

THE EMERGING AFRICAN VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

AN ANALYSIS OF THE NARRATIVES OF GAMES DEVELOPED IN CAMEROON AND NIGERIA

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INTRODUCTION: THE AFRICAN VIDEO GAME LANDSCAPE

Though gaming is a global phenomenon, game development in Africa has yet to receive significant critical attention. Video games—popular interactive media played on a variety of devices such as computers, mobile devices and game consoles—are a major economic force: according to the Entertainment Software Association (ESA), the U.S. gaming industry added more than \$11.7 billion to the U.S. gross domestic profit in 2016 and generated \$30.4 billion in revenue.¹ Worldwide, the industry has experienced similar growth, with revenues expected to reach \$108.9 billion in 2017 according to Newzoo, a research firm covering global games, eSports and mobile markets. This growth is driven in particular by the boom in mobile gaming, which, according to the same report, will account for 42% of global game industry revenues in 2017.² A segmentation of this revenue by regions shows that the Asian Pacific region will constitute \$51.2 billion of this profit and North America \$27 billion, while “Africa, Europe and the Middle East” will return \$26.2 billion. Video games are therefore a worldwide phenomenon, though in Africa, the gaming industry is still in its infancy, which explains the scarcity of data on game industry revenues in this part of the world.

Nevertheless, recent reports on video games in Africa show that video games are being played more and more across the continent.³ The increasing prominence of video game play is explained in part by the widespread use of mobile devices. A 2013 report by tech company Ericsson showed that 38% of mobile users’ weekly activities in Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Kenya, Senegal and Cameroon) are devoted to playing games.⁴ A 2018 report on entertainment and media industries in Africa by Price Waterhouse Cooper predicts that the video game market in countries such as Kenya will be worth US\$118 million in 2022, growing from US\$63 million in 2017.⁵ This report also forecasts similar growth for countries like Ghana, Tanzania, Nigeria and South Africa, with social/casual gaming being the fastest growing segment of the market due to the growth in smartphone ownership.

Likewise, there is a growing interest among teenagers and young adults across Africa in playing video games, and although *Counter Strike* (Valve, 2000-2012), *Call of Duty* (Activision, 2003-) and *League of Legends* (Riot, 2009) are among the most-played games in the region, African game developers are increasingly trying to tap into the current generation of gamers by developing games locally.⁶ Indeed, game development studios are emerging across Africa, encouraging developers to produce games on

1. Entertainment Software Association, “Annual Report 2017,” *Entertainment Software Association*, 12 January 2018, <https://www.esaannualreport.com/>.

2. Newzoo, “Global Games Market Report,” *Newzoo.com*, 12 January 2018, <https://newzoo.com/solutions/standard/market-forecasts/global-games-market-report/>.

3. Christopher Vourlias, “Video Game Culture Takes Hold Across Nigeria,” *Aljazeera America*, 15 December 2014, <http://america.aljazeera.com/>.

4. Ericsson, “Bridging the Digital Divide: How Mobile Phones are Playing a Key Role in Connecting People in Sub-Saharan Africa,” *All Africa*, 12 December 2013, <http://www.ericsson.com/res/docs/2013/consumerlab/bridging-the-digital-divide-subsaharan-africa.pdf>.

5. Price Waterhouse Cooper, “Entertainment and Media Outlook: 2018–2022, An African Perspective,” *Price Waterhouse Cooper*, 2018, <https://www.pwc.co.za/en/assets/pdf/entertainment-and-media-outlook-2018-2022.pdf>.

the continent.⁷ The emergence of locally developed games brings new voices to the medium, meaning that the narratives of games created by developers in Africa are of increasing interest, although research on this subject is sparse. Indeed, the existence of small independent gaming studios provides a new opportunity for developers to create games that reflect local cultural preferences and provide content tailored to users that would not likely be produced by “global” game developers.

With this in mind, this chapter focuses specifically on an analysis of the narratives of games developed in Cameroon and Nigeria. The chapter begins with a summary of previous research on game narratives, then applies this framework to a sample of ten games developed in these two western African nations. The chapter concludes by outlining possible paths for further research on games and game development in Africa.

APPROACHES TO GAME NARRATIVE

In literary analysis, terms like “narrative,” “plot” and “story” are often used interchangeably, or subjected to a variety of divergent definitions. However, this chapter defines narrative as “the unique way in which [a] story is being presented to the audience.”⁸ Hence, a game’s narrative “encapsulates the methods used to deliver the necessary scenes, the order of the scenes, the time taken for the events to unfold (duration) and the frequency with which these scenes occur.”⁹ Using this expansive definition of narrative, elements of a video game’s narrative would include gameplay (i.e., player interaction with the game), cut scenes, back stories, lighting, music, promotional materials and other techniques/elements used to present the story to the audience.¹⁰ This broad definition of narrative is also well-captured by the concepts of interactive narrative and interactive digital narrative,¹¹ both of which point to the fundamentally interactive nature of video game narratives.

