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THE RISE OF KENYAN POLITICAL ANIMATION: TACTICS OF SUBVERSION

A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety without being able to keep it at a distance.¹

The rise of Kenyan political animation around and following the post-election violence in 2008 was a marked juncture in the discussion of Kenyan animation and its connections to cartooning within Kenya. Whilst cartooning within the Kenyan media was present as far back as the 1950's, locally produced animation made its appearance in late 1990's as an addition to the range of visual imagery produced within Kenya.² Notwithstanding this historical difference, a separation between these two modes is not always discrete. Animation shares with cartooning a range of similar aesthetic devices and practices. Similarly the community of artists that create this work can be found moving across and between these two fields and their spheres of practice.³ Not all of these

¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 17

² John A., Lent, *Cartooning in Africa*, (New York: Hampton Press, 2008)

Patrick Gathara, *Drawing the Line: the History and Impact of Cartooning in Kenya*, (Nairobi: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Association of East African Cartoonists, 2004)

³ Such as Alfred Muchilwa, illustrator, cartoonist and animator; Celeste Wamiru political cartoonist, animator; Godfrey Mwambempwa, political cartoonist, animator; Joe Ngari, illustrator, cartoonist, animator; George Obonya, illustrator, animator; Kwame Nyongo, illustrator, animator; Daniel Muli, cartoonist, musician, animator; Jim Chuchu,

artists' animations are discussed in this chapter but instead a few key examples of political animations are included that highlight examples of *tactics* of subversion.⁴ These cases draw from the aesthetic subterfuge that animation permits through a range of devices, such as simplification of form, distortion, anthropomorphism, a predisposition to and/or the usual ensuing associations with children's genres. They also capitalise upon the changes in the media landscape within Kenya to circumvent conventional exhibition and distribution methods. The account begins with a discussion of the cartoonist Godfrey Mwampembwa (aka Gado), as a key catalytic agent who was able to draw upon tactics to create a more hospitable climate for political critique in the arts and popular media.⁵ His work in cartooning informed his subsequent political satire and television series *The XYZ Show* and encouraged his peers' political engagement through animation (drawing upon similar devices that appear historically within cartooning, such as caricature, parody, allegory and humour). It also served as a precursor to other tactically subversive voices within the animated moving images in Kenya that are discussed here.

The Rise of Political Moving Images in Kenya

Prior to the political events in 2007 leading up to and following the elections within Kenya, the Kenyan mass media had been described as having a tense relationship with the state. Although "Kenyan journalists enjoy considerable freedom to practice their profession", "patronage and bribery" compromised the media's role to promote and

documentarian, artist, political activist; Gatumia Gatumia, animator; Allan Mwaniki, illustrator, animator, and many others

⁴ de Certau, *Everyday Life*

⁵ de Certau, *Everyday Life*

protect democracy.⁶ The Kenyan media environment has historically been subject to different obstacles that hindered its liberalisation, these include the statutory limits to freedom of expression such as the Books and Newspapers Act of 1962, that grants “the police wide powers to seize without any search warrant” or the Film and Stage Plays Act, that grants a licencing officer (appointed by the minister for information and broadcasting) the power to deny a licence that is required for the production and performance/ public exhibition.⁷ Furthermore the State’s frequent interference that extended to closing down the printing facilities or arresting key players in the media, serves as evidence of the repressive state apparatuses in action.⁸ The advent of broadband and Internet related technologies including mobile phones changed the discussion dramatically to include considerations of the citizen as participant journalist, with systems such as, for example the Web application *Ushahidi* being created and adopted to respond to the election violence in 2007.⁹ This system is but one example of the use of the Internet and digital technologies that create a sense of empowerment with the users of these devices, outside of the state controlled mechanisms.¹⁰ It is within this

⁶ Lewis, Odhiambo, “The Media Environment in Kenya since 1990,” *African Studies* 61, no. 2 (2002): 303.

⁷ Odhiambo, “Media in Kenya”, 302.

⁸ Wanyande, Peter, “Mass Media State Relations in Post Colonial Kenya,” *Africa Media Review* 9, no.3 (1995): 54-75.

Odhiambo, “The Media in Kenya”, 295 – 318.

⁹ The Ushahidi application created a platform that allowed citizens to report live through the use of their own mobile phone and Internet technologies by uploading their own content in the form of images, videos or text. This live-feed of information is then combined with Google maps that was able to track where this content related to.

¹⁰ Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich, ‘Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya’s 2007-2008 Post-Election Crisis’ in *Internet and Democracy Case Studies Series*, Berkman Centre Research Publication No. 2008-2009. (The Berkman Centre for Internet and Society, Harvard University, 2009)

context of new technologies that one observes a rise in animation with political content within Kenya. Whilst the specific cases presented in this chapter appear as a handful of detailed accounts, they are representative of a wider engagement with digital technologies in animation whether at a production stage or at distribution stage and significantly occurring simultaneously or following 2007.

As Lent argued cartoons in Kenya play a role in the zeitgeist of their time, participating in and inflecting upon events at a given historical moment such as in the 1950's late colonialism, in the 60's and 70's the new nation-state, and later 1990s a concern with wealth and power.

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In these contexts, the study of historical comics does not only serve a documentation function, but also gives insight into the development of public discourses within the framework of popular culture.¹¹

Similarly the political animations that emerged during and following 2007 also give insight to the concerns regarding the State and ethnic tensions surrounding the elections of that time. They also engage with wider discourses that emerge surrounding the use of digital media and in particular Web publishing, social networks and online video content and the “participatory culture” these systems create.¹² These animations corroborate the documentation of an increase in technologically engaged citizens (albeit predominantly

¹¹ John A., Lent, *Cartooning in Africa*, 156.

¹² Jean Burgess, and Joshua Green, *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009)

Howard Rheingold, ‘Using Participatory Media and Public Voice to Encourage Civic Engagement’ in *Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth*. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning, edited by W. Lance Bennett, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008), 97–118.

urban) that appear empowered by the freedoms that are granted in terms of distribution of content. In 2007, for example, it was possible to watch online a short political 2D animation called *The Stated Opinion Show* (2007) by Musa Ihiga. The animation was similar in format to *The XYZ Show*, a satire that parodies a talk show with a host character and the political figurehead Mwai Kibaki as guest (in minimalist cartoon aesthetic). Ihiga was an information technologist by profession and not strictly speaking a trained animation artist, nevertheless his expertise in these related technologies ensured that he was able to circumvent mainstream exhibition and distribution methods. Alongside the different Internet platforms such as YouTube, Ihiga distributed his short animation on self-made DVDs and VCDs at local market stalls for sale. His small contribution was evidence of a form of light-touch political critique that had a noticeable local effect as it was screened at the Kenyan International Film Festival and Lola Kenya Film Festival, and mentioned in the Kenya Film and Television awards (2009). In a similar vein, in 2013, animator Allan Mwaniki known for his work on commercial productions such as the children's animation series *Tinga Tinga Tales* (2011) was also inspired to make short political animations that were circulated digitally on YouTube, Google+ and Facebook.¹³ His 2D animation *Jino Pevu Uhunye* (2013) is a short satirical clip of Uhuru Kenyatta doing a dance celebration at State House “amidst the Hague trials, political problems in the country, teachers strikes etc.” of the time.¹⁴ That same year Mwaniki also made a collaborative animation *Children of War* (2013), part-funded by GESCI, an organisation founded by the United Nations ICT task force. The short was inspired by the artist's contact with refugees in the Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps that he believed also

¹³ Mwaniki's engagement with animation and political activism extended beyond these animated shorts and continued through his involvement with the creative hub PAWA254 (an organisation that encourages political and social activism through the arts and digital media) where he ran workshops in animation in August 2014.

