Animation for Development in a Terrorized Space: Co-creating Animated Stories with Internally Displaced Girls in Northeast Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the ways within which animation can be used for the purpose of development. The paper examines the issues and opportunities in per/forming folklore through the use of traditional animation techniques. In the paper, we argue against the canonical conceptualizations of animation on the premise that existing canonical definitions and concepts do not have functional value for many traditional African societies. In this study, we coined and idealize 'Animation for Development' as a sub-genre of Animation Theatre that uses traditional animation to facilitate developmental change in local communities faced with terrorism and banditry. We draw from our experience in designing *Rayuwa* ('This Life'), a Hausa animation-folklore intended for the Digital Lab Africa Project, to claim that traditional animation offers a repository from whence community people can find voice or agency to vocalize their developmental challenges. In doing this, we identified the issues in designing 'animation for development' as well as the opportunities in folklorizing digital content for animation. We use Media Convergence as a theoretical moor to assess the possibilities in locating indigenous oral media *a la* folkloric-animation contents in web 2.0 and projecting such contents through the divergent

forms web 2.0 has to offer. Our paper found out that the new media technologies offer possibilities within which folkloric-animation can be used to engage communities as well as stakeholders for meaningful participatory development. We submit that new media technologies is positively modifying the manners and ways folklore has always been conceived, and not reducing its potency as assumed by many conservatives.

Keywords: Animation for Development, Per/forming, Folklore, and IDPs

Introduction

The uses of animation in the past years have justified their contributions to entertainments, teaching and learning outcomes, and now folklore. Many digital animators and folklore theorists believe that digital animations provide a repository of conserving the myths, legends, folktales as well as other lore that exist in cultures. As a result, the tendencies to perceive folklore as a form of expressive culture has increased since folklore embrace other aspects of communicative and news/digital arts, such as animation, gaming, film, cartoon, Graphic interchange Format (GiF), and 'fakelore' (fake news). Major developments in the internet and digital media have made the field of folklore as well as oral arts expansive. Animation is one aspect of the expressive arts that has benefited immensely from the development of the internet. It has formed a corpus of oral literature that can be referred to as 'oralnimation' literature. Oralnimation, for us, embodies all digitized animated-folkloric materials that is rooted in a given culture and treats issues about the folk-life of the peoples of that culture using indigenous languages or idiolects. In oralnimation, the legends, myths, folktales, festivals and indigenous performances of a people is digitized. Furthermore,

the lives, struggles, pleasures as well as contemporary realities of a society are represented. Thus, oralnimation does not only treat stories about the past but also pressing issues of contemporary relevance.

As an area of specialization, many Nigerian animator-critics (Joseph Azi 2012; Toni Duruaku 2013; Isaac Kwasu and Ema Ema 2015; Samuel Alade, Stephen Folaranmi and Odetunji Odejobi 2015; Akorede 2018) have used the medium of animation to serve several purposes ranging from entertainment, cultural preservativity, education, teaching and learning outcomes as well as to other aspects of Nigeria's social life. Traces of the deployment of animation-folklore in addressing somber development concerns is still very scanty as there are no fully fledged animation-folklore films that facilitate development. What currently exist are micro animation-folkloric materials produced by Nigerians for short film festivals around the world. Only recently, in the fourth edition of the "We art Water Film Festival" two micro animations that folklorize the issues of development, *Breath of Water* won the best film in micro animation category while the other, *Water wahala* made it to the finals of the competition. These micro-animation films are commentaries on the challenges of accessing portable water faced by many Nigerians. Nevertheless, the producers do not effectively deploy oral media to give cultural scope to the micro-animations. Hence, the works cannot be said to have the potential to mobilize (the Nigerian people, the sufferers of poor access to water) to take any meaningful action about their situation. Thus, these works only make comment about the problem. They do not engage or use local resources or people either in the process of developing micro-animation film or in the performance.