Rather than providing a broad and single definition of narrative in video games, some researchers go a step further to qualify narratives as emergent or embedded.¹² Emergent narrative arises from players’ interactions with the game world in unpredictable and changeable manners, while embedded narrative exists prior to a player’s interaction with the game and is basically the pre-generated story created by the game developer and laid out for the player to discover.¹³ As previously stated, this chapter defines game narrative as the different ways in which a story is presented to the player, including the game’s backstory, setting, key characters, languages, character names and objectives.¹⁴ This open conception of game narrative is critical for understanding the local and cultural framing of African video games.

Research shows that players find video games with narratives more engaging and immersive, as narratives in games contextualize players’ actions and give a greater sense of meaning.¹⁵ The presence of stories makes a difference in players’ experiences, as they generate greater identification with

6. Stephane Boyera and Aman Grewal, “Games in Africa: Opportunities and Challenges,” 5 May 2014, https://www.orangepartner.com/sites/default/files/final_games_public_0.pdf.

7. Abdi L. Dahir, “African Video Game Makers are Breaking into the Global Industry with their Own Stories,” *Quartz*, 7 May 2017, <https://qz.com/africa/974439/african-video-game-makers-are-breaking-into-the-global-industry-with-their-own-stories/>.

8. Barry Ip, “Narrative Structures in Computer and Video Games. Part 1: Context, Definitions, and Initial findings,” *Games and Culture* 6.2 (2011): 107.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*; see also Christopher Moser and Xiaowen Fang, “Narrative Structure and Player Experience in Role-Playing Games,” *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction* 31.2 (2015): 146-156.

11. Ip, “Narrative Structures in Computer and Video Games”; Hartmut Koenitz, Gabriele Ferri, Mads Haahr, Diğdem Sezen and Tonguc Ibrahim Sezen, *Interactive Digital Narrative: History, Theory and Practice* (Routledge, 2015).

12. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (MIT Press, 2003).

13. Moser and Fang, “Narrative Structure and Player Experience”; Joseph Packer, “What Makes an Orc? Racial Cosmos and Emergent Narrative in World of Warcraft,” *Games and Culture* 9.2 (2014): 83-101.

14. Andrew Rollings and Ernest Adams, *Andrew Rollings and Ernest Adams on Game Design* (New Riders, 2003).

15. Sean Hammond, Helen Pain and Tim J. Smith, “Player Agency in Interactive Narrative: Audience, Actor & Author,” paper presented at Artificial Intelligence &

characters in the game (e.g., characters' goals and actions), create positive emotions in players and produce physiological arousal, which is known to increase learning from media.¹⁶ Even without going into a discussion on the different types of narrative (i.e., embedded or emergent), narrative structures (linear or branching) and player roles in the construction of game narrative, the concept of narrative is a notion that has been discussed extensively in game studies.¹⁷ Nevertheless, it is important to note that literature on video game narratives has largely focused on games produced in the major centers of global game production, and has not yet explored games designed by African developers.

AFRICAN VIDEO GAME NARRATIVES: THE CASES OF CAMEROON AND NIGERIA

In a 2014 report, Vourlias contended that video game culture was taking over Nigeria, and the same could certainly be said of Cameroon.¹⁸ Video games have become an increasingly common part of daily life for many Africans, and game development studios are emerging across Africa, especially in Cameroon and Nigeria.¹⁹

Nigeria and Cameroon are neighboring countries in the sub-Saharan region of Africa. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, with approximately 167 million inhabitants, and is home to over 250 ethnic languages,²⁰ including the country's four major languages: English (the official language, due to the heritage of British colonialism), Yoruba, Ibo and Hausa. The country is bordered by Chad and the Republic of Niger to the north, Benin to the west and Cameroon to the east. In 2014, Nigeria emerged as one of Africa's largest economies, and the third-fastest growing economy in the world.²¹ However, a recent dip in oil prices has slowed the country's growth, given the national economy's heavy dependence on oil revenues.²² Nevertheless, Nigeria has a growing middle class with high purchasing power who can afford the latest electronic devices.²³

Cameroon is located in the West-central part of Africa, and is bordered to the north by Chad, the Central African Republic to the east, Congo, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea to the south, and to the west by Nigeria, with which it shares the largest border (see Image 3.2.1).²⁴ Cameroon has a population of over 20 million and is often called "Africa in miniature" due to the presence of Africa's linguistic, biological and cultural diversity in this country.²⁵ Major languages include English and French (official languages inherited from British and French colonial rule) in addition to more than 270 other languages spoken throughout the country.²⁶ As with Nigeria, Cameroon has an emergent middle class with high buying power,²⁷ and it is a leading economic power within the central region of Africa, though the country has experienced an economic slowdown in recent years.²⁸ In sum,

Simulation of Behavior, University of Newcastle, 2-5 April 2007, <http://homepages.cs.ncl.ac.uk/patrick.olivier/AISB07/narrative.pdf>; Edward F. Schneider, "Death with a Story," *Human Communication Research* 30.3 (2004): 361-375.

