4.1.3 C1 as an unpatriotic media text**

The image in C1 re-enacts the story of the final actions of former President Mahama in Ghana. However, unlike the final meal that Jesus shared with his disciples, which shows an act of humility, Mahama's last-minute appointments of key officials were interpreted as unpatriotic. The message in the cartoon seeks to question the rationale behind the appointment of these officials at the time Mahama was exiting office. The concept of an unpatriotic President in C1 can be defined as the Mahama-making decisions that affect the next government's administration. This is in line with Shifman's (2014) position on cartoons as a tool to satiate political reality. Hence, the image in C1 seeks to ridicule Mahama's unpatriotic attitude. C1 can, therefore, be argued as a satirical political text. It further draws attention to the flaws identified in Mahama's last-minute decisions. C1 presents an ideology in which unpatriotic behaviors are unacceptable. In contrast to the Last Supper story in the Bible, where Jesus's last-minute communion with his disciples connotes a selfless leader, Mahama's deeds during his last days in office are interpreted as a selfish attitude that threatens to intensify the inter-party rivalry between the outgoing NDC government and the incoming NPP government.

#### **4.1.4 Humour and its impact on the unpatriotic message in C1**

The humor element is visible in C1. First, replacing a highly revered and religiously significant scene with a Ghanaian political scenario created an immediate comedic contrast. The disconnect between the act of generosity (sharing appointments/increasing allowances) and the reality of unpatriotism evokes some level of humor and irony. This strategic tool makes messages more engaging, accessible, and impactful. In addition, the use of the word "Alawa," which is Ghanaian slang for allowances, evokes humor in cartoons. Language play in this cartoon creates humor by making fun of its target, as theorized by Zhang and Liu (2014), who state that using verbal humor in cartoons makes the cartoon more interesting and attracts public attention. However, the humor in C1 does not defeat the intended message. Rather, it amplifies the message about political patronage and favouritism, acts that weaken morale in government service, and reduces the public's faith in the integrity of government.

**4.2 Cartoon 2 C (2)****Figure 2a:** You can't reap where you did not sow

Source: 3new.com, November 15, 2019

**4.2.1 Description of C2**

The cartoon captures a maize or corn farm, which has a signpost in the middle that reads "VOLTA FARMS." In the farm are two people: on the right, the person in green clothing standing next to corn plants and a bag labelled "ONAPO FERTILIZER" and saying "OGA! YOU CAN'T REAP" has a resemblance to John Dramani Mahama (President of Ghana from 2012-2016), while the person in a blue suit holding what looks like a basket labelled "1D1F" (One District One Factory) has a resemblance to Nana Akufo Addo (President of Ghana from 2017-2024).

**4.2.2 Background of C2**

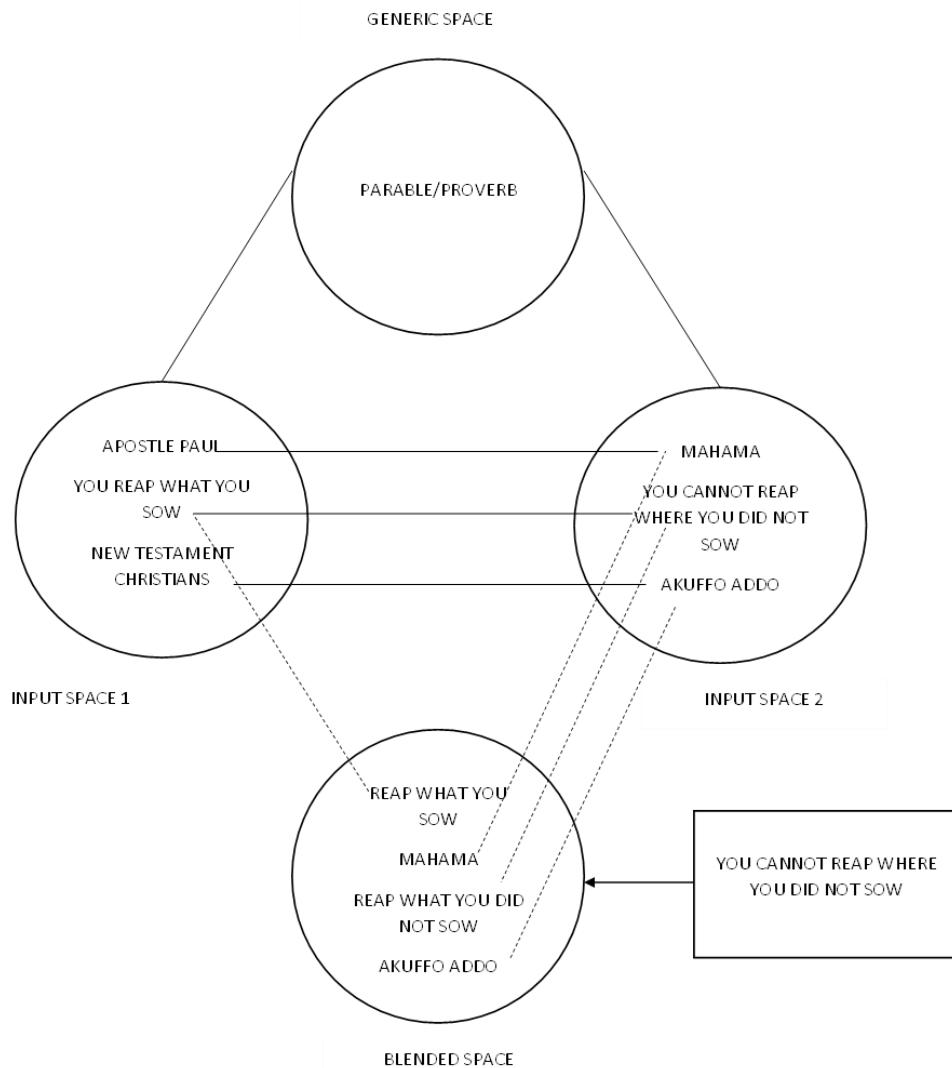
As part of his campaign for the December 2020 elections, the flagbearer of the NDC, Mahama, paid courtesy visits to farming communities in the country, including the Upper West, Brong Ahafo, and Volta regions. In his messages, Mahama told the sitting president Nana Addo not to

take full credit to implement the concept of planting for food and jobs. News outlets who reported this story mentioned Mahama as the originator of the Planting for Food and Jobs initiative.