Animation for Development (A4D), which we propose in this paper, is the co-creating and use of folkloric materials to voice the developmental challenges of people living in a defined community. The concept is closely related to what Ida Hamre refers to as "Animation Theatre" (55), a wider conception of Puppet Theatre. A4D as a performative digitized art, uses indigenous resources; people, their languages, their stories and totems to mobilize, conscientize and animate people living in communities to take actions on the affairs of their development. Unlike the traditional conception and development of animation, A4D emphasizes participation of communities in the conception and development of the animation-folklore so much so that communities are not just spoken about but are involved in the planning and designing of the folkloric material. It is 'developmental' because in the process of participating, the community members are empowered on how to use animation to voice divergent challenges or aspects of their social or political reality.

In this paper, we argue for the taxonomization of micro-animation films that address concerns of societal development as Animation for Development (A4D) works. Our idea of A4D is such that these works should, in terms of their form and structure, deploy the indigenous idiolects of the folklorized community in the digital narration of the events in the animation-folkloric films or short films. Our idea of genuine development is premised on the finds from our 'workshopical' experiment with *Rayuwa* (A folkloric-animation video) that true development is empowering especially to the owners of the sourced folk materials. Whilst we acknowledge the contradictions in our acceptance of folkloric-animation works that address concerns of development as A4D,

we believe that the facilitator-animator[s] should take his art further by promoting or advocating in its entirety the oral media and lives of the people he is folklorizing.

The team of researchers worked with girls drawn across diverse groups. At the end of the workshop-experiment, the facilitators working with the group of girls came up with the folkloric animation video, *Rayuwa* produced. The choice of the story was sourced from the girls and performed by them. The team of facilitators only gave direction and perspectives in the arrangement of the sequences, the recording of the voiceover as well as the production of the first shoot. To begin with, it is important to give some explanations into the several concepts explored in this work

Conceptual/Theoretical Clarifications

Animation is the process of making the illusion of motion and change by means of the rapid display of a sequence of static images that minimally differ from each other (Jiang Tan, 1). Animators are artists who specialize in the creation of animation. According to Tan, animation can be recorded with either analogue media, a flip book, motion picture film, video tape, digital media, including formats with animated GIF, Flash animation and or digital video (2). To display animation, a digital camera, computer, or projector are used along with new technologies that are produced.

Animation creation methods include the traditional animation creation method and those involving stop motion animation of two and three-dimensional objects, paper cutouts, puppets and clay figures. Jiang Tan notes that these images are displayed in a rapid succession, usually 24, 25, 30, or 60 frames

per second (2). Traditional animations are those that use conventional methods, rooted in a defined culture, to tell stories. The stories told are usually folk-like and they animate mythic or legendary characters. This implies that the relationship between folklore and animation is age-long and symbiotic.

Universally perceived as a form of people's culture, folklore is both a repository of traditional philosophies and a conveyor of the quintessential reality of a people. This position corroborates the submission that folklore is the accumulated store of what mankind has experienced, learned, and practiced across the ages as popular and traditional knowledge, as distinguished from so-called scientific knowledge. Maria Leach and Jerome Fried see folklore as a generic term use to designate "the customs, beliefs, traditions, tales, magical practices, proverbs, songs; and in short, the accumulated knowledge of a homogeneous people (354)." Similarly, Norton Rurangwa perceives folklore as an art form, comprising various types of stories, proverbs, sayings, spells, songs, incantations, and other formulas, which employs spoken language as its medium (npag). For Meyer Abrams folklore includes:

> legends, superstitions, songs, tales, proverbs, riddles, spells, and nursery rhymes; pseudoscientific lore about the weather, plants, and animals; customary activities at births, marriages, and deaths; and traditional dances and forms of drama which are performed on holidays or at communal gatherings (101).

From the divergent definitions of folklore above, it is apparent that folklore is a resource [bank] from whence animation can draw its contents. Diverse stories and urban

legends rooted in cultures have, at different times, been animated and used to entertain and instructs. In fields such as medicine, engineering, biological sciences, applied and visual arts, amongst others, animation with folkloric materials have been used for training and learning. In military and paramilitary trainings, animation that contains aspects of the folkloric nuances of targeted group or communities has also been used to plan and execute major operations. Such animation works are also folkloric even though they are classified and archived in military libraries.

For us, both folklore and animation are two respective and divergent medium of expression. While one is highly cultural and deploys oral media, the other is an innovation stemming from avant-garde advancement in media technology. Before now, the two media have always been treated in the terms of their contrasting binarity. However, the advancement of technology especially with the development of web 2.0 has ushered in what is today referred to as "media convergence". This study is anchored on the theory of Media Convergence.