16. Schneider, "Death with a Story," 2004.

17. See, for example, Gonzalo Frasca, "Simulation versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology," in *The Video Game Theory Reader*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf and Bernard Perron (Routledge, 2003); Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Jonas H. Smith and Susana P. Tosca, *Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction* (Routledge, 2015); Ip, "Narrative Structures in Computer and Video Games."

18. Vourlias, "Video Game Culture Takes Hold Across Nigeria."

19. Richard Moss, "The State of Game Development in Africa," *Gamasutra*, 12 December 2016, http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/264888/The_state_of_game_development_in_Africa.php.

20. Ibid.

21. Eleni Giokos, "Nigeria's Economy Was a 'Disaster' in 2016. Will This Year be Different?," *CNN Money*, 17 June 2017, <http://money.cnn.com/2017/04/27/news/economy/nigeria-oil-growth/index.html>.

22. Ibid.

23. Norimitsu Onishi, "Nigeria Goes to the Mall," *New York Times*, 5 January 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/05/world/africa/nigeria-goes-to-the-mall.html?mcubz=1>.

24. UNICEF, "West and Central Africa," *unicef.org*, 15 January 2017, <https://www.unicef.org/appeals/cameroon.html>.

25. Huguette G. Mbenda, Gauri Awasthi, Poonam Singh, I. Gouado and A. Das, "Does Malaria Epidemiology Project Cameroon as 'Africa in miniature'?", *Journal of Biosciences* 39.4 (2014): 727-738.

26. Ibid.

27. Danielle Resnick, "The Political Economy of Africa's Emergent Middle Class: Retrospect and Prospects," *Journal of International Development* 27.5 (2015): 573-587.

Cameroon and Nigeria have a longstanding cultural affinity that transcends nationality,²⁹ given that the current boundaries between both countries are remnant of the colonial era, and often serve to artificially separate otherwise unified sociocultural groups and practices found in both countries.³⁰ An understanding of the relationship between the two countries is helpful in understanding how local culture shapes game development in each one.



Image 3.2.1. Map of Cameroon, Nigeria and the surrounding region.

This chapter focuses on the narratives of games developed in Cameroon and Nigeria, examining the ways developers use elements such as the backstory, cut scenes, setting, key characters, character names and game objectives to enhance their games' appeal and to emphasize the Cameroonian and Nigerian characteristics of game narratives. An analysis of these games' narratives, broadly defined, reveals the many mechanisms used by game developers to evoke Cameroonian and Nigerian culture in their products.

The games selected for this chapter adhere to four criteria: 1) they were produced by one of the top three studios in their respective countries; 2) they were released in the last two years; 3) they were featured among the top ten games on the developers' site; and finally, 4) they were produced by companies aiming to reach the growing population African gamers. Based on these criteria, ten video games were selected from developers Chopup, Maliyo and Kiro'o, three of Nigeria and Cameroon's leading gaming studios.³¹ While they differ greatly in genre, aesthetics and other design elements, these games share a great deal on the level of the contextualization of their narratives.

Aurion: Legacy of the Kori-Odan (Kiro'o, 2016; hereafter *ALKO*), developed by Cameroonian studio

28. Samuel Fambon, Andy McKay, Joseph P. Timnou, Olive S. Kouakep, Anacllet Dzossa and Tchakoute Romain, "Slow Progress in Growth and Poverty Reduction in Cameroon," in *Growth and Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. Channing Arndt, Andy McKay and Finn Tarp (Oxford University Press, 2016).

29. Olabanji O. Ewetan and Ese Ewetan U., "Insecurity and Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria," *Journal of Sustainable Development Studies* 5.1 (2014): 40-63.

30. Gabriel L. Adeola and Oluayemi O. Fayomi, "The Political and Security Implications of Cross Border Migration between Nigeria and her Francophone Neighbors," *International Journal of Social Science Tomorrow* 1.3 (2012): 1-9.

31. W. Chibelushi, "Level up!: Our Top five African Gaming Studios," *African Business Review*, 17 June 2017, <http://www.africanbusinessreview.co.za/technology/2723/Level-up:-Our-top-five-African-gaming-studios>; Rara Reines, "African-Themed Video Games Are a Market with Strong Potential," *Ayiba*, 13 December 2016, <http://ayibamagazine.com/top-african-video-game-companies/>.