¹⁴ Allan Mwaniki, Personal Communication, 15/09/2013.

shared similar experiences and vulnerabilities to the internally displaced Kenyans victims of the aftermath of the post-election violence in 2008. This sobering animation consists of small vignettes interspersed between inter-title frames, at times depicting an army of faceless soldiers, or abducted children imprisoned in cells, at other times the shot focuses in on the face of a child soldier.

These types of animations are not only evidence of an increase in the “vernacular creativity”¹⁵ resulting from the accessibility and proliferation of digital technologies, but also proof of the rise of a “networked public sphere” that frames public discourse.¹⁶ As Benkler argues the fundamental difference between earlier mass media is the change in the architecture from the unidirectional “hub-and-spoke” to the “distributed architecture with multidirectional connections among all nodes”.¹⁷ Critically the cost of becoming a participant and content provider becomes more affordable to the individual, and the opportunity for State control over the public sphere becomes more difficult (although not impossible as the instance of China demonstrates).¹⁸ The Kenyan animators that have actively engaged with these media, such as the likes of Gatumia Gatumia and Andrew Kaggia discussed later in detail, mark a significant move towards a grassroots approach to political engagement. They serve as examples of the proliferation of an empowered voice that circulates outside of conventionally mainstream media such as television or radio. They also demonstrate the ability to escape constituted institutional

¹⁵ Jean Burgess, ‘Hearing Ordinary Voices: Cultural Studies, Vernacular Creativity and Digital Storytelling,’ *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 20 no. 2, (2006): 201-214.

¹⁶ Yochai Benkler, *The wealth of networks: How social production transforms markets and freedom* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), 212.

¹⁷ Benkler, *The wealth of networks*, 213.

¹⁸ Benkler, *The wealth of networks*, 212.

boundaries that in the Kenyan context may be used to gag and control by different players with vested interests.

Gado, *The XYZ Show*: A catalytic agent

The Tanzanian cartoonist Godfrey Mwampembwa, (aka Gado), has a widely recognized professional career in political cartooning as the editorial cartoonist for the Kenya's Daily Nation. A lesser-known fact about this cartoonist is his experience and work in animation. Between 1996 and 1997 Mwampembwa studied animation at *Fabrica*, the communications research centre based in Treviso, Italy. This was followed by further studies in 2000 at the Vancouver Film School in Canada, where he studied classical animation and filmmaking. In 2004 he also participated on the UNESCO Africa Animated training program that attracted a number of regional artists and cartoonists with the aim to produce animated shorts, including Allan Mwaniki and Peter Mute.¹⁹ This knowledge of animated techniques and filmmaking combined with a strong foundation in political cartooning arguably were to directly inform the development of Gado's political parody *The XYZ Show* and connect him to the community of emerging Kenyan animation artists. His cartoons have also permeated beyond the local print media having had published his cartoons in various international papers including Courier International (France), Le Monde (France), New African (U.K.), Washington Time (US). This international coverage may have served to position the artist as a key public figure contributing to the Kenyan critical discourse on politics. Later this exposure would

¹⁹ The UNESCO Africa Animated training program that aimed to encourage the production of local animated content with the incentive of cultural retrieval to present "programmes with African imagery, dialogue and music that draw on the continent's vast oral and pictorial heritage, reclaiming and preserving it for the next generation". UNESCO, 2013 http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=17285&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html Accessed 10/08/2014

bolster and enable the development and production of the political parody, *The XYZ Show* (2008) that would be sponsored in the main by key international partners such as Ford Foundation and the embassies of Switzerland, Nederland and France.

The XYZ Show (2008-) is a political parody presented in a television-news format that uses latex puppets that are moulded from sculptures based upon Gado's drawn caricatures. The influences from Britain's *Spitting Image* (1984-1996) and France's Canal Plus *Les Guignols* (1988-) are immediately visible. At its start *The XYZ Show* (2008-) limited the form to a restricted set of caricatured politicians without resorting to the cruder and more extreme depictions visible in *Spitting Image* (1984-1996). In a similar vein to *Spitting Image* (1984-1996), *The XYZ Show* (2008-) relied on analogous visual devices;

the puppets were instantly recognisable to the generality of viewers, despite the frequently immense exaggeration of particular aspects of a figure's physiognomy, physique, behaviour, dress or character. One such trait would frequently be used to make metaphorical reference to another.²⁰

The structure of *The XYZ Show* (2008-) is much more akin to the French show *Les Guignols* (1988-). The program is presented as a spoof news show with a host and guest, with brief inserts including interviews with other guests, and limited puppet inserts depicting aspects of the news headlines. At its start, Gado's production adopted a similar format but adapted the structure to compensate for a lack of funds and resources. By 2015 and in the ninth series, the show had grown and included a range of diverse sets, situations, and references to international politicians, popular icons and celebrities.

²⁰ Ulrike Meinhof and Jonathan Smith (2000), 'Spitting Image: TV Genre and intertextuality' in *Intertextuality and the Media: from genre to everyday life*, edited by Ulrike Meinhof, Jonathan Smith, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 45.



Figure 1.01: A range of the cast of puppets from *The XZY Show* (2008-) in the studio at GoDown Arts Centre, Nairobi, Kenya, 08/2009.



Figure 1.02: The sculptor Gerald Olewe in his studio at the GoDown Arts Centre with details of Gado's cartoons on the board, 08/2009.