The development of media convergence can be traced to the well-known convergence theories. The theories related to convergence and multimedia are cross-media; multiple platforms, transmedia and intermedia production theories (Narcisse Kopecka-Piech, 78). The description and definition of Media Convergence is related to issues considered by this concept.

Murdock defines the convergence in the media, determined by the digital evolution, on three levels: technological level (communication systems), the content level (cultural forms) and the economic level (related to companies, employers and the media market) (36). For Henry Jenkins media convergence is an interaction between new and traditional media (npag.). Jenkins

theorization emphasizes cultural convergence and considers not only the technological shift in convergence, but also its effects on the media industry and its audiences. Juha Herkman, on the other hand, considers media convergence, from the point of view of inter-media relationships, and underlines that consequence of the economic convergence is the flow of cross-media products (371). Thus, convergence means many media products, linked not only through intertextually, but also in the production, distribution and marketing processes (Georgeta Drula, 131).

Deuze considers that the actual level of media convergence is the convergence of the citizen-consumer, which is also the creator of news (104). This new approach is determined by the changing media consumption habits due to usage of the new technologies. Thus, it can be stated that a new form of convergence is a combination of paid, owned, and earned content. This form of convergence combines at least two or more channels of communication, and is characterized by a consistent storyline, look and feel. One of the central frames of analysis of media convergence is that it embraces or simulates all other forms of media into the digital world.

Even before the neologism—media convergence was coined, traditional animation is the first experiment that sets the motion for media convergence-driven technologies like 2D and 3D animations. Traditional animation (also called cel animation or hand-drawn animation) was the process used for most animated films of the 20th century. The individual frames of a traditionally animated film are photographs of drawings, first drawn on paper. To create the illusion of movement, each drawing differs slightly from the one before it. The animators' drawings are traced or photocopied onto transparent acetate sheets called cels, which

are filled in with paints in assigned colors or tones on the side opposite the line drawings. The completed character cels are photographed one-by-one against a painted background by a rostrum camera onto motion picture film.

Nevertheless, one of the letdowns in Jiang Tan's conceptualization of traditional cel animation process, which we contest, is his submission that it has become obsolete by the beginning of the 21st century. Traditional animation could be relevant to communities in Nigeria as well as parts in the world. As part of the convergence, today's animators' drawings and the backgrounds are either scanned into or drawn directly into a computer system. Various software programs are used to color the drawings and simulate camera movement and effects. The final animated piece is output to one of several delivery media, including traditional 35 mm film and newer media with digital video. Some animation producers have used the term "tradigital" to describe cel animation which makes extensive use of computer technologies. Hence, traditional animation can be said to be relevant irrespective of new technologies.

Synopsis of *Rayuwa*

Rayuwa narrates the story of the suffering girls and women in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camp in Northeast Nigeria. Set in Chibok, the traditional animation begins with an attack in a girls-only school. The school is burnt as some girls are carted away by Boko Haram fighters. The surviving girls and women are taken away from their villages to an IDP camp in Maiduguri. Whilst at the camp, they are raped for food by soldiers, trafficked to the Middle-East by a military-pimp cartel, harassed and beaten, sexually abused and exploited. Relief materials sent

to the camp are given to girls and women who are ready to give in to their demands. The situation continues like this until the Boko Haram terrorist group takes the IDP camp unaware in a raid while soldiers fled. The relief materials are taken as soldiers fled. More girls are taken away as they call out to their God. Some women and children are killed as they call for help from the international community.

"The Rayuwa Animation Workshop": Issues and Prospects in Design and Performance

Designing animation for development be it traditional or 3D animation is both expensive and demanding. It requires humongous financial war-chest and commitment on the part of the facilitators. Following this demand is the issue of trust. It takes time for the participants to learn to trust the facilitators and for the facilitators to share in the pulses of the participants. It is even worse when the facilitators are non-native speakers of Hausa language and dialects. As experienced in the development of *Rayuwa*, it requires an effective mobilization of community people as well as their resources. The first challenge for facilitators is to pique the interest of the participants through traditional games, play, focus group discussions. Initially, the idea of coming together to do A4D is new to them and does not reflect or answer their pressing immediate needs. As one of the participants said:

> There are other things we can do. This idea does not answer our questions about life and our place in it as girls. We sleep with fear and wake up with fear that something bad will happen to us; that our mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters may be killed either by Boko Haram or by soldiers. We are not safe

anywhere. Everyday people come to assures us and
make promises but we are still here.