Kiro'o Games, is a role-playing game that tells the story of the prince of a city called Zama, who is overthrown by his brother-in-law Ngarba Evou on the day of his wedding and coronation. Forced into exile, prince Enzo Kori-Odan and his wife Erine Evou travel the world to gain strength in the hope of returning to Zama to claim their kingdom. According to the game website, *ALKO* derives its narrative from African stories and culture.³² Indeed, the game's backstory reveals a practice common in Cameroonian culture, as well as other cultures of West and Central Africa: the marital status of a prince often determines his ascension to the throne;³³ it is therefore not surprising that the prince's wife is mentioned in the narrative. The influence of Cameroonian culture on *ALKO* is also seen in the names used to identify characters, as well as the game setting. Names such as Evou, Ngarba Evou and Zama are reminiscent of those used by the Beti ethnic group in Cameroon. In using these names to identify characters and location, the developers situate the players in a Cameroonian fantasy world. The names add to the African-ness of the game narrative and connect the player to Africa. For instance, in the language of the Beti ethnic group in Cameroon, the name Evou means "witch," while Ngarba refers to "someone who is boastful" and Zama means "God." These names reflect the desire of developers to create narratives inspired by African culture, narratives with which Cameroonian players—and certainly many other Africans—can identify, characteristics which make *ALKO* stand out as an African-centered video game.

The localization of games can also be noted in *Ebola Strike Force* (ChopUp, 2015; hereafter *ESF*), a video game developed for mobile devices by Nigerian game studio ChopUp. *ESF* is about a team of scientists and doctors who discover that they can cure Ebola using a serum that can only be extracted from patient X with the help of a nanobot. In this description, one element that clearly stands out is the centrality of Ebola, a rare and deadly disease that caused thousands of deaths during the largest outbreak of the epidemic in West Africa between 2014-2016.³⁴ The use of Ebola as the game's focus situates its narrative in West Africa, and as such gives an immediate sense of the game's setting. Further enhancing the game's contextualization in the west African setting, the player is given the following background information at the beginning of the game:

On August 19, 2014, Dr. Ameyo Stella Adadevor, a consultant physician at First consultants medical centre: a Lagos-based hospital, died of the dreaded Ebola disease, She contacted the disease while caring for an infected patient: Patrick Sawyer from Liberia. Due to the bravery and self-sacrifice of Dr. Adadevor and her team, an Ebola epidemic in the Lagos Metropolis was averted. Her heroic efforts prevented an outbreak in the most populous African country, Nigeria.

This game is dedicated to her and all other medical personnel who lost their lives in the battle to keep us Ebola free. May God Almighty rest their soul in perfect peace, Amen!

In this background story, geographical references such as those to Lagos, Ameyo, Liberia and Nigeria further evidence the ways this game's narrative tackles topics and subjects related to the everyday lives of Africans. The game draws the user into this setting with references to real-life locales, situations and individuals, using names, dates and titles to enhance the realism of its west African setting.

Another recent title with a west African setting is *Aboki Run* (Maliyo, 2016), a mobile game designed by Maliyo game studio in Nigeria that tells the story of three young friends, Chinedu, Danjuma and Gbenga, who leave the city to venture into the forest, the forbidden habitat of spirits, where they are trapped by the forest gods. In order to be set free and return to the city, the three friends need

32. Kiro'o Games, Aurion, <http://kiroogames.com/en/aurion.html>.

33. John Mbaku, *Culture and Customs of Cameroon* (Greenwood, 2005).

34. J. Quick, et al., "Real-Time, Portable Genome Sequencing for Ebola Surveillance," *Nature* 530.7589 (2016): 228.

the player's help. In African culture, and particularly in Nigeria's Igbo culture, the forbidden forest symbolizes evil, and is the graveyard of those considered a plague to the community, individuals who have committed acts forbidden by society or those who have died of incurable diseases.³⁵ Hence, in the Igbo culture and worldview, the forbidden forest is symbolically the home to evil spirits and other forces of darkness.³⁶ In addition to the evil forest imagery that reflects Igbo culture, the three characters' names are also linked to the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria: Chinedu is an Igbo name that means "God leads"; Gbenga, a Yoruba name, is the short form of Oluwagbenga/Olugbenga, meaning "God has raised me up"; and finally, Danjuma, a Hausa name, is said to mean "son of Friday."³⁷ As with the previously mentioned games, *Aboki Run*, situated in Nigeria, immerses players in a variety of aspects of African culture with its narrative.