**Table 2: Sources reporting the battle for credit on 1D1F between Mahama and Nana Addo**

News Outlet	Publication Date	Headline	Key Details Reported
GhanaWeb	July 17, 2019	Mahama govt funded NPP's 'Planting for Food and Jobs' programme - Sammy Gyamfi	Argues that the NDC under the erstwhile administration of former President John Mahama secured funds for the NPP flagship planting for food and jobs programme
Myjoyonline	September 1, 2021	Planting for Food and Jobs was my idea – Mahama	Former President John Dramani Mahama claims credit for the flagship Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ) programme introduced by the Akufo-Addo-led New Patriotic Party (NPP),
Pulse	September 11, 2021	‘Planting for Food and Jobs was my idea, Akufo-Addo only continued it’ – Mahama	Explains that the Akufo-Addo government only changed the name of the programme when it assumed office.

C2 originates from a parable in the Bible (Galatians 6:7). The original understanding of the phrase as stated in the Bible is that of a master who sought to gain profit without working for it himself. The original idiomatic expression that comes to mind in the cartoon is *you reap what you sow*. The reverse of the idiom, as displayed in the captions, contributes to the humorous meanings in the cartoon. The idiomatic expressions used in this image can be explained as a blend of the domains of planting and achievement.



**Figure 2b:** The conceptual integration network for the cartoon you cannot reap where you did not sow

In this conceptual integration network, input space 1 contains a biblical expression that reaps what you sow, which means that future consequences are inevitably shaped by present actions. Input space 2 also contains a specific period when Mahama challenges Nana Akuffo Addo of taking credit for a policy<sup>6</sup> he (Mahama) had initiated sometime before Nana Addo resumed office. The blend inherits the frame structure from input space 2 and only one projection from input space 2. In this blend, Mahama warns Akuffo not to take credit for an NDC-initiated policy.

<sup>6</sup> planting for food and jobs

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#### **4.2.3 C2 as a misconception media text**

The image in C2 can be classified as a misconceived text. C2 shows a conflict between the leaders of the two major political parties in Ghana. First, C2 shows the effect of taking credit on others' achievements. The narration behind the image in C2 suggests that a political party falsely attributing the concept of a government project, as though they were originators, has serious implications for maintaining harmony between political rivals. In other words, taking credit for others' achievements plays a pivotal role in promoting misunderstandings and cooperation between people with different political ideologies. The image in C2 campaigns against appropriating other people's achievements without acknowledging the efforts of the original creators. While C2 shows appropriation as a dishonorable act, it also shows that every government has its own initiatives and that new governments should acknowledge and continue the initiatives of previous governments to ensure the continuity and rapid development of the country.

#### **4.2.4 Humour and its impact on the message in C2**

This exaggerated representation of Nana Addo as a short person evokes a hilarious scenario. The use of the Nigerian pidgin word "Oga!" as a nickname for Nana Addo also heightens the comic effect in C2: the name sounds funny enough to be remembered for a lifetime. The conceptualization of the two Ghanaian presidents as farmers identifies C2 as a political satire. This is because the image in C2 successfully ridiculed the two presidents as battling for credit for the 1D1F policy. Humour underscores the idea of the NPP government trying to benefit unfairly from the efforts of the NDC government. Humor in C2 serves to amplify the message of potential exploitation or hypocrisy surrounding the "1D1F" initiative. This finding is consistent with Shifman's (2012) superiority class of humor. The major argument of the superiority theory is that an individual or group of people may derive enjoyment by ridiculing the beliefs of others because they think their beliefs are superior to those of others (Sani et al., 2012). The artist cleverly uses irony and exaggeration to critique the situation in a funny yet thought-provoking manner.

### 4.3 Cartoon 3 C (3)

Figure 3a: Custom Goliath Slain



Source: 3new.com, August 30, 2022

#### 4.3.1 Description of C3

The image in C3 features a young dark-skinned man dressed in a simple yellow tunic attire, reminiscent of ancient clothing. He wore a red headband and held a sling. The fallen giant is featured in what appears to be an amour-like attire and has a sword and a shield with him. The young dark-skinned man with the inscription "SP," which means Special Prosecutor, resembles Mr. Kissi Agyebeng. The fallen giant with the defeated armor resembles Colonel Kwadwo Damoah.