While the above statement paints a picture of despair, it was an entry point for the facilitators to get the participants to share their experiences.
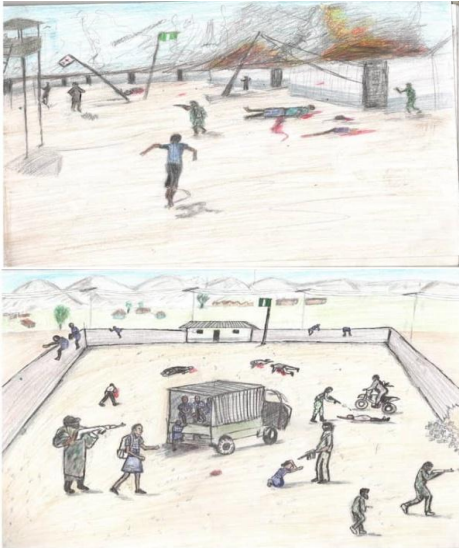

Illustrations 1 and 2: Scenes of attack on a public school

At the centre of the stories shared were fear, insecurity and little access to education for girls. The facilitators asked the participants to express their concerns using a picture-story. The outcomes were stimulating as most of the participants painted pictures of girls being chased out of schools, the lives and exploitation of women in IDP camps as well as viciousness and non-committal of men of the Nigerian armed forces. The facilitators put the picture-stories together and decided to use it as a script.
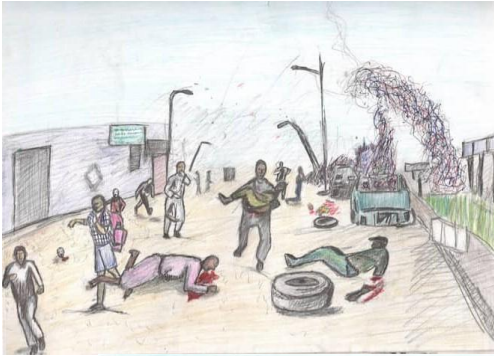
Illustrations 3&4: Terrorist carting away with girls

For the purpose of continuity, the facilitators added some other illustrations to the story and asked the participants to critique it. In the process of assessment, the lead-artist facilitator was asked to emphasize the sufferings of girls and women rather than the recklessness of the armed forces.
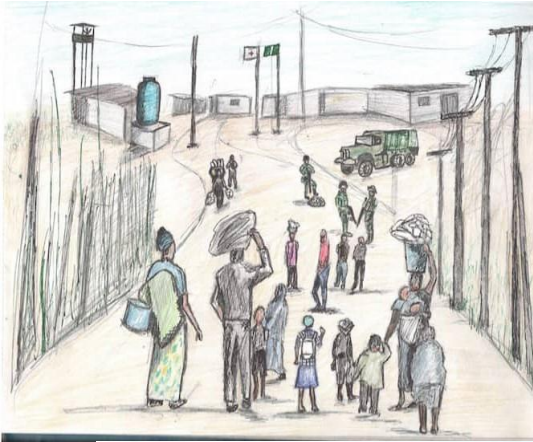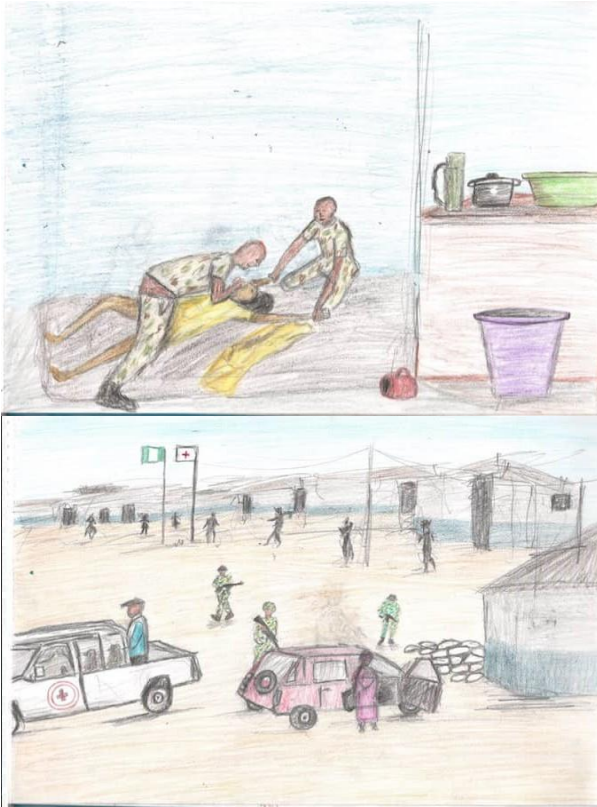
Illustrations 5&6: Girls and Women arrive IDP camp