Taking on African cultural themes in the strategy genre, ChopUp studio's *Jagun: Clash of Kingdoms* (2015) is a mobile game that narrates the story of a (fictional) prosperous medieval kingdom in the Niger region called Jagunlabi (see Image 3.2.2). The prosperity of this kingdom attracts many enemies, and in order to defend the kingdom, the *Jagun* has to use bows, fireballs and *juju*. The story sets the game in Africa—specifically Nigeria—by referring to a prosperous kingdom in the Niger area during the medieval age. As previously discussed, Nigeria is an economic power in contemporary Africa, and just like Nigeria, Jagunlabi is located in the Niger area, and the way in which its affluence attracts adversaries, could refer to the colonizers of Nigeria, or to any individual or power that might attempt to destabilize the country. To defend the kingdom, players are given bows and, interestingly, *juju*, a popular word in West Africa that describes an object believed to possess supernatural powers. *Juju* in the popular culture can be used to protect or defend the owner, and it is a concept which resonates with most West Africans, again demonstrating the relationship between the game's narrative and the African reality. In the same vein, the kingdom's name, "Jangunlabi," is a Yoruba word employed to mean "brave men or warriors," while "Jagun" is the word for "warrior" in Yoruba. The developers incorporate into the narrative African concepts reminiscent of a glorious past, and the on-screen prompts in the game (see Image 3.2.3) also evidence the inspiration developers draw from African culture and history. Historically, the Nri kingdom referenced in the game (see Image 3.2.3) was located in the east of the Nigeria, and was ruled by the descendants of King Eri from the 10th century until it was subdued by the British in 1911.³⁸ The prosperous kingdom of Nri is believed to be the foundation of the rich Igbo culture,³⁹ and thus the similarity between the historical Nri kingdom and Nri in the game points to the situatedness of the game's narrative in Nigeria.

Notably, with the exception of *ALKO*, all of the games analyzed in this chapter are designed for mobile devices. The way developers create their products and game narratives with local realities in mind is further illustrated by games designed around the theme or concept of the *okada*. "Okada" is the name used in Nigeria to refer to a motorcycle, and okadas are a popular means of transportation for many west Africans, which situates games on the okada theme of beyond the Nigerian context.⁴⁰ The following paragraphs discuss three okada-themed games, *Okada Rider* (ChopUp, 2015), *Okada vs Danfo* (Maliyo, 2016) and *Okada Ride* (Maliyo, 2013).

ChopUp's *Okada Rider* is another mobile game, this time portraying motorcycle driver Abu, waiting

35. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (Heinemann, 1986).

36. Ibid.

37. Name Doctor, 12 December 2013, <http://www.name-doctor.com/>.

38. Richard M. Juang and Noelle Morrisette, *Africa and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History* (ABC-CLIO, 2008); all game images in this chapter are used with permission of the games' publishers.

39. Ibid.

40. Ofonime E. Johnson, "Prevalence and Pattern of Road Traffic Accidents among Commercial Motorcyclists in a City in Southern Nigeria," *Educational Research* 3.6 (2012): 537-542.



Image 3.2.2. Jagun: Clash of Kingdoms.