The project had begun as an idea in 2002 inspired by a visit to Canal Plus TV in France where Gado and was given a tour of the station and a behind the scenes look at the making of *Les Guignols* (1988-). Gado intended to produce a similar show to this back in Kenya, and he was spurred along by the support offered through Canal Plus at the time. The main obstacles that he faced were the production costs for the development of the puppets and the specialised skills required to make the puppets, armature, etc. In 2004, with the help of the French Embassy, Gado secured support to send the Kenyan sculptor Gerald Olewe to France to be trained for a month by Alain Duverne the lead designer and sculptor for the marionettes on *Les Guignols* (1988-). During this time Olewe created and completed his first latex puppet of politician Mwai Kibaki. Once Olewe returned to Kenya, Gado and Olewe proceeded to put together a team of scriptwriters, animators, puppeteers, voice actors, with a view to develop a treatment for the show and setup a production company. After receiving no private investment, the team decided to self-fund a 20-minute pilot that included animated inserts, as well as a collage of puppets and live action back-plates.²¹ The pilot was complete in April 2007 and in October 2007 the pilot was screened at the *Afrimation* screening in London and the following year at the *Africa in Motion Film Festival* in Edinburgh.

The political problems, which caused a humanitarian crisis where ethnic violence was triggered by the disputed presidential elections in January 2008, delayed the promotion and distribution of the program that at the time was construed by mainstream television stations as being controversial. Towards the end of 2008 the production team managed to convince foreign donors and partners to invest in a season's worth of programs. The money was primarily invested in the continued making of the puppets and setting up of a workshop. The predictions were that the program would run on air from April 2009 on a

²¹ Godfrey Mwampembwa, Personal Communication, 15/08/2009.

weekly basis on Citizen TV. Whilst the ratings listed the program as garnering an incredible viewership, the company found it impossible to secure advertising around the allocated program slot, private companies at the time were reticent to be affiliated or associated by proximity to the political nature of the program.²² Notwithstanding in 2015 the show was still running in its ninth season.

The XYZ Show presents an interesting case of subversivity not necessarily because of its overt use of the caricature and political content but also because of its production methods (that utilized a combination of puppets, digital compositing techniques and motion graphics) and importantly its exhibition and distribution methods. In 2007 a YouTube channel was setup containing excerpts and episodes from the series and by 2015 the channel listed 38,169 subscribers and over 4 million views. By 2009 the program also led to the setting up of the company *BuniMedia* that includes amongst other services, the online distribution and streaming platform *BuniTV*. The platform promotes a range of African related content in animation or “film”, predominantly made by African artists. It also serves to host all of the episodes of *The XYZ Show* across the series. This is one example of how the distribution of this content via the Internet and mobile phone was a critical component to discourses on political empowerment and agency in Kenya.²³

²² Godfrey Mwampembwa, Personal Communication, 15/08/2009.

²³ Burgess, Green, *YouTube: Online Video*

Benkler, *The wealth of networks*

Rheingold, “Using Participatory Media”

After the 2007 elections, we argued that it was the right time for a show like this, that Kenya needed a show like this: We have one [coalition] government and no opposition so we needed to strengthen criticism.²⁴



Figure 1:03: Detail of the puppet of President Kibaki in foreground at *The XYZ Show* studio at the Go Down Arts Centre, Nairobi.

²⁴ Mwampembwa on CNN, 2009
<http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/africa/11/04/africanvoices.gado/>



Figure 1.04: Still frame for the first pilot made of *The XYZ Show*.

The coinciding of different factors; the electoral political events in 2008, the international donor support for this production, the upsurge in use of digital technologies and an appetite within the public sphere for critical political engagement, are significant ingredients to the discussion of subversive animation in Kenya. It is possible to infer that whilst Gado was able to provide political critique that retained independence from local power forces, his position was also informed by the understanding of a prerequisite to promote the ideologies that the partner foreign agencies, embassies and organizations represented. That said, he is discussed in this context as a catalytic agent to political animation in Kenya. His program was a precursor to other subversive voices within the animated moving images in Kenya. Gado was uniquely placed as he has a wide range of connections across the creative arts with cartoonists and animators in Kenya. By appearing to create a more hospitable climate for political critique in the arts and popular media, Gado is presented here as key figure responsible for encouraging his peers' political engagement through animation.

Alternate Political Voices

Representation, however, is far more difficult for governments to control, regulate and censor than are actual industries. If a newspaper contravenes state preferences, its plant can be destroyed, its staffers imprisoned and even killed. But ideas continue to find currency and circulation.²⁵

Gatunia Gatunia

The case of the artist Gatunia Gatunia's animation *The Greedy Lords of the Jungle* (2009) provides evidence of a crafted use of computer animation for political purpose. In this example 3D computer animation is used to retell an allegorical narrative that resonated with Kenyan audiences on multiple levels. Gatunia Gatunia (b. 1978) was educated in 3D computer animation in Canada with a background in the arts. The use of this type of technology and animation tool is more complex requiring dexterity in the use of the software as well as an artistic engagement to negotiate modelling, rigging, texturing, lighting, staging in a virtual 3D environment²⁶. At the age of 23 he was working in the digital content and animation sector, at RECON-Digital a multi-media company based in

²⁵ Keyan Tomaselli, "Repositioning African media studies: thoughts and provocations." *Journal of African Media Studies* 1, no. 1, (2009): 9-21.

²⁶ The terms "modelling", "rigging" and "texturing" are technical terms that denote processes within 3D animation software. The modelling is a process of creating or virtual sculpting the objects and things that will populate the virtual space. The rigging process involves assigning a virtual skeleton and then attributing areas of control on the model that it is designed to move. The texturing process involves assigning digital images to the model/object so that it appears to have the textural quality of the thing it is simulating.

Nairobi. By 2009 he produced the animated short *The Greedy Lords of the Jungle* (2009). The same year the film was selected for screening in the 2009 Durban International Film Festival, South Africa, as well as being aired on national television on television station.²⁷

Gatumia speaks of this animation as a reinterpretation of a Gikuyu story popularised in Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* (1939) and influenced also in part by the Kenyan cartoons of the 1980's such as *Picha Hadithi* by Terry Hirst.²⁸ In Kenyatta's account of this Gikuyu narrative, the story is seen as parody of the British colonial government. For the most part Gatumia's adaptation remains true to the "original" narrative, although the artist decided to change the ending of the story to a more palatable, less violent demise, one that was "more appropriate to the tone of the film".²⁹

The adapted story consists of a protagonist, "Man", whose land is repeatedly taken away from him by a gang of antagonists (represented here as various anthropomorphised animals, King Lion, Mr Elephant, Mr Rhinoceros, Mr Buffalo, Mr Crocodile, Mr Hippo, Mr Leopard, Chairman Honourable Mr Fox). At the start of the story, unbeknown to the protagonist, Mr Elephant conspires with the others to take Man's land from him. When Man calls for aid, King Lion invites him to set up a commission of inquiry to settle the matter. He is given to opportunity to appeal his fate to the "very very grand commission of experts in jungle law" (*The Greedy Lords of the Jungle*, 2009). However the said commission in this story is made up of the same corrupt villains that were complicit in the plan to appropriate the protagonist's land. The central character leaves this situation,