#### 4.3.2 Background of C3

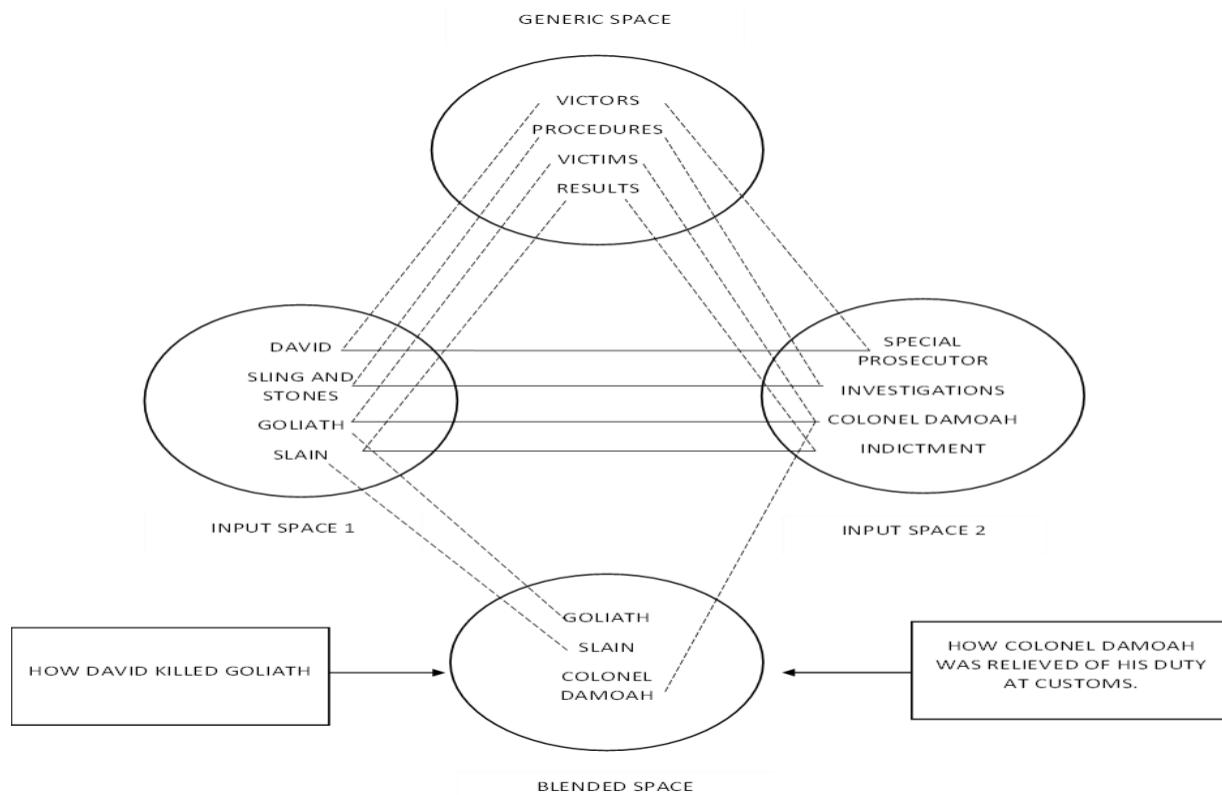
C3 is a representation of two Ghanaian public officers: Ghana's current Special Prosecutor and a former Commissioner of Customs at the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA). In August 2022, the Special Prosecutor, Mr. Kissi Agyebeng, implicated Colonel Kwadwo Damoah in depriving Ghana of money through unaccounted taxes. To clarify his name, Colonel Damoah granted press conferences to defend himself. In his defense, Colonel Damoah referred to the Special Prosecutor as a "small boy." Not long after these comments from Colonel Damoah, the President relieved

Colonel Damoah of his position at Customs, stating that the latter's contract had expired. Ghanaians, however, wondered whether the commissioner was going home because his contract had expired or whether the president believed that the Colonel was guilty of the Special Prosecutor's findings.

**Table 3: Sources reporting Col. Damoah's dismissal**

News Outlet	Publication Date	Headline	Key Details Reported
Myjoyonline	August 29, 2022	Presidency sacks GRA Commissioner, Col Damoah; orders him to hand over	Reports that Col. Damoah was sacked due to the Special Prosecutor's findings
The Herald	August 29, 2022	Akufo-Addo removes Col. Damoah from Customs	Reports that Col. Damoah was removed from his office due to the Special Prosecutor's investigation
Graphic online	August 29, 2022	Col. Kwadwo Damoah relieved of duties as Customs Commissioner	Reports that Col. Damoah was relieved of his office because his tenure was up.

As typical of him, Tilapia dropped a cartoon illustrating how the Special Prosecutor (David the small boy) had defeated Colonel Damoah (Goliath the Giant). The cartoon in Figure 3a pictorially exploits the biblical account of David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17:40-58). This image can again be analyzed as a conceptual blend (see Figure 3a).



**Figure 3b:** The conceptual integration network for the cartoon Custom Goliath Slain

This single-scope network consists of input 1, which contains the experiential frame of a popular war story in the Bible, where the frames and scenarios of a young boy (David) defeat a great Philistine giant named Goliath. Input space 2 contains the frame of a political situation in Ghana, where a Colonel (big/ old Man) is sacked from office because of a “small boy” (Special Prosecutor). The elements in the source input space map onto elements in the target input space so that the Special Prosecutor corresponds in the cross-space mapping to David in input space 1, whereas investigations in input space 2 correspond to the cross-space mapping to sling and stone in input space 1. Goliath in Input Space 1 maps directly to Colonel Damoah in Input Space 2. Finally, the slain in input space 1 maps onto the indictment in input space 2. However, only Goliath and slain in input space 1, in addition to Colonel Damoah in input space 2, were projected onto the blend. The new structure that emerges in the blend is an elderly man of high rank in the security service, who is prosecuted by a young criminal investigator. At the completion stage inferences are drawn from the background knowledge about how Colonel Damoah referred to the Special Prosecutor as a ‘small boy,’ yet the investigative findings of the “small boy” had the elderly man, Colonel Damoah removed from office.

#### **4.3.3 C3 as an anti-corruption media text**

This is becoming a common trend in Ghana, where government officials are often cited for corruption. According to the image in C3, the head of the government agency mandated that businesses comply with the relevant laws that ensure Ghana maintains a sustainable revenue stream specifically at the country's borders was cited by the Special Prosecutor as granting favorable tax treatment to some business owners in Ghana.

