

LGBTQIA+ Inclusivity vs Cultural Relativism in a Conservative Africa: The Travails of Western Children Entertainment in Cameroon

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Abstract

Over the decades, Western cable television channels have purveyed the LGBTQIA+ rights movement in Africa. Through the broadcast of queer contents (particularly LGBTQIA+ inclusive animated cartoons), broadcasters such as Disney Junior, Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network and Canal+ Elles among others have sought to positively represent non-heterosexual identities and contribute in some ways to the gay rights movement in Africa. Considered antithetical to the moral values and cultural policies of most African nations, this inclusive children contents have most often attracted virulent criticism and sanctions from African media regulators. In Cameroon more specifically, tighter censorship systems are now deployed to stultify pro-gay media advocacy and queer children media. African governments' hostility to pro-LGBTQIA+ inclusive contents warrants that Western television channels adapt their broadcast and business strategies to African cultural and political realities. This paper seeks to examine this adaptation imperative in the light of the Cameroonian experience. Using secondary sources and critical observations, the paper specifically answers three research questions: How have Western cable television channels used animated contents to support the LGBTQIA+ rights movement in Cameroon? How has Cameroon homophobic institutions sought to counter this TV-assisted rights movement? And how may Western media adapt to the Cameroonian homophobic context?

Keywords: LGBTQIA+ Rights Movements, Animated Contents, Cultural Relativism, Queer Theory, Homophobia, Children Entertainment

Introduction

The LGBTQIA+ rights movement is presently pushed by a variety of socio-political forces in Africa. These forces range from right organisations and Western chancelleries to local artists and liberal clergymen such as the late Desmond Tutu. Popularly regarded as an un-African and an essentially Western phenomenon, this rights movement has progressively found its way into the creative and media industry of the continent. In effect, over the years, LGBTQIA+ artists have come up with thought-provoking artistic or media productions aimed at emphasising the plight and

human rights of non-heterosexual identities on the continent. These artists and media people have, in this way, been advocating social justice for LGBTQIA+ communities in Africa. In Nigeria (Africa's most populous nation) for instance, LGBTQIA+ filmmakers have released movies that convey redemptive narratives about the humanity of queer people. Two cases in point are Uyaiedu Ikpe-Etim and Pamela Adie who released *Ife* (2020), a film that celebrates lesbianism. The film follows a same sex women couple who face various forms of challenges related to their sexual orientation in Nigeria.

In the same country (Nigeria), Unoma Azuah, a lesbian writer published a memoir titled *Embracing My Shadow: Growing Up Lesbian in Nigeria* (2020) which documents her personal experience as a gay in a homophobic country. The lesbian writer also edited *Blessed Body: Secret Lives of the Nigerian LGBT* (2020) and *Mounting the Moon: Queer Nigerian Poetry* (2020), two anthologies which document queer experience in a toxic and homophobic Nigeria (Unoma 2020a,b,c). Similar queer artistic, literary and cinematographic experiences are perceptible in countries across Africa. Gibson Ncube (2022) documents some of these experiences in the field of cinema. His book titled "*Queer Bodies in African Films*" attests to the growth of a queer African cinema that seeks painstakingly to project the humanity of LGBTQIA+ communities originating from the continent.

Thus, pro-LGBTQIA+ voices in the African media and creative industry have over the years become diverse. But their influence and ability to provoke ground-breaking change in mentalities are hampered or reduced by institutional homophobia and authoritarianism. In effect, the predominance of conservatism and religiosity in most African countries has threatened media-based movements in favour of LGBTQIA+ rights in most African countries. Such conservatism and religiosity have enabled the adoption not only of homophobic legal systems but also of rigid censorship systems which dissuade the production and distribution of pro-LGBTQIA+ media contents in African nations (Nyanzi & Karamagi 2015; Matebeni, Surya & Vasu 2011). It is in this precarious and homophobic context that a good number of Western cable televisions have been broadcasting inclusive contents that positively represent LGBTQIA+ in many African towns.