²⁷ Kamau, NTV 2009
<http://www.businessdailyafrica.com/-/539444/626786/-/rwdtwe/-/index.html>
Accessed 10/09/2013)

²⁸ Gatumia Gatumia, Personal Communication, 12/08/2013

²⁹ Gatumia Gatumia, Personal Communication, 12/08/2013

accepting his fate, disempowered and dejected. However this “colonization” is repeated once again, when Man moves and establishes himself in a new place. Eventually the protagonist devises a plan to entrap the usurpers within the confines of the same land that they move in to occupy, by imprisoning them. Crucially, Gatumia alters the original narrative that ends with the trapping of the animals in a hut that is then burnt to the ground by Man. It is possible to speculate that the less violent version of this parody is designed to befit the genre of “naïve and childlike” animation and present it as moralistic tale with a somewhat innocuous and cautious conclusion. The fate of the villains is the more socially acceptable notion of imprisonment as opposed to a horrific and brutal death. In so doing, Gatumia is able to subvert possible institutional impediments that may arise from bodies such as the Classification of Broadcasting Board, or the Broadcasting Content Advisory Council that regulates the exhibition of content, making the film more palatable and approachable to the range of audience sensibilities.

Gatumia claims that the narrative was intended to serve as an allegory to echo different moments in Kenyan and African histories, firstly the “disenfranchisement of the Africans by the Europeans especially during and after ‘the Scramble for Africa’”³⁰ and simultaneously the continued experiences of alienation caused by contemporary African politics and the endemic institutional corruption. Like other allegorical narratives, this story contracts larger historical narratives into a smaller spatially and temporally removed narrative that is transformed to impart covert political and moral messages. If discussed solely as an allegorical narrative it is possible to see the film as a vehicle for telling a bigger story, with specific cultural and historical referents, in a context where direct

³⁰ Recon-Digital YouTube, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ID0q1Ex4Mb8>, Accessed 10/08/2013

mention of the grander narrative could be problematic³¹. However, the discursive framework of the allegory can be seen to limit the possibility of addressing the “thick layers of meaning” that this film is able to carry and its readings across different spatial and temporal contexts. In other words, by emphasising an allegorical narrative genre the range of possible readings risk becoming restricted to a dominant mode.³² Furthermore as Clifford suggests, “any story has the propensity to generate another story in the mind of the reader (or hearer), to repeat and displace some prior story”.³³ In this case, the narrative collapses multiple historically positioned narratives so that the thematic concern with the “wrongful appropriation of property and rights” can be seen to transcend the condition of the colonised and reappear in the discourses on the post-colonial experience.³⁴ Mbembe’s description of the postcolonial relationship is echoed within this narrative proposition, “the postcolonial relationship is not primarily a relationship of resistance or of collaboration but can be best characterised as illicit cohabitation, a relationship made fraught by the very fact of the *commandement* and its subjects having to share the same living space”.³⁵ The motif of an illicit cohabitation is illustrated at the start of the narrative. The Elephant appears to be visiting the land inhabited by Man where he is welcomed and invited to stay, whilst all the while the Elephant is “hatching a plan of

³¹ Mike Wayne, *Political Film: The Dialectics of Third Cinema*, (Pluto Press: London, 2001), 130.

³² Paul De Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (London: Yale University Press, 1979)

James Clifford, “On Ethnographic Allegory”. In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, 98 – 121. Berkley: University of California Press, 1986.

³³ Clifford, “Ethnographic Allegory”, 100.

³⁴ Recon-Digital YouTube, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/user/RECONDigitalVideo>

³⁵ Achille Mbembe, “Provisional Notes on the Postcolony.” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 62, no. 1, (1992): 4.

his own”.³⁶ Furthermore the concern with habitation and place is not limited to a discussion on the presumed binary premise of invader and invaded, as Mbembe suggests this is in fact more complex and nuanced. In this particular animation for example the narrative constructs a plot to illustrate the continual and repeated movement from one place to another of the protagonist. This narrative ploy alludes to the political discussions at the time situated in Kenya with regards to the “I.D.P. (Internally Displaced Persons) problem”. The discourses on Internally Displaced Persons within Kenya are specifically historically located in the events leading up to and after the elections of 2007/8. Like other examples discussed in this section, the impact of the post-election violence, whilst not overtly referred to within this piece, clearly served to motivate the narrative content. In reference to wrongful and forceful appropriation of property, the Gatumia publicly states,

Unfortunately this is a problem still rife in Africa and one that regularly rears its ugly head right here in Kenya. One need go no further than the I.D.P. problem and the numerous national scandals to find evidence of the effects of such vice.³⁷

Therefore the weight of this animation lies in its ability to allude to multiple readings. It may appear to be a moralistic tale about power and guile or a representation of the colonial experience. Alternatively it may be seen to reflect the contemporary experiences of post-colonial politics across different African countries, or specifically as an extended metaphor of the conditions of the internally displaced Kenyan citizens who were forced into internal exile due to the events surrounding the post-election violence. This

³⁶ *The Greedy Lords of the Jungle*, 2009

³⁷ Recon-Digital YouTube, 2010

simultaneous multiplicity permits the animation to circulate within mainstream media while disguising the critique of one system by alluding to other parallel systems of power. The artist here is able to employ a tactic that allows the form to be insinuated into mainstream media as simply a fable about power and greed.³⁸ The multi-layering of possible readings permits a type of subterfuge that evades censorship that may be imposed by the state. Furthermore, the postcolonial positioning of this animation also offers “imaginative revision” of the histories it draws upon and its conclusion invites the belief in the possibility of transformation.³⁹

It is possible to extrapolate another reading of this response to multiple forms of colonisation, seen through the lens of a larger discourse on animation and the cultural imperialism of Disney. Gatumia Gatumia frequently stated that a personal objective of his as an artist in animation, was to create content that promotes African narratives in response to the hegemonic content imported from the US.⁴⁰ In a sense this animation is politically underpinned not only by its embedded content within the allegory of colonization, but in its entirety as an animation that is an example of locally produced content for a local audience.

JUST A BAND

³⁸ de Certeau, *Everyday Life*

³⁹ Stephen Slemon, “Post-colonial allegory and the transformation of history”, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 23, no. 1, (1988):164.

⁴⁰ Gatumia on Capital Talk, K24TV, 2012
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=183wseZ-Wis> Accessed 10/09/2013.



Figure 4.07: Poster Image for Just a Band exhibition TRNSMSSN at the Goethe, 2009.