The artist-facilitator instead facilitated them on the basics of drawing and tasked them to draw the needed illustrations themselves.

Illustrations 7&8: Relief materials arrive IDP camp as a woman begs for food

Illustrations 9&10: Soldiers rape Woman as a Sex Trafficker enters the camp freely

The above illustrations as well as others were scanned and subjected to media editing in the form of a motion picture.

Issues in the Design and Performance

Rayuwa falls within the category of traditional animation. The choice of traditional animation is sanctioned by the adverse impact the use of sketch pad would have had working with the

participants who would have been awed by the technology instead of focusing on the activities of the workshop. Furthermore, sketchpads as well as other new technologies for developing animation are expensive and cannot be afforded by community girls and Women. We believe that drawing on paper and cardboard is within their means and that they could further use it for other advocacy and demand creation. For them, traditional animation is affordable.

One of the major issues in the design of *Rayuwa* is character detailing and delineation. The folk characters lack depth and are difficult to identify in the different sequences. This affected the continuity of the story from sequence to sequence. To circumvent this problem, the sketches were done in a way that fewer characters are made to appear in each sequence; and the action in every sequence begins and ends in one happening. Each of the 14 sequences is complete in itself and sends a message.

Another problematic aspect of the design is the robust representation of the modus operandi of Boko Haram fighters as well as the exploitation of women and girls in ID camps were not explicit enough because of the lack of deep expertise of both the participants and the artist-facilitator. Nevertheless, enough was done by the artist-facilitator to highlight the method of attack of the terrorist group one of them being the element of surprise attack. On the issue of exploitation, rape and abuse in IDP camps, the illustrations were explicit. The roles of the military and external aid-givers were graphical enough to highlight the trafficking of IDP girls and women to places in the Middle East. For example, in the folkloric-animation film, Hajiya is seen promising the girls and women of a better life in the Middle East. She gives them money and encourages them to pull out of school and follow

her. She is as also seen negotiating the prices to be paid for each girl with the camp commandant who gives her easy access in and out of the camp.

Scanning the illustrations to picture format also affected the quality of the colour used in painting the illustration. The colours were not as sharp as they were on the cardboard paper. Nonetheless, for the participants the picture quality (intermittent bright and fading colour quality) was okay by them as the shade of the scanned photographs reflected their realities as well as that of communities.

Illustrations 11&12: Sex Trafficker paying soldiers to take school girls away from IDP camp

The facilitators also had to deal with the size of the scanned pictures. Reducing the size of the scanned illustrations meant that the quality of the photograph would further be affected. At the same time, the facilitators wanted the folkloric-animation to fit well, in terms of clarity, into phone formats for easy distribution across divergent social media platforms.

Hausa language was used in the narration. The participants rehearsed their parts and performed them while being recorded. This aspect of the project was problematic because of the multivalence of Hausa language spoken. Most of the spoken Hausa in the folkloric-animation video were broken Hausa from different scattered areas. Standard Hausa was not used. The beauty of this is that it represented the diversity of the group we worked with. The participants' speeches were edited and cleaned up on the studio in the presence of the participants. Their opinions were sought on the aspects of the performance that they want removed. Those aspects were cleaned out.

To carry non-Hausa speaker along, the animation video was subtitled in English. The subtitling explains the action taking place in the different sequence. In some cases, the timing of the speech of the performers-participants did not match the timing or movement of the moving picture. They come either too early or too late in the picture. The software to better animate the moving picture was within reach but the Facilitating team wanted the participants to have an experience in traditional animation so much so that they can use it as a medium for voicing their challenges without new technologies constituting any hindrance to them. Hence, the non-availability of high-tech software was a non-issue.

Illustrations 13&14: Terrorists attack IDP camp, kills IDPs and soldiers then carts away with Relief Material

Observable again in the illustrations is the absence of pictorial depth. The illustrations were linear even though voice-recording was done to aid meanings.

Illustrations 15: Girl appealing to international community to come to their aid

Furthermore, the audience-reader is also left to make or deduce meanings from the pictures peradventure they could read the English translation or understand the [Hausa] language in the animation motion picture.

Prospects in deploying Animation for Development

The prospect of working with a community to develop a folkloric animation video that tells the stories of girls and women in a terrorized space is rewarding as it offers communities the opportunity to harness their indigenous to demand for better life. The experiment with *Rayuwa* is a reference point that proves that traditional animation video films that folklorizes the struggles of women can serve as a form of voice to people living in different communities.

Developing animation in the studio with all the highlights of new technologies and software is good but not really transforming or touching the lives of people for whom the animation work is created. It is a different experience to involve people at the community level in planning and developing

animation work. Through active engagement and sharing both the animators and community people are involved in a world of learning, de-learning and relearning. At the penumbra of these processes is empowerment for both the facilitators and the community of participants. While the community learns about new methods of voicing or speaking using the convergence of oral and new media, the facilitators learn new ways of simulating traditional animation to 3D. Learning never stops in the process.

Importantly, is the fact that digitized folkloric-animation for development is a user-friendly medium for facilitating intercultural communication across borders. As evident in the responses gotten from the post assessment form of the participants, (the Rayuwa) Animation for Development Workshop is a life-changing experience that gives girls and women opportunities of being part of the decision that affect their lives. A4D is not just a tool for amplifying voices, it is an empowering medium of handing over a means of livelihood or survival to people especially in projecting the problems in the peripherals and mobilizing for community action to solve problems.

Nigeria is a nation of diverse peoples, ethnics, tribes and tongues. As a nation of diverse cultures and traditions, the country boasts of diverse urban legends, myths, folktales, musical-drama, dance-drama, performative totems, amongst other folkist performances that can constitute a basis for showcasing Nigeria's cultural wealth. The plethora of histories, myths and legends in the different cultures offer developers of animation a source or folkloric bank from whence contents can drawn in communicating developmental change. Because the divergent stories in different urban legends and myths are enduring, and indigenous peoples can identify with them, policymakers working with animation

developers can animate these stories to serve behaviour change on any area of development concern. They can also be used to assert, rebrand or, better court attention to Nigeria through divergent stimulating animation programs in the new media.

Nigerians are currently the highest or topmost users of the new media in Africa and about 6th in the world. The question however is how many Nigerian content is in the cyberspace or the new media. With all its population and diversity, only few Nigerian content, that is Nollywood productions, are in the new media. The real deal, traditional lives *a la* folklores and urban legends are missing. With A4D, Nigerian contents can dominate the new media if concerted effort can be given to folkloric animations. Traditional animation is one aspects of animation that is affordable and can be used to facilitating participatory development.

Conclusion

This study has critically examined the import of folkloric-animations in addressing issues of development in local communities. The study idealize the neologism, Animation for Development (A4D) as a tool for mobilizing, engaging and stimulating communities faced with diverse challenges to take action by voicing their challenges using animation as medium. The study is premised on the believe that girls and women in Nigeria's IDP camps and Northeastern States of Nigeria, a region besieged by the activities of Boko Haram terrorist group, has no access to the media to voice their concerns as most conventional media focus on the terrorist and the military operations rather than the lives and sufferings of women and girls. The paper has examined how folkloric animations can be used in empowering girls and

women in rural communities; and considerably, how the Nigerian-state can deploy folkloric animation video-films in showcasing its diverse cultural wealth. It also assessed the issues in folklorizing and designing traditional animation while also emphasizing the opportunities which web 2.0 offer in digitizing folkloric materials.

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