Interestingly, the representation of Colonel Kwadwo Damoah in C3 as a 'big man' (Goliath) is very appropriate. In the Ghanaian socio-political space, being important and having achieved a lot of political power or wealth is culturally conceptualized as being a BIG MAN. A conceptualization that is born out of the general metaphor IMPORTANCE IS BIG. People with high-profile positions (BIG MEN) often escape being cited for corruption by existing anti-corruption institutions in Ghana, such as the Office of the Attorney General, the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament, the Commission of Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), The Office of the Auditor-General, and the Economic and Organised Crime Office. However, a new upcoming anti-corruption agency (YOUNG OFFICE) headed by a SMALL BOY boldly cited the BIG MAN for corruption. The story generally seeks to draw the public's attention to the fact that anti-corruption agencies in Ghana are meant to clamp down corruption without fear or favor. In line with the position of political cartoon research by Chagas et al. (2019) and Wiggins and Bowers (2015), the message in C3 seeks to criticize the act of corruption as unacceptable behavior through Internet memes and artifacts.

#### **4.3.4 Humour and its impact on the message in C3**

By reframing what appears to be the contemporary political situation of Col. Damoah and Mr. Kissi Agyebeng as a David versus Goliath story, the cartoonist creates immediate humor through this comparison. The humor in C3 also is evoked from the "underdog triumphs" narrative, where the "SP" (likely a small boy in politics and age) defeats the "Customs Goliath" (an older person and likely a big shot in a powerful bureaucratic institution) creates comic relief. The humor in C3 is a powerful tool for shaping public opinion. It simplifies complex issues, creates a celebratory tone, and amplifies the message of an underdog triumphing over a powerful foe. Humour does not diminish the message, but rather points out the need to challenge corruption in established political/public offices.

#### 4.4 Cartoon 4 C4

Figure 4a: Pontius Mensa.



Source: 3new.com, June 15, 2022

##### 4.4.1 Description of C4

This cartoon is a caricature of a man named "Pontius Mensa," a play on the name of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who, according to the Bible (Matthew 27:24), ordered the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In the image, Pontius Mensa is depicted by washing his hands, referencing the biblical scene in which Pilate washes his hands to disclaim responsibility for Jesus's death. The background features a large, modern-looking church or a cathedral. This is likely the National Cathedral of Ghana, a controversial project that has been the subject of much debate.

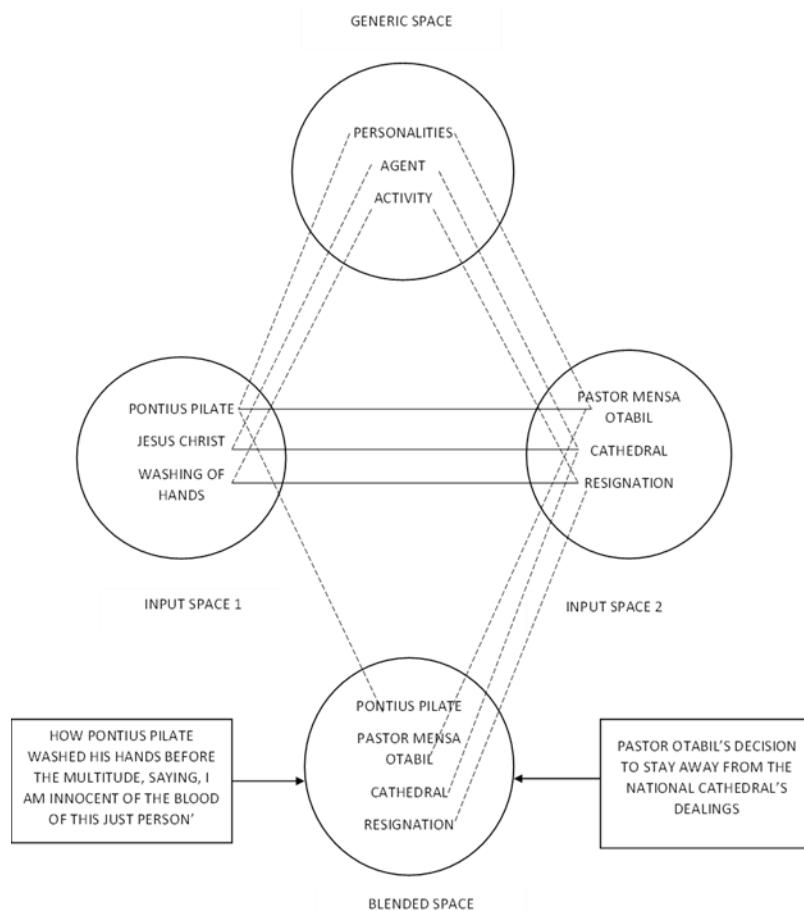
##### 4.4.2 Background of C4

There were many speculations regarding the resignation of Pastor Mensa Otabil. For instance, some Ghanaians, including the Honorable Samuel Okudjeto Ablakwah (June 13, 2022), believed that Pastor Otabil resigned as a Trustee due to the unrest surrounding the affairs of the National Cathedral. Shortly after the news of Mensa Otabil's resignation began to circulate, some members of the Board of Trustees publicly denied these allegations. The public's reaction to Pastor Mensa Otabil's involvement with the National Cathedral Board ignited concerns and debates about the project's legitimacy. Various news outlets discussed the news of Pastor Mensah Otabil's resignations.

**Table 4:** Sources reporting the story of Pastor Mensa Otabil's resignation from the Board of Trustees.

News Outlet	Publication Date	Headline	Key Details Reported
GhanaWeb	24th May 2023	Why Mensah Otabil quits as Board Member of the Trustees of National Cathedral - Joyce Aryee reveals	Explains the reason for Otabil's resignation. The story reports that Mensah Otabil was never part of the Board of Trustees of the National Cathedral
MyJoyOnline	13 <sup>th</sup> June 2022	National Cathedral: 'Otabil has left Board of Trustees due to illegalities happening' – Ablakwa	Connects the resignation to the illegality being perpetrated by the Akufo-Addo government with respect to the project.
Citi Newsroom	17 <sup>th</sup> June 2022	Mensa Otabil was never a member of the National Cathedral board – Secretariat	Denies the story of Mensah Otabil's resignation from the Board of Trustees for the National Cathedral
Adom Online	17 <sup>th</sup> June 2022	New twist to Mensa Otabil's 'exit' from National Cathedral Board of Trustees	Refutes reports that Dr. Mensa Otabil, one of the Members of its Board of Trustees, resigned
Modern Ghana	18 <sup>th</sup> June 2022	National Cathedral: Allegations that Pastor Otabil resigned from Board of Trustees false – Secretariat	Negates reports that Dr. Mensa Otabil, one of the Members of its Board of Trustees, resigned from the Board due to illegalities.