In 2003 Jim Chuchu (b. 1982), Daniel Muli (b. 1982) and Bill Sellanga (b. 1982) formed the musical and multimedia group *Just a Band*.⁴¹ The artists decided to live and work together in an apartment-come-studio based in Nairobi, where they recorded and produced their music, filmed their footage and animated on their homemade pcs to later edit music videos or create installation pieces as part of a larger exhibition. This collective of Kenyan artists provide another example of the use of animated moving images for political purpose. They differ from the other cases presented here in their ability to indiscriminately straddle acutely different public spaces, such as both the gallery and the nightclub in order to disseminate their creative work. Their engagement with the public sphere is unique because their work is able to connect with different discourses ranging from those in the field of popular music, online activism, viral videos, to multimedia and digital art. More importantly it

⁴¹ Whilst the “electronic music/art collective” known as *Just a Band* in 2012 grew to include another three artists Mbithi Masya, Joe Were, Sedar Oddenyo, for the purpose of this chapter, the discussion will concentrate on the three founding members, their early multimedia work and their own political activism as individuals and through the band.

appears to do so in an inclusive and undifferentiated way.⁴² Through this straddling of popular culture and the arts, negotiating local and foreign influences musically and aesthetically, they are also able to present an interesting case study of subversivity. Whilst so far the evidence of a rise in political animation in Kenya has been discussed in the context of mainstream media and the popular participatory culture of online or mobile distribution, these artists provide the opportunity to consider alternative types of animated moving images, and alternative spaces and contexts of exhibition and distribution (as well as capitalising upon online participatory culture).

In 2006, “the collective”⁴³ released a single *Inwinyo Piny* (2008) that was accompanied by an animated short. *Inwinyo Piny* (2008) is one of the earliest examples that hint at the artists’ engagement with social and political concerns. The animated video is set in the midst of an urban landscape (Nairobi) with surreal interludes of a DJ floating in the sky on a giant turtle. Simultaneously the story follows a solitary person who is assaulted and robbed by a gang of thugs. The video alludes to the everydayness of criminality on the streets in Nairobi. By embedding this event within a larger surrealist non-linear context, the artists are able to disguise an inferred social commentary. These types of pervasive practices continue to appear throughout their work as multi-media artists, simultaneously straddling diverse conceptual and discursive spaces such as politics and electronic music, the gallery and the club, the

⁴² Jurgen Habermas, *The structural transformation of the Public Sphere*, translated by Thomas Burger, Edward Lawrence, (Massachusetts: MIT, 1991).

⁴³ In an interview with [Africaisacountry.com](http://www.africaisacountry.com) (<http://www.youtube.com/user/africaisacountry>) Daniel Muli discusses the reasons why they choose to call themselves a collective as they try to engage with the semantics of “band” and “artist” and whether these terms describe their work and more importantly the range of contexts that they circulate within (gallery vs musical). This small excerpt alludes to the straddling that occurs in their work. This interview can be viewed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCILm_KsR0w.

digital still and animated moving images, documentary and fiction, political activism, subversion and the spectacle.

In 2008, the band released its first album *Scratch to Reveal* (2008) that was also accompanied by various animated shorts that also served as music videos to accompany their music. This was followed in 2009 by a digital media exhibition that promoted some of the musical content and accompanying digital moving images (music videos?). The exhibition *TRNSMSSN* was held at the Goethe-Institut, Nairobi, between May 5-16th 2009. This exhibition consisted of a set of different animated shorts, installations and video art. Amongst this eclectic mix of music videos, post-apocalyptic visuals and Kenyan sci-fi, *Just a Band* collaborated with award winning Kenyan activist photographer Boniface Mwangi to make two pieces with animated moving images that directly address the post-election violence, *2012*, *The Sequel* (2009) and *Somehow* (2009).

These two short pieces both rely on the predominant use of photographic imagery taken by Mwangi during the post-election violence events. However they also employ the additional use of animated techniques to move the images/ or to embed elements, albeit in a very limited manner for different effect. These moving image pieces employ aspects of animation techniques whilst appearing photographic in nature. The sequences present multi-faceted subversive qualities that can be located beyond the overt reference to political content.

One such facet can be observed within the context of exhibition that saw these sequences embedded within a larger collection of work that appeared eclectic in scope. The literature on the exhibition would suggest that it was by no means

underpinned nor framed by an overt interest in political content. Amongst the “broken synthesizers and fragmented satellite broadcasts from the future [that] provide a fictionalized Kenyan future; panicked astronauts, lovelorn puppets, a flying tortoise, the meaning of life, an experimental boy band and a sprinkling of sparkly stuff...”, the images of Kenya’s post-election violence created cause for reflection on possible imagined futures.⁴⁴ The collision of disparate elements (including a DJ set that the band performed to conclude the event) served in a sense to obfuscate the social political elements that existed within the larger “fictionalized” whole.

After the violence in 2008, the Tourism minister kept telling Kenyans to go back to normal and maintain peace for the sake of the tourism industry...It made me wonder where we supposed to hide the ashes and dust somewhere and smile at the tourists.⁴⁵

Another facet of the transgression of these sequences is visible in the sequence’s structure that encourages viewers to consider the nature of animation and the inter-relationship between still and moving image. Whilst the artists do not depict movement in a filmic sense, through the sequence of 24 images to make up one second of movement on screen, they present a state of change between two still images. The moving images immediately refer to the photojournalistic origin, retaining an element of stillness. In the case of *Somehow* (2009), movement is introduced as an interjection or rupture in the original image, with the insertion of cut-out “Hollywood smiles” that are positioned to replace the mouths of the subjects depicted in these images. This on/off or

⁴⁴ TRNSMSSN Event Description, May 5, 2009, <https://www.facebook.com/events/70184281594/> Accessed, 10/09/2013

⁴⁵ Personal Communication, Chuchu, February 2, 2010

limited animation technique generates an “uncanny” effect⁴⁶ that makes for discomfoting viewing.



Figure 4.08: Two sequences of 2 frames from *Somehow* (2009) illustrating the limited on/off animated technique used with sound.

The juxtaposition of identical sequential images with the additional rupture of a superimposed smile creates a conflation of visual opposites within the same image. A woman flees from the violence in tears; a woman flees from the violence with a smile on her face. This rupture is also emphasised by the soundtrack that is otherwise silent, with the exception of a pinging sound that is synchronous with the inserted

⁴⁶ The uncanny valley was a phenomenon studied by Masahiro Mori (1970) with regards to reactions to human qualities in robots. He observed that at a certain tolerance of similarity the robot appeared to look “creepy”. This phenomenon has been used to describe some effects in animation whereby animatronics, puppets, or CG photoreal characters appear to be human enough to arouse some empathy, yet at the same time is clearly enough *not* human to avoid the sense of wrongness.

cut-out smiles. Between each new image, the sound of a camera shutter opening and closing is used to denote the change and remind the viewer of the origin of the image. Here it is worth considering the discussion of parodic forms without derision as proposed by Hutcheon.⁴⁷ The animated sequence makes references to the photojournalistic genre and relies on a reading of the image as such for the parody to work. An understanding of the journalistic qualities of the image is essential in that it allows the viewer to locate the image as a document of a referent (in the vein of documentary genre) of an event and person/people in a particular time and place. The artists' interjection in this case plays upon the portrayal of a grotesque body, but not as Bakhtin (1965) discusses in the context of satire, instead here it results in an unsettling sense of unease rather than humour. The sequence is cohesive only in its subject matter, a focus on the Kenyan citizen around the time of the post-election violence.