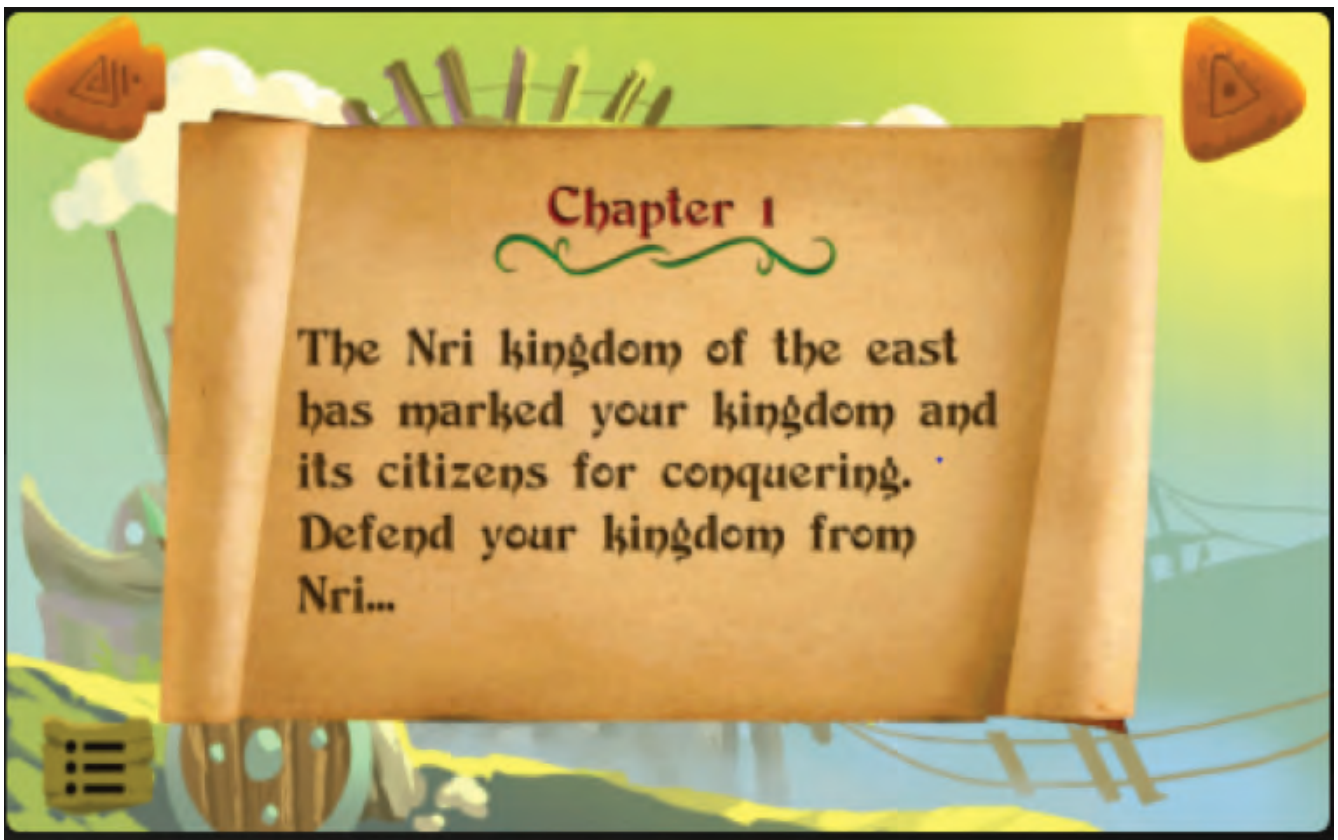


Image 3.2.3. On-screen prompt from Jagun: Clash of Kingdoms.

for customers, as usual, at a bus stop. Abu has to leave the city, when he suddenly sees police officers confiscating bicycles on the order of the governor of Lagos State. While the okada is a very popular means of transportation in Nigeria, as well as in other parts of western Africa, due to the risky behaviors drivers exhibit and their frequent accidents, okada drivers have come under strict scrutiny from authorities.⁴¹ Consequently, it is not uncommon to see police officers seizing motorcycles, or to see drivers attempting to avoid police seizure of their motorcycles. Even still, this means of transportation is seen as fast and affordable by many residents in the region, making it preferable for avoiding the congested roads of Lagos.⁴² In this way, the game relates to the realities of life in the Nigerian capital by telling the tale of an African okada driver, and thus sharing this experience with players. The protagonist's name, Abu, meaning "father of," "excellence," or "full of," while Arabic in origin, is also a popular name in west Africa, making him another example of an African-coded character (see Image 3.2.4).



Image 3.2.4. Opening screen of Okada Rider.

The okada is such a part of Africans'—and particularly Nigerians'—daily lives, that it inspired the development of another mobile game, this one from Maliyo studio in Nigeria. *Okada vs Danfo* focuses on the challenges of navigating Lagos' traffic as a motorcycle driver attempting to avoid the dangerous hazards of downtown Lagos traffic jams. In this way, *Okada vs Danfo* differs from *Okada Rider* because it captures another aspect of an Okada driver's life. In this game, the main character does not have to escape from the police, but instead must drive through the busy city of Lagos, transporting the player into the realities of Lagos traffic. While okada, as already mentioned, is the local term for motorcycle, "danfo" is the name given to commercial buses in Nigeria. Danfo and okada are used for public transportation, and competition for passengers is fierce among drivers of these two modes of

41. Adekunle Salako, Olumide Abiodun and Oluwafolahan Sholeye, "Risk Behaviors for Road Traffic Accidents and Severe Crash Injuries among Commercial Motorcyclists in Sagamu, South West, Nigeria," *Online Journal of Medicine and Medical Science Research* 2.2 (2013): 1.

42. Ibid.

transportation. As can be seen in its title, this game captures this tension by opposing okada to danfo, reflecting the ways that local reality fuels the content of the game and shapes its narrative.

With *Okada Ride (OKR)*, players interact with Ali, a motorcycle driver who needs more money to feed his family of eight. After learning that Alhaji Shehu is looking for truck drivers, Ali has to quickly get to Alhaji Shehu in order to take advantage of this opportunity to make more money. However, on that day, roads in Lagos are blocked or busy, and Ali is forced to take a less frequented route, but one that follows a road that is filled with potholes. Helping Ali dodge these obstacles and get to Alhaji Shehu on time is the game's objective. Though similar in name to *Okada Rider*, *OKR*—developed by Maliyo studio—offers players a distinct purpose or meaning for their actions. In *OKR*, the purpose is to avoid obstacles on the road and get to Alhaji Shehu on time for a better job opportunity. The narrative highlights not only the the problems of traffic congestion in Lagos, but also the poor quality of roads in the surrounding area. Every inhabitant of Lagos, along with many citizens of other parts of Africa, can relate to this reality. Moreover, though their Arabic roots, the names Ali and Alhaji Shehu are also found among Muslims in Nigeria. The game's narrative further reflects the real hardships of this context through the fact that Ali, as an okada driver, has to look for another paying job to provide for his family of eight, since the real-life job of okada driver does not pay well enough to feed such a large family.