As part of reporting Mensa Otabil's resignation story, the cartoonist Tilapia created a cartoon with the inscription Pontius Mensa (C4). The humorous meaning of this cartoon was created in a four-space conceptual integration network composed of a generic space, two input spaces, and a blended space.



**Figure 4b:** The conceptual integration network for the cartoon Pontius Mensa

Input space 1 contains a typical scene from the New Testament (Matthew 27:24), where Pontius Pilate washes his hands on the issue of Jesus's crucifixion because he does not believe Jesus to be guilty of any crime worthy of execution. There also exists the wordplay "Pontius Mensa" - combining Otabil's first name with Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who "washed his hands" of responsibility for Jesus's crucifixion. Input space 2 contains knowledge of the idiomatic expression to wash one's hands off something, which means intentionally stopping involvement in an activity that one was previously responsible for. This idiom, although not verbally expressed, is successfully represented pictorially such that the image immediately triggers the retrieval of the idiom from our encyclopedic knowledge.

The elements in both input spaces were connected via cross-space mapping. Pontius Pilate from input space 1 connects to Pastor Mensa Otabil from input space 2, and Jesus Christ from input space 1 connects to the cathedral from input space 2. Pontius Pilate washing his hands off Jesus's crucifixion connects with Mensa Otabil's resignation from the board of trustees. The blend inherits the organizing frame from input space 1. Projected to the blend from Input Space 1, Pontius Pilate

disassociates himself from the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Projected to the blend from input space 2 is Pastor Mensah Otabil and his decision to resign from the Board of Trustees in charge of building the National Cathedral. Comparing the Pontius Pilate scenario with Pastor Otabil's scenario creates a humorous effect in the blend.

#### **4.4.3 C4 as an anti-scandal media text**

In addition to the allusion of the image in C4 to Pontius Pilate's story in the Bible, C4 lends itself to several metaphorical and rhetorical interpretations. First, both scenarios involve the questions of responsibility and accountability. Dr. Otabil's decision to step aside from the National Cathedral project, on the one hand, could be seen as avoiding potential conflicts or responsibilities, while Pontius Pilate's action, on the other hand, is often interpreted as an act of evading moral responsibility. This claim is presented in the image of Mensa Otabil washing his hands in a bowl, as the cartoon portrays. The cartoon implies the abdication of responsibility (handwashing).

In addition, both scenarios were influenced by public perceptions. Mensa Otabil's supposed involvement with the National Cathedral was interpreted, while Pontius Pilate's actions were historically viewed as a symbol of moral cowardice.

The situation presented in C4 is an anti-scandal media text that employs ridiculing and shaming the evasion of responsibility, integrity, and transparency. The cartoon further presents the ideology that integrity is a foundational moral virtue and the foundation upon which a good character is built. The implications of Mensa Otabil's decision to leave the National Cathedral Board of Trustees highlight the importance of accountability and transparency in public life.

The image in C4 corroborates the literature on Internet memes and cartoons (Mina, 2019; Laineste & Voolaid, 2017; Börzsei, 2013) which states that Internet cartoons project people's views about sensitive issues in a rather simplified and humorous way, intending to deflate tension and any imminent uproar. The anti-scandal reaction in C4 seeks to simplify a clergyman's dissociation from the illegalities and controversies concerning the construction of the National Cathedral. By using a religious figure to comment on a political issue, the cartoon critiques the handling of the National Cathedral project and the perceived roles of influential figures such as Mensa Otabil. This aligns with the broader use of memes and cartoons in political commentaries. In addition, viewers gain an understanding of the issues, and they can better participate in public discussions by ridiculing and halting corrupt and scandalous acts in the government.

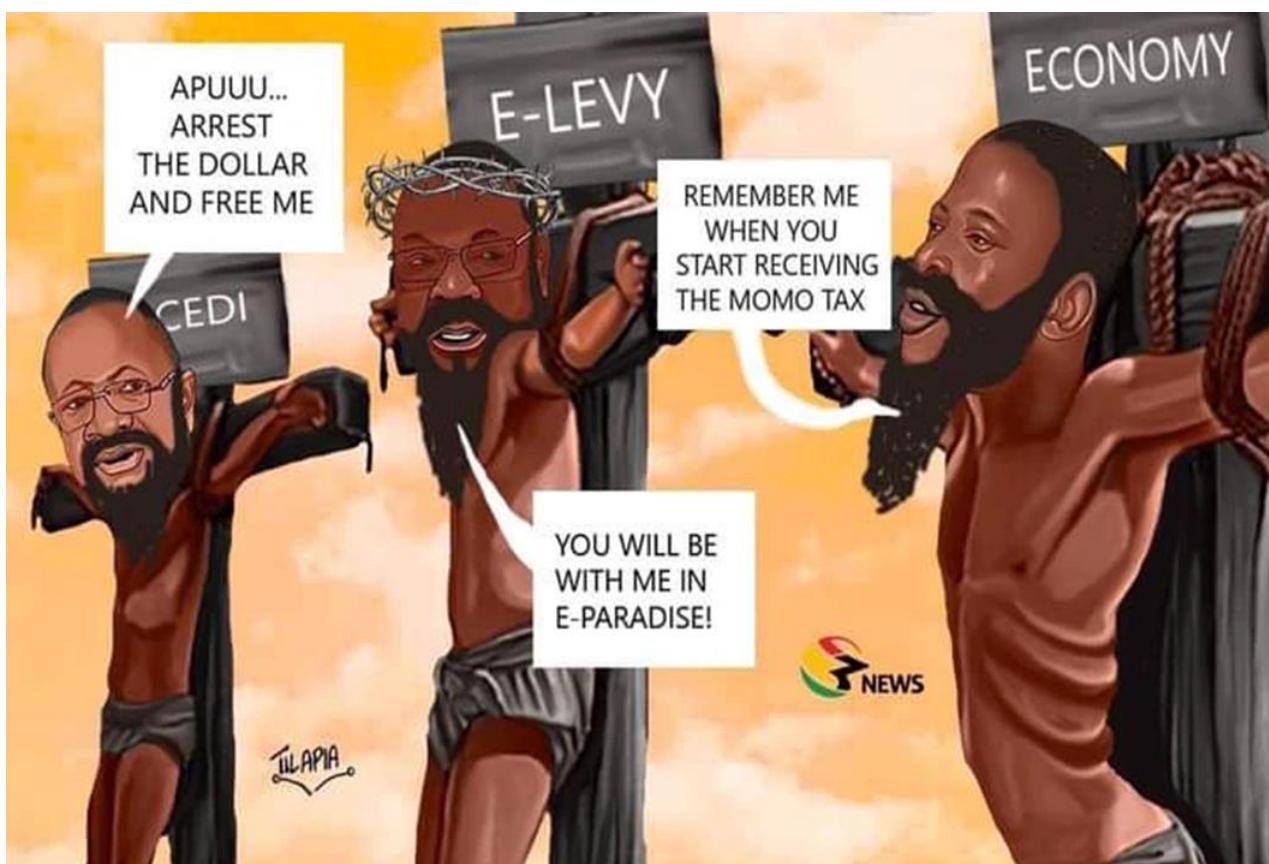
#### **4.4.4 Humour and its impact on the anti-scandal message in C4**