Aside from the collective work, including political pieces that were embedded within a larger body of creative work that encompassed music, video, web-based multimedia, the individuals within *Just a Band* were also involved in separate projects that also consisted of different types of political activism through the uses of animation and moving images. Jim Chuchu, at the time, setup the politically activist organization Kuwani Serious (2009) that actively sought to engage with the issues surrounding the postelection violence, through the dissemination of short digital video interviews disseminated on the web. The project aimed to raise a political consciousness amongst young Kenyans through viral videos on YouTube and

⁴⁷ Linda Hutcheon, "Modern Parody and Bakhtin." In *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges*, edited by Gary Morson and Caryl Emerson, 87-104. Illinois: North Western University Press, 1989.

Facebook. One of the most famous contributions written and directed by Jim Chuchu, with Mbithi Masya (as co-director), and narrated by Bill Selanga, was the short digital video, *If This Country Burns, We Burn With It* (2010). The video portrait exposes images of a sample of Kenyan citizens, accompanied by a voice-over that provokes activism through a collective responsibility as opposed to apathy. By 2015, the short digital video clocked 26,485 views on YouTube, and had circulated separately through links on social networking sites. In 2012, Jim Chuchu moved on to co-found and take on the role of Creative Director for NEST, a multi-disciplinary art space in Nairobi. The work with Kuweni Serious, spawned another creative hub promoting political activism, PAWA254, setup in 2011 by the photographer Bonaface Mwangi, team leader of the organisation.⁴⁸ In 2009 Daniel Muli worked with a media production company *Mediae* in Nairobi. His work consisted of creating animated inserts for the children's educational program *The Know Zone* (2009). The *African Tales* series was a collection of animation inserts to be placed within the larger program structure that presented a storyteller who narrated different stories. Embedded amongst the series was one particular episode with educational politically inflected content about animals sharing resources over a waterhole. The following year Muli also contributed to the creative team of multi-media production company *Well Told Story*. Amongst the company's portfolio was the Emmy award winning *Shujaa* (2010), a multi-platform project designed to encourage political engagement in the youth. The story is promoted through comic books, animated comics on YouTube, social networking, and radio. The term *Shujaa* means heroes in "Sheng," an urban slang used by youth throughout Kenya. USAID partnered with this innovative Kenyan company in this initiative to engage youth in issues such as

⁴⁸ <http://pawa254.org/> Accessed 21/08/2014

political violence, negative ethnicity, leadership, and peaceful elections. The narrative revolves around a cast of characters including DJ B. who is an unemployed nineteen year-old who has a pirate radio broadcast station. Daniel Muli was one of a team of artists that created the artwork for the comics.⁴⁹

It would appear that the *Just a Band* presents two facets to their collective identity. Those of popular musicians serving the culture industry and reliant on the income it generates to enable them to continue their artistic pursuits. In this space, their work is uploaded onto the web, linked to iTunes, Amazon and other global players with a view to sell their singles and albums which can be downloaded and accessed by a global audience. On the other hand this position enables them to create subversive work that can be seen to circulate in different public spheres whilst re-presented within a gallery context. Their most recent example of political content in their music videos is visible in the short digital video/ single, *Matatizo* (2013), (a re-recording of the Kenyan composer Issa Jum's song) as a tribute to the Citizens for Justice who survived the Nyayo House Torture Chambers (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Citizens for Justice (Nairobi, Kenya), 2003). Their upload on their YouTube Channel includes a link to the published book, *We Lived to Tell: The Nyayo House Story* (2003).⁵⁰

ANDREW KAGGIA

The political content within Kenyan animation was not restricted to the years following the post-election violence of 2007 and early 2008 but saw a return with the elections in

⁴⁹ DFID, 2011, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/award-for-shujaaz-a-comic-with-serious-messages>, Accessed 21/08/2014

⁵⁰ <http://kenya.usaid.gov/programs/democracy-and-governance/1097> Accessed 11/10/2013

2012. Andrew Kaggia's (b. 1987) animation *Waguezi 2012* (2011) was popularised on local and international media for its parodic depiction of Kenyan political leaders as competing cars in a race. Kaggia's professional background in animation began in 2007 with the development of interactive games for the web. In 2009 he moved to work on the international production, *Tinga Tinga Tales* (2009) at Tiger Aspect Studios as well as undertaking lecturing 3D computer animation at Nairobi's Institute of Technology. Following this he worked at BuniMedia on digital effects and animation for *The XYZ Show* between September 2009 and 2011. This experience pre-empted the production of *Waguezi 2012* (2011) that made its timely appearance on the web in time for the 2012 elections.

Waguezi 2012 (2011) is a thirteen-minute 3D computer animated short, which like others discussed in this context was distributed mainly through YouTube and circulated on social networking sites such as Facebook. The computer-generated animation makes overt reference to a collection of US science-fiction films, including the franchise *Transformers*⁵¹ (1984), the iconic image of the bionic face from the film *Terminator* (1984), and freeze-frame bullet timed shots from *The Matrix* (1999). In *Waguezi 2012* (2011), the animation is mostly a series of different fight sequences that culminates in a standoff battle where the politicians are transformed from vehicles into anthropomorphised robots, engaging in complex and acrobatic fight scenes with a host of weaponry at their disposal. These sequences are littered with nuanced references to the politicians' slogans, catchphrases and their mannerisms. Kaggia plays with the term "Waguezi" which is both Swahili for transformers but that "can also mean "the change makers," because our

⁵¹ For the purpose of this argument the reference made here is to the US version of the *Transformers* franchise as this is more likely to have had contemporary pertinence to Kaggia, as opposed to the original Japanese toys which inspired the spin-off animations, comic books and films.

leaders are the tools for change.⁵² He also uses text in inter-title frames to provide context and make reference to the “transformer” or “chameleon” politician who betrays others and changes allegiances. The animation begins with a car race with interspersed title frames to situate the “race to 2012”, and during it there are some visual ploys that are used to contextualise the characters (through for example the number plates) and props in the environment with a large brick wall in the shape of the word “Hague” that obstructs the cars on their journey. In the final scene of the animation the supposed victor looks out in the distance with a Kenyan flag by his side blowing in the wind. In a final twist, another opponent makes an unexpected appearance as he launches himself towards the victor, implying a continuation of the battle. The animation concludes with a final title frame – simply put, a cautionary “Vote Wisely”.