Games centered on the okada concept capture different aspects of everyday life and culture in Nigeria, and by extension in Africa. Thus, regional players can readily identify with the struggles of the main characters in these different okada-themed games.

In addition to *Ebola Strike Force*, *Jagun: Clash of Kingdoms* and *Okada Rider*, Nigerian developers ChopUp designed the mobile games *Ojuju Calabar* (2017; hereafter *OJC*), *Mama Put* (2015) and *Monkey Post* (2016), each inspired in different elements of local culture. This game recounts the adventure of Tunde, who finds himself in the *Ojuju* land and needs to escape to save his life, which can only be done with the help of the player. *OJC*'s Nigerian setting is primarily reflected in the reference to *Ojuju Calabar*: Calabar is a city in the southeastern part of Nigeria, capital of the Cross-River State; while *ojuju* means “masquerade.” The custom of *Ojuju Calabar*, or Calabar Masquerade, was often used by parents in Nigeria to scare children and prevent them from doing wrong.⁴³ It is a fictional masquerade in Nigerian fables, and once again reflects the ways the game is shaped by Nigerian popular culture. The protagonist's name is also chosen consciously, as names in African culture are believed to not only identify an individual, but also determine character and destiny.⁴⁴ Tunde is a Yoruba name that means “return,” which explains why the player has to save and return him home: as his name indicates, Tunde has to go back, and thus must escape from the *Ojuju* land.

Another of ChopUp's mobile titles, *Mama Put*, features protagonist Iya Basira in her kitchen, in need of ingredients as she gets ready to cook delicious Nigerian dishes. The player is invited to join Iya Basira in her kitchen, and must unlock the ingredients Iya Basira needs for each dish. “Iya” means “mother” in Yoruba, but the two-word term “Iya Basira” refers to a restaurant that specialize in local food, also known as a “Mama Put.” These restaurants sell familiar food at an affordable price, making them very popular. *Mama Put* is set in Nigeria, and the dishes the player is prompted to cook with Iya Basira are popular local foods, as seen in Image 3.2.5. The on-screen prompt says the following: “Iya Basira is about to unleash her famous Jollof rice. Can you help her get the missing ingredients?” This

43. P. Sanèh, “Ojuju Calabar,” *Observe Nigeria: A Sincere Look at the Nation*, 15 January 2016, <https://www.observeigeria.com/cultures/ojuju-calabar/>.

44. Abdulganiy Olatunji, Moshood Issah, Yusuf Noah, A. Y. Muhammed and Abdul-Rasheed Sulaiman, “Personal Name as a Reality of Everyday Life: Naming Dynamics in Select African Societies,” *Journal of Pan African Studies* 8.3 (2015): 72-91.

prompt adds to the game narrative as it alludes to a dish popular in Africa and its diaspora. In these ways, game design emphasizes the African-ness of the character as well as the environment in *Mama Put*.

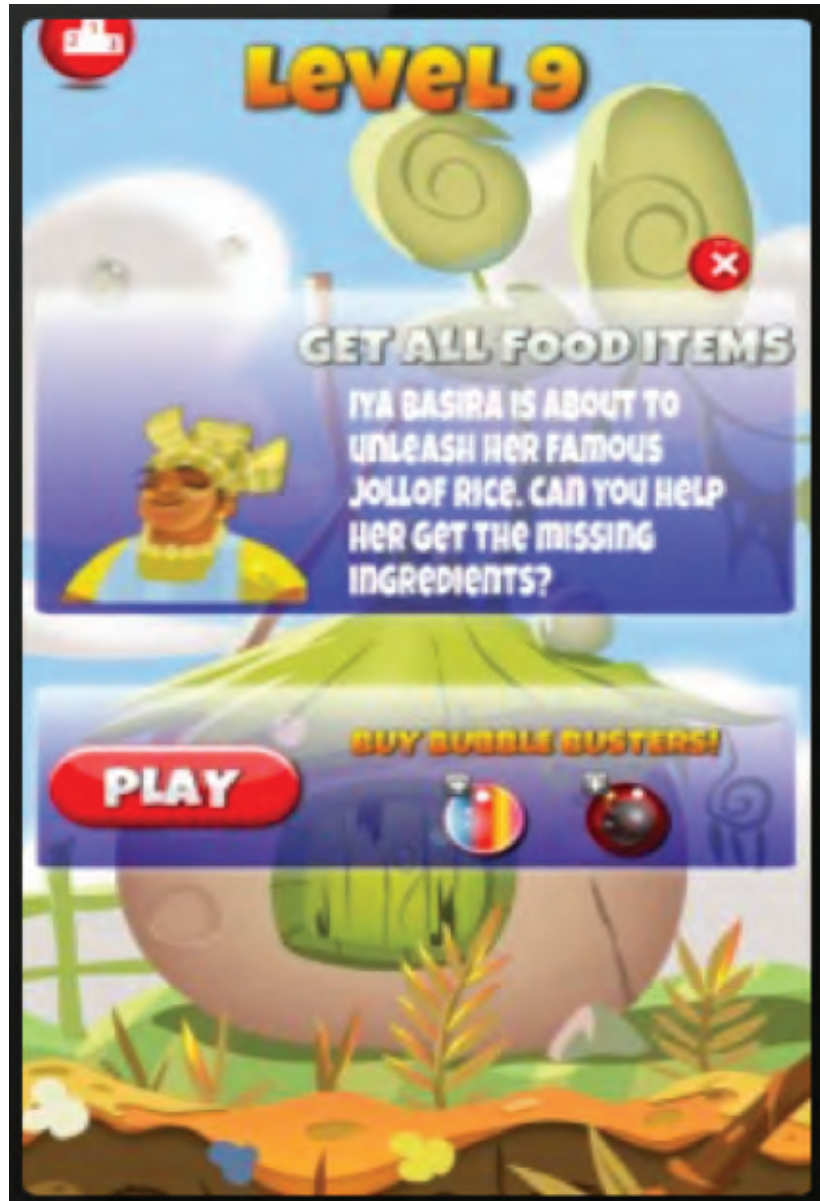


Image 3.2.5. On-screen prompt from *Mama Put*.

Based on one of Nigerians' favorite pastimes, the mobile game *Monkey Post* is a street soccer game with no penalties, red cards or corner kicks, just soccer and goals. *Monkey Post*, it should be noted, is the name given to street soccer in Nigeria because of the closeness of goal posts (Ekwealor 2006), and in addition to reminding us of street soccer gameplay, the teams listed in the league (see Image 3.2.6) reflect local reality. Players are invited to compete against friends and play the leagues choosing from teams such as Lekki Islanders, Ikeja Warriors or Agege FC. With this mobile game, ChopUp makes a virtual representation of street soccer as it is played in many African countries. For example, Lekki, Ikeja, as well as Agege are all cities in Lagos state, Nigeria. As Ekwealor (2016) has explained, *Monkey*

Post is another game from ChopUp studio that focuses on culturally-themed content aimed at a local audience.



FIXTURES		STANDINGS					
R	TEAM	P	W	L	D	GD	PTS
1	Chopup Warriors	2	2	-	-	11	6
2	Lekki Islanders	2	2	-	-	3	6
3	Ikeja Warriors	2	1	-	1	1	4
4	Festac Fighters	2	1	1	-	-	3
5	Surulere Allstars	2	-	-	2	-	2
6	Agege FC	2	-	-	2	-	2
7	Apapa Pillars	2	-	1	1	-	1
8	Ikorodu FC	2	-	1	1	-	1
9	Ebute Metta Sharks	2	-	1	1	-	1
10	Badagry United	2	-	2	-	-	-

Image 3.2.6. Monkey Post league teams.

This review of selected game narratives produced in Africa reflects the many ways in which game development is a culturally-inspired activity, that is, an undertaking framed and shaped by the context and culture of the developers. It is not surprising, then, that research on the representation of minorities such as Africans confirms that Western/colonial worldviews of Africans frequently inform the narratives of video games developed in the Western world.⁴⁵ Indie games, and mobile games in particular, certainly offer an opportunity for the diversification of game narratives, and in practical terms, for making video game development a worldwide activity in which many can participate.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Though this study focuses on a limited number of African games designed by developers in Cameroon and Nigeria, it reflects the fact that the gaming industry is still at its infancy in both countries, as it is across the continent as a whole. But the situation remains precarious and fraught with irregularity: for example, at the time of this study, in one of the biggest independent gaming studios Cameroon had released only one video game. Reaching a level of stability for the local industry is also a challenge: more games and developers have recently emerged in Nigeria relative to Cameroon, even but even still Kuluya, one of Nigeria's leading studios in 2015, was no longer in existence by 2017. When it comes to game narratives, the games reviewed in this small-scale study all revolve around African themes, drawing from Africa's reality, folklore, environment, cultural traditions and everyday

45. Rebecca Y. Bayeck, Tataleni I. Asino and Patricia A. Young, "Representations of Africans in Popular Video Games in the U.S.," *Journal of Virtual Worlds Research* 11.2 (2018).

customs in order to tell and share African stories. The developers use African names and African characters to present unique narratives to the audience, demonstrating how bringing new voices into game development can diversify the overall landscape of games and game culture.

Though limited by its sample size and strict focus on narrative, this study was, to the author's knowledge, the first to examine the subject of African video game narratives. Further research needs to be conducted on African games in order to examine topics such as gender, language and ethnic representation. Given that video games' prominence and popularity are on the rise in Africa, exploring the content of games developed by Africans helps better understand how local developers are bringing new insights and perspectives, contributing to global trends in the gaming industry.

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