The merging of Mensa Otabil's name with Pontius Pilate is the most immediate source of humor. In a deeply religious country like Ghana, recasting a prominent pastor in the role of pilate carries weight and ironic humor. The cartoonists used shared religious knowledge as the foundation for the joke. This wordplay is amusing, because it unexpectedly links a biblical figure (Pontius Pilate) with a contemporary religious figure (Mensa Otabil). The cultural/biblical references enhance the cartoon's ability to engage audiences and convey messages about accountability, transparency, and

morality in a humorous yet impactful way. The cartoon uses humor to critique the National Cathedral project's perceived irregularities or lack of transparency. Using satire encourages viewers to question the handling of the project. The meme highlights the finding that Ghanaians often use prominent national figures, particularly through the lens of high-profile figures such as pastors or politicians, to tackle serious national issues with humor (Philips-Kumaga et al., 2022). Thus, humor provides relief through amusement, as suggested by Cooper (2008) and Alsadi and Howard (2021), while also conveying a moral lesson about the importance of strength in resisting corruption.

#### 4.5 Cartoon 5 C5

**Figure 5a:** E-levy tax



Source: 3new.com, April 18, 2022

##### 4.5.1 Description of C5

This cartoon depicts a satirical crucifixion scene, with three figures representing different economic policies or entities. Each figure is shown as a cross with the labels above. The figure on the left (labelled "CEDI") has a speech bubble saying "APUUU... ARREST THE DOLLAR AND

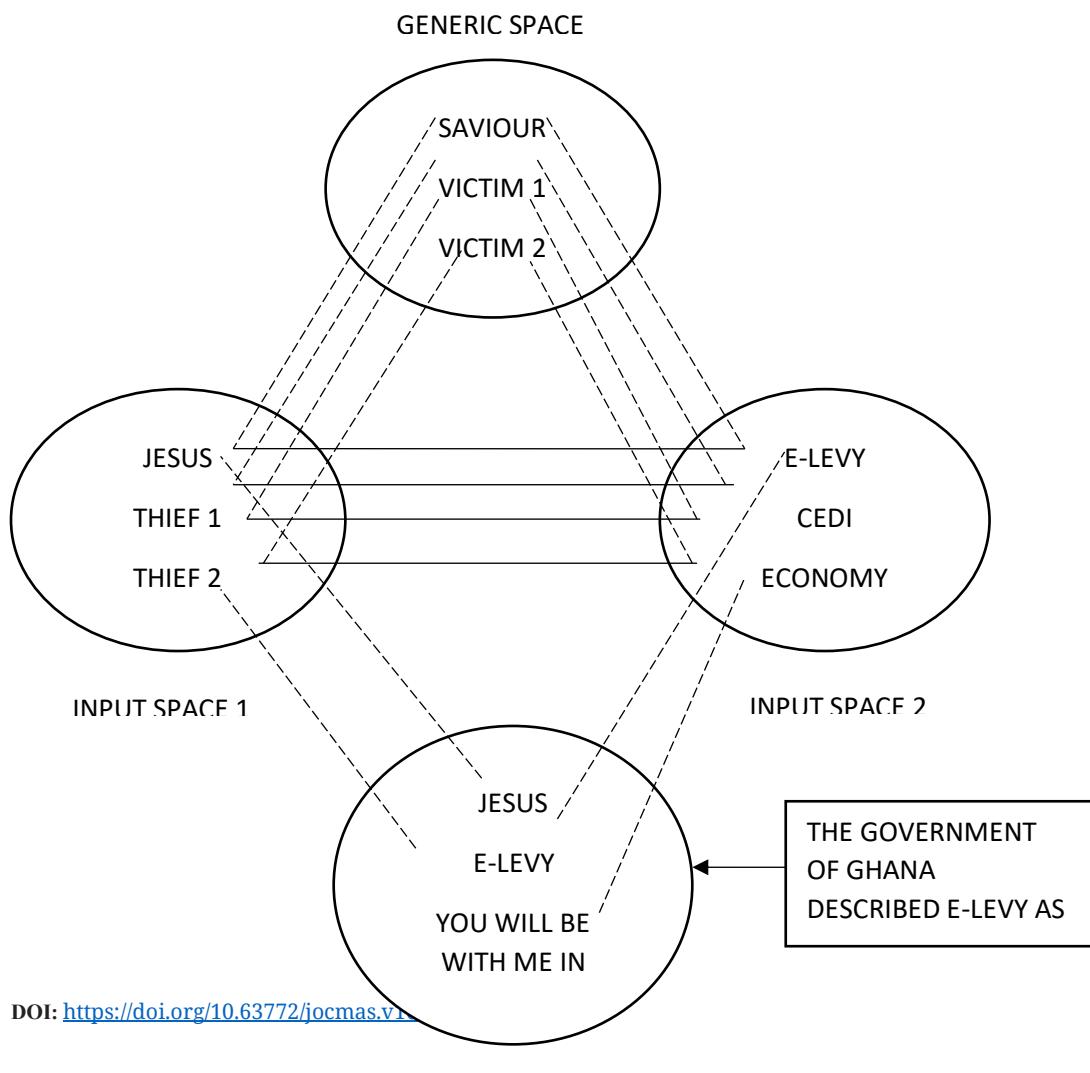
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63772/jocmas.v10n1.3>