Kaggia’s cautionary animation enabled him to embed his political concern within an imaginary urban space that notably lacked any people, where the only characters present were politicians depicted as disembodied mechanical robots. The animation’s narrative structure lacks any obvious political bias towards one or another politician, and depicts each of them similarly engaging in battle, with effectively no real victor. This even-handed critique alongside its didactic message ensured that it was able to circulate across different Kenyan audiences with different political allegiances, as well as being seen to be in support of the then governmental stance for peaceful elections.

TACTICAL SUBVERSIONS

⁵² Kermiolitis, 2013 http://edition.cnn.com/2013/03/01/world/africa/kenya-wageuzi-elections/index.html?hpt=iaf_t4

One important facet to the political animations of Kenyan artists such as Musa Ihiga, Gatumia Gatumia, Peter Mute, Andrew Kaggia, and the art collective Just A Band in collaboration with activist photographer Boniface Mwangi, is that they all present evidence of a use of *tactics* and Allan Mwaniki that re-position their work as not simply fixed as oppositional or critical.⁵³ They are not constrained by a dichotomous reductive model of “within” or “without” and are able to straddle both spaces. Their animations work as a manipulation of “mechanisms of discipline” within the systems that these artefacts intend to disparage. Therefore whilst these artists play with the conventions of animation, they are all too aware of the power structures that they must work within, and any discussion of subversion must involve to a degree considerations of adaptation and compliance for the dissemination of these moving images to be effective in their critique.

The examples discussed here provide evidence of the artist appropriating the medium of animation as a form that offers an alternative interpellation to that of the mass media at the service of dominant ideologies.⁵⁴ They also capitalise from the historical legacy of Disney and the like and the inescapable effect that these Western models of animation have had on global audiences. Disney’s historical development as a form that drew upon fable and fairy-tale aided the proliferation of a myth that animation was suited for children’s audience. Consequentially this genre of animation has created an overarching belief that animation is harmless and innocent⁵⁵ thus disarming both the institutional

⁵³ (de Certau, 1984)

⁵⁴ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 86-126.

⁵⁵ Furthermore the “unreal” or “naïve” aesthetic that animated moving images are able to present can have a distancing effect on the viewer, breaking the direct link between the content and a real-world referent. This discourse has become particularly pertinent in discussions of the so-called animated documentary or socially engaged animations, which will be looked at in more detail later on.

systems that legitimize the credibility of the form, as well as the viewer who engages with it in different ways. These subversive animations are able to draw upon these conceptions to surreptitiously question and challenge the boundaries within social and cultural hierarchical spaces. The artists who make these moving images do so by co-opting aspects of popular culture to use to their own end and in a sense *sublimate* their embedded critique⁵⁶.

There is also however a paradox in the necessary partial complicity of some of these artists within the institutional structures that they seek to question. This may arise from their reliance on the benefits that these organisations bring in “supporting” and promoting their work. In 2003 for example Gado’s *The XYZ Show* (2009) relied on funding from the French Embassy to develop the pilot for the first program. In 2009 (with difficulty) it went on to air on Citizen TV for no cost, as the production continued to be funded by international partners such as The Ford Foundation, The French Embassy, The Swiss Embassy, the Embassy of the Nederland, and the Open Society Foundation for East Africa. The series ran off the back of the post-election violence in 2007, with a strong remit and incentive (through its partners) to address the political aftermath of this traumatic event in Kenyan political history. The political relationship of the partner institutions and their own involvement and interests in Kenya politics necessitated a complex vested interest in the promotion of the political critique offered within *The XYZ Show*.

⁵⁶ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 197.

The tensions resulting from a necessary compromise caused at times by repressive state apparatuses such as censorship bodies or the military⁵⁷ calls for a *sublimated*⁵⁸ critique that appears to be more visible in cases where artists must work within these politically and socially restrictive contexts.⁵⁹ This sublimation appears under different guises, and Peck has discussed the uses of overt tropes such as parodies of gender and sexuality within some of the episodes of *The XYZ Show*.⁶⁰ However whereas Peck believes this results in an “inadvertent” and counterproductive reaffirmation of the status-quo in terms of the state and its emasculated power, this discussion recognises Gado’s show as an entry into a wider and complex tactical relationship between the producer of this political content and the subjects it sets out to critique. As a practitioner in cartooning and animation Gado’s work sits within the genre of political cartooning within mainstream media, however his work has also circumvented and escaped more traditional broadcast media moving within virtual media such as the Internet. This deterritorialization of his content, both in cartooning as intended for print or in the case of *The XYZ Show*, intended for broadcast, would suggest a tactical awareness and negotiation of the use of different spaces for distribution and exhibition.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State”, 101.

⁵⁸ The notion of sublimation presented here stems from the Freudian psychoanalytical discussion of a rejection or *adaptation* of practices or drives that may be thought of vulgar or socially unacceptable, in favour of ones with a more acceptable aim that are considered culturally and socially suitable.

⁵⁹ Parallels can be seen in the discourses surrounding Eastern European animation, with the likes of Russian animator Yuri Norstein’s animated film *Tale of Tales* (1979), and Czech Jiri Trinka’s *The Hand* (1965) as key examples of politically subversive animations.

⁶⁰ Rachele Peck, “Political Strictures and Latex Caricatures in Kenya: Buttressing Mzee Masculinity in *The XYZ Show*”, *Research in African Literatures* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 146-165.

⁶¹ Lyombe Eko, “The art of satirical deterritorialization: Shifting cartoons from real space to cyberspace in Sub-Saharan Africa”, *International Communication Gazette* 77, no. 3, (2015): 248-266.

Furthermore it is possible to frame the discussion of *tactics* and consumer production, where the “prod-user” of political animation in Kenya employs digital technologies as a means of self-representation and cultural agency.⁶² In this context the discussion is not only framed by concepts of resistance in the everyday but also considers that “there is at least the potential, whether realised or not, for cultural participation and self-representation”.⁶³ It is this potential that arises from the adoption of participatory media such as blogging, video-streaming and social networking that encourages a digital space for Kenyan animators to engage with a politicized mode of citizenship that may take the form of parodic content, anthropomorphic animals, or caricature within animation. The *tactics* therefore that are described in the context of Kenyan political animation in part correlate also with a rise in the uses of digital technologies and the spaces these afford. Within this context, one considers Gado’s contributions not only as a cartoonist and producer of the puppet/animated program *The XYZ Show*, but as director of the online distribution platform BuniTV that would serve to host and promote the examples of animated work discussed here.