Actually, Western cable television channels have these last years, functioned as subtle purveyors of the LGBTQIA+ rights movement in Africa (Oketumbi & Mbagwu 2021; Mazuma & Etimbok 2023, Djadzeka 2024). Through inclusivity policies (particularly considerable quotas dedicated to queer animated contents), broadcasters such as Disney Junior, Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network and Canal+ Elles among others have sought to positively represent LGBTQIA+ sexualities. In so doing, these broadcasters have in no small measure contributed to the LGBTQIA+ rights movement in African countries. In 2021 for instance, the Walt Disney Network (cited in Ramey 2021) launched its 'Reimagine Tomorrow' campaign meant to (re)define its inclusivity policy. This campaign aimed at 'amplifying underrepresented voices and untold stories as well as championing the importance of accurate representation in media and entertainment'. By this scheme, the global television network pledged to establish inclusion standard across all Disney

content. It additionally pledged that, ‘by 2022, 50% of regular and recurring characters across Disney scripted content will come from underrepresented groups’.

Considered antithetical to the moral values and cultural policies of most sub-Saharan African nations, LGBTQIA+ inclusive broadcast – like the one adopted by Disney above – has most often attracted virulent criticism and sanctions from African media regulators. In Cameroon more specifically, tighter censorship is now deployed to stultified such pro-gay media advocacy and queered children media.

Hostility to pro-LGBTQIA+ broadcast warrants that Western television channels adapt their broadcast and business strategies to African cultural and political realities. This paper seeks to examine this adaptation imperative in the light of the Cameroonian experience. Using secondary sources and critical observations, the paper specifically answers three research questions. In the first place, it examines how Western cable television channels have used inclusive contents to support the LGBTQIA+ rights movement in Cameroon. In second place, it discusses Cameroon homophobic institutions’ reaction to Western TVs’ inclusive broadcast, while in the last place, the paper examines how Western media may adapt their diversity policies to survive in the “queerphobic” Cameroonian audio-visual media landscape.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This paper is based on the descriptive research model. It specifically describes the travails of queer children content broadcast in Cameroon and the adaptive broadcast and business approaches that may enable the relevance of Western children televisions in the Cameroonian audio-visual media landscape. The paper used documentary analysis and critical observations as its methods of data collection. The first consisted in exploiting a wide range of secondary sources including research articles, book chapters, encyclopaedias, work papers, government edits, newspaper articles and online material among others. The second method of data collection (critical observations) consisted in exploiting empirical evidence (notably recent happenings and developments in the political and media ecologies of Cameroon and Africa) to buttress discussions in the paper. The paper is anchored in two theories namely the Queer Theory and Cultural Relativism.

The Queer Theory

This theory is essentially concerned with non-heterosexual identities and social concerns emanating from LGBTQIA+ and feminist perspectives. It has often been used in cultural studies to question ‘the traditions in which an entire variety of sexuality has been omitted by the “politics of identity”, a politics that informs and polices popular cultural representations of the Queer’ (Yadav and Kalia 2022: 1). The theory also looks at how identity may be limiting and how it may function as a phenomenon that denaturalizes discourse.

In children media studies, the Queer theory is often used to examine or make a case for the representation of LGBTQIA+ sexualities in children entertainment. For instance, some scholars

tap into the theory to explain the psychological effects of the exclusion or negative representation of non-heterosexual identities in children TV shows and films (Kennedy 236, Janssen 88, Jagose 91). In line with this theory, pro-LGBTQIA+ entities argue that inclusivity and diversity should be guiding principles, as far as the representation of sexuality in children entertainment is concerned. These two principles enable children contents creators to neutralize what psychologist Pitman Gayle calls ‘symbolic annihilation’. In his words, ‘symbolic annihilation in psychology and sociology [...] is the idea that if you don’t see yourself represented or reflected in society or in media (television, movies, books), you essentially don’t exist’. To avoid such a regrettable scenario, Pitman says ‘It’s so important to have L.G.B.T. representations in children’s books’ (cited in Yadav and Kalia 2022: 8). Thus, including LGBTQIA+ identities among the sexualities being represented in a TV show or film may have a big psychological impact on children who are members of this non-heterosexual community. The realization that there is someone like them out there may help their psyche.

Still in line with the queer theory, scholars such as Hedbed, Venzo and Young (2020: 199) argue that diverse representation in children entertainment may equally have a pedagogical function. It may subtly educate children who aren’t directly members of the LGBTQIA+ community by helping them understand how to show respect and understanding to LGBTQIA+ people in their lives. This follows from two beliefs. The first is that the imageries of childhood television programs persist within children as dominant parts of their memories; while the second belief is that the impressions gathered from exposition to childhood TV television like shape the child’s belief system for a long time. Janssen (2020) corroborates these believes. He points out that:

Childhood has been recognized as a crucial emblematic function in neoliberal sexual politics, and it has been duly regularized as a