FREE ME." APUUU... ARREST THE DOLLAR AND FREE ME'. The middle figure (labelled "E-LEVY") wears a crown of thorns and has speech bubbles saying, "YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN E-PARADISE!". The figure on the right (labelled "ECONOMY") has a speech bubble saying, "REMEMBER ME WHEN YOU START RECEIVING THE MOMO TAX."

#### 4.5.2 Background of C5

The background to C5 is that the Ghanaian government proposed an electronic transfer levy that would impose a 1.5% tax on all electronic transactions in the country. This proposal generated many reactions from Ghanaians, especially on social media platforms, where various metaphors have been used to describe E-Levy. One of the most common metaphors used is "E-Paradise." The term E-Paradise is used by some Ghanaians to refer to the idea that the levy tax was going to turn Ghana into Paradise. Among the various humorous forms used to comment on the implementation of the levy tax is the cartoon shown in Figure 5a.

The humorous meaning of this cartoon arises in a four-space conceptual integration network composed of two input spaces: a generic space and a blended space.



**Figure 5b:** The conceptual integration network for the cartoon E-levy tax

The elements in both input spaces were connected via cross-space mapping. Jesus in input space 1 connects to E-levy from input space 2, thief 1 from input space 1 connects directly to Economy in input space 2, and thief 2 connects to Cedi from input space 2. Projected to the blend from input space 1 is Thief 2, asking Jesus to remember him when Jesus goes to Paradise, and Jesus's assurance of taking the thief with him to Paradise. Projected from the blend of input space 2 are the promises and assurances that the Government of Ghana gave before the implementation of the electronic levy tax. In the humor created in the blend, E-levy transforms Ghana's economy into a Paradise.

**4.5.3 C5 as an economic policy critique media text**

C5 seeks to compare the sweet promises given by the government to Ghanaians regarding the implementation of the E-Levy tax with the crucifixion story of Jesus (Matthew 27:24). The intended meaning employed in this cartoon is that just as Jesus promised to take one of the thieves who hanged with him on the cross to Paradise, so is the government's argument that the implementation of the E-levy will ensure that Ghana's economy accelerates steadily. This meme captures growing resentment in the Ghanaian community, as Ghanaians protested the newly introduced electronic transaction tax. Ghanaians have come up with other metaphors to describe the E-Levy (such as E-levy is a killer law, First, it was e-levy- the Saviour edition). Others have likened this to the biblical story of the Israelites being taxed by the Pharaoh in Egypt, stating that the government is imposing a heavy burden on the people. As an anti-government economic policy message, C5 seeks to direct the government's attention to the negative perception of Ghanaians towards the implementation of the levy tax. The intended meaning in C5 seems to agree with Laineste and Voolaid's (2017) assertion that cartoons and memes mirror the sociopolitical and economic issues of a nation.

**4.5.4 Humour and its impact on the message in C5**

The most striking source of humor employed by the cartoonist in C5 was dark humor. Depicting an unpopular economic policy in Ghana through the religious parody of Jesus's crucifixion is inherently astonishing and attention seeking. The cartoon uses sacrilegious humor designed to evoke strong emotional responses, such as anger, sadness, frustration, and despair about the state of the economy. C5 also satisfied the government's E-levy policy and perceived it as a failure. The use of crucifixion imagery guarantees a powerful reaction, but also carries the risk of alienating or offending viewers. For many religious communities, sacred symbols are not merely representations but also embodiments of divine or sacred history. Their use in satirical or political contexts can be experienced as actual desecrations rather than as mere commentary (Scott, 2023).

#### 4.6 Cartoon 6 C6



**Figure 6a:** National Cathedral. Source: 3new.com, August 30, 2018

##### 4.6.1 Description of C6

This cartoon is a satirical, reminiscent scene of Jesus's trial (Luke 23:18-25) with a Ghanaian political story. The left side is an angry crowd with raised arms and expressions of outrage. One person in the crowd has a speech bubble saying, "CRUCIFY HIM AND LET THE JUDGES RESIDENCE STAND". In the center stands a figure wearing glasses and what seems to be a robe with a red scarf or stole. This figure is depicted as one being judged or condemned by the crowd. On the right side are two figures in long robes labelled with a sign reading "JUDGES' RESIDENCE" and "NATIONAL CATHEDRAL."

##### 4.6.2. Background of C6

The cartoon in Figure 6a depicts an image of a National Cathedral story in Ghana. The Akufo Addo-led administration came under public criticism after it emerged that several buildings, including the Scholarship Secretariat, Passport Office at Ridge, and nine bungalows occupied by Appeals Court Judges, were to be demolished to make space for the 5000-seater state-of-the-art National Cathedral, which would also include a Bible Museum and Documentation Center. Nine Appeals Court Judges, whose bungalows were affected, were asked to move into a rented facility. The brouhaha concerning the location of the National Cathedral has been discussed extensively by various Ghanaian news outlets.

**Table 6:** Sources reporting the demolition of the Judges' bungalows

News Outlet	Publication Date	Headline	Key Details Reported
Ghanaweb	November 19 2018	Gov't begins demolition of Judges' bungalows for National Cathedral	Demolition of bungalows built by the Judicial Service to house Court of Appeal Judges
CitineWSroom	August 27, 2018	Nine judges evicted to make way for national cathedral project	Petitioned to reconsider a plan to evict judges from their Ridge Roundabout residence in Accra to make way for the construction of the 5,000-seater National Cathedral
Myjoyonline	August 13, 2019	Cathedral: Demolished Judges' homes were colonial relics – Secretary to Board	Secretary to the Board of Trustees of the National Cathedral defends the government's decision to demolish residential apartments housing judges for the Cathedral.
Adomonline	December 21, 2018	Judges finally relocated for the construction of national Cathedral	The relocation of nine judges from their Ridge bungalows to make way for the construction of the National Cathedral.

The humorous meaning of the cartoon in Figure 6a is created in a four-space conceptual integration network composed of two input spaces that project the roles and values from the generic space. Subsequently, the elements in the two input spaces are systematically mapped during the composition of the humor. In this conceptual integration network, the input space contains the story of the Barabbas in the New Testament. This input space also includes the instance where the crowd asked Pilate to release Barabbas, the thief, but crucifies Jesus instead (Luke 23:18-25). Input space two contains the story of the judge's residence, which was to be demolished to enable the construction of the National Cathedral. This input space also includes Ghanaian's negative reaction towards demolition. The blend inherits the frame structure from input space 2 as well as selective projections from input space 1. Although not all elements in both input spaces are projected into the blend, the few elements that are projected into the blended space suggest that Nana Addo was not a political figure during Jesus's trial, but a political leader in Ghana, whose people wanted him to keep the judges' residence at the cost of the National Cathedral. The ability to interpret the blend depends solely on the inferences drawn from our encyclopedic knowledge about Jesus's rejection and the construction of the infamous National Cathedral in Ghana. In that

sense, the people in Jerusalem rejected Jesus as a religious figure, just as the people of Ghana rejected the infrastructure meant for religious activities.

#### **4.6.3 C6 as a priority advocacy media text**

The cartoon presents an idea of the impact of misplaced priorities on the Ghanaian economy. Contrary to what the Finance Minister, Ken Ofori-Atta, promised Ghanaians, the construction of the National Cathedral put undue financial constraints on the Ghanaian economy. As a prioritization campaign text, the cartoon calls for definite actions against misplaced priorities. It also highlights the negative results of incorrect choices during critical financial periods in Ghana. According to the cartoon, the government of Ghana seems to prioritize the construction of a National Cathedral at \$100 million at the expense of existing state buildings. It can be concluded that the cartoon is informative and produces a picture of a government with misplaced priorities. The story in C6 is consistent with Mina's (2014) assertion that Internet memes advocate social change. The image of C6 reiterates the hardships that directly affect people's lives when government priorities are misplaced.

#### **4.6.4 Humour and its impact on the message of C6**

The humor in C6 was enhanced by satire and irony. The humor lies in the re-imaging of the trial of Jesus in the contemporary Ghanaian political context. The biblical reference "Crucify him and let the Judges Residence stand" mirrors the crowd's rejection of Jesus in the Bible. The humor used in C6 does not reduce the serious message in the cartoon but rather invites viewers to think critically about the parallel between injustice in the Bible and the current Ghanaian event. The humor makes the critique memorable and prompts viewers to reflect on the absurdity of prioritizing one project over another.

### **Conclusion**

This paper shows how cartoons conceptualize humor using a conceptual integration network, as shown in the blended patterns above. We also argued that applying conceptual blending to political news (in this context, humorous political cartoons) provides light relief from serious political discourse. We also conclude that political cartoons born out of conceptual integration present accessible, relatable, and instant commentaries for political discussion for all levels of people in society. Considering that one of the goals of political cartoons is to humorously cast powerful interpretations of the day's news, conceptual integration shows that the emergent structure(s) created in the blend promote humorous meanings arrived at through the reader's background knowledge. The political cartoons used in this research have been identified as playing critical roles in facilitating social change and shaping Ghanaians' opinions and attitudes toward corruption. The study has demonstrated that anti-corruption text cartoons hilariously expose corrupt politicians and, as a result, tend to render corruption unpopular in Ghana. The image in C2 also shows that political cartoons exhibit content aimed at disregarding dishonesty. It was further identified that the issues raised by C2 sought to advocate for peaceful coexistence between Ghana's

two main political parties. The interpretation of the cartoon shows that peace is a societal value needed for democracy and development.

These findings contribute to our knowledge on the techniques and spatiotemporal features of political cartoons. Combining the inductively focused descriptive approach, qualitative content analysis approach, and conceptual representation approach has revealed fresh insights into the field of political cartoon research. Cultural knowledge has been shown to play a key role in the conceptualization of messages in cartoons. Thus, the study largely supports Mina (2014) regarding the social change function of memes and the promotion of participatory culture, as suggested by Wiggins and Bowers (2015). The study also corroborates van Dijk's (1990) argument that the understanding and interpretation of humor discourse is made up of mental processes and rich inferences from encyclopedic knowledge. Research has also established the centrality of humor in the overall meaning-making of political cartoon messages, as observed by Shifman (2013). This study has affirmed the use of humor in cartoons to serve purposes such as clarifying news, providing entertainment, and enacting social change. As these findings do not encompass the entirety of knowledge on the topic of political discourse, further studies could employ quantitative or mixed-methods analysis to investigate the impact of memes beyond politics, examining other social, political, and economic issues in Ghana.

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