The making in question is a production, a poesis – but a hidden one, because it is scattered over areas defined and occupied by systems of “production” (television, urban development, commerce, etc)....it is dispersed, but it insinuates itself

⁶² Axel Bruns, “Towards Producersage: Futures for User-Led Content Production” in *Proceedings Cultural Attitudes towards Communication and Technology 2006*, Estonia, edited by F. Sudweeks, and H. Hrachovec, C. Ess, (2006): 275-284.

⁶³ Burgess, “Hearing Ordinary Voices,” 204.

everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its ways of using the products imposed by a dominant economic order.⁶⁴

THE POLITICS OF COMPLICITY

The emergence of political animation in Kenya was not positioned as a simplistic oppositional critique of the State, but instead manifested subversive qualities that compounded the us/them dichotomous model. These animations provided a commentary that was tactfully presented as innocuous animation, in a way that enabled an engagement from within these same systems it sought to comment upon. By 2012 the context that gave rise to this body of work was changing. The political environment then appeared to be more accommodating and willing to use these same critical agents to another political end. The strong push in Kenyan government policy to incentivise and promote local talent within the IT sector and related creative industries also played its part in positioning these artists favourably. Some artists were able to straddle “oppositional” discursive spaces, and on occasion create work that had a simultaneous subversive/complicit functions. It is possible to observe how the Kenyan artists were able to deploy a tactic that enabled them to profit and benefit from the institutions that employed them for their own political end, whilst simultaneously maintaining a subversive voice. The popularity of their earlier work amongst the general public paradoxically afforded some artists (such as Gado, Peter Mute, Gatumia Gatumia) relative power that positioned them as key players in the field of animation in Kenya.

⁶⁴ de Certeau, *Everyday Life*, xii

There appeared to be a degree of complicity with the same institutions they served to critique. By 2012 the artists' position as critic had become a key factor in validating and endorsing the State's own display of reform and change following 2008. Evidence of this can be seen in BuniMedia's production of *The XYZ Show* (2009-) and the production of the Public Services Announcements commissioned by the NGO organisation Kenyan ACT and Kenya Civil Society Strengthening Program (KCSSP)⁶⁵ in 2012 for a 'Peace and Good Governance', and anticorruption campaign, *The Wazi Campaign*⁶⁶. The campaign was part funded by the DFID (Department for International Development, UK) and USAID and consisted of a series of 3D computer animated shorts that aired on local Kenyan national television stations and was promoted online through social media and networking sites. In places the animated shorts are stylistically reminiscent of the US blockbuster animated films such as *A Bug's Life*, *Bee Movie*, and *Antz*, such as Buni Media's *Different Tribes Working as One* (2013), or *Making it in the Counties* (2013). Each of the animated shorts from the series ends with the same slogan, "Kenya ni Jina, Nchi ni Wewe" (Kenya is just a name, you are the country) and aims to encourage citizenship and "celebrate ethnic diversity" through civic education. Whilst the nation state government did not overtly endorse the project, its wide distribution across a large range of television stations (KBC, Kiss TV, Citizen TV, NTV, QTV, and KTN) would suggest a more obliging position from the part of the government.

Another more overt example of the interplay between subversive animation and the State can be seen in the production and release of the animated computer game *Election Thief* (2013). This game is a multi level platform 2D game that was developed for mobile

⁶⁵ "The KCSSP program is a six year United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded program that started in 2006 and ends in 2013. KCSSP is jointly implemented by Pact and Act! <http://www.kcssp.org/> Accessed 31/09/2013.

⁶⁶ The Wazi Campaign, <http://www.wazicampaign.org/> Accessed 03/09/2013.

phone platforms as an Android Application. The game features Omu, the ordinary citizen whose goal is to catch the ‘election thief’ who has stolen votes during an election. The company that developed the game, *University of Games (UOGames)* are based in Nairobi and were setup in 2011 with the aid from a TANDAA grant.⁶⁷ The involvement of TANDAA on the project suggests the complicated relationship between the state and distribution of political content. In an interesting spin on the game’s description, the TANDAA website lists the game as a tool for “spreading the peace message during time of elections”, therefore whilst the game can be framed as a facet of political discourse in Kenya, it’s complicity with the State suggests the government’s own appropriation of the political nature of the game to support its own agenda.⁶⁸

In conclusion, Kenyan animation artists were able to deploy a range of *tactics* that ensured that they were able to subvert political gagging through specific techniques situated around practices in animation. As de Certeau outlines these tactics are calculated action that “play with the terrain imposed upon it”, posing “movement in the enemy’s field of vision” and “in the space controlled by him.”⁶⁹ They were underpinned by the understanding that animation also affords a degree of freedom as it is positioned as harmless type of moving image suited for children’s audiences. Animations such as those of Gatumia Gatumia’s *The Greedy Lords of the Jungle* (2009) and Andrew Kaggia’s *Wagwezi 2012* (2011) are presented here as an intricate network of “symbolic inversions”, visual

⁶⁷ University of Games, <http://www.uogames.net> Accessed 03/07/2013.

⁶⁸ TANDAA grants were setup by the ICT Authority of the Kenyan government to enable the creation and distribution of locally relevant digital content through the Tandaa Symposium and seed money to ICT entrepreneurs, <https://sites.google.com/a/ict.go.ke/tandaa/> Accessed 10/06/2015.

⁶⁹ Michel de Certeau, Fredric Jameson and Carl Lovitt, “On the Oppositional Practices of Everyday Life”, *Social Text*, no. 3, (1980): 6.

metaphor and parody.⁷⁰ In some cases they draw upon similar aesthetic devices that are visible in cartooning, an iconic representation (in the sense of a semblance) and a reduction of realism (literally and metaphorically), a form of ‘amplification through simplification’ and anthropomorphic characters.⁷¹ On other occasions, these politically subversive voices, whether ‘vernacular’ or otherwise circulated as music videos, art installations, computer games. The range of artistic and technical skills that these artists were equipped with facilitated this straddling of moving image types and enabled a capitalizing of digital technologies. This ensured that the artists were also able to circumvent traditional distribution circuits, such as television broadcasting, exploiting instead the rise of mobile phone technologies and access to mobile broadband. Their expert use of these technologies also insured a subsequent tactical complicity with the same institutions they initially critiqued. Institutional bodies looked towards them, for their knowledge and ability to create effective animated content and employed them for the generation of state funded public service announcements. This effective positioning and movement through and across different spaces suggests the need to engage with the notion of tactical subversivity in the context of Sub-Saharan animation.

⁷⁰ Barbara Babcock, *The reversible world: Symbolic Inversion in art and society*, London: Cornell University Press, 1978.

⁷¹ McCloud, Scott, *Understanding Comics; The invisible Art* (Avon: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993): 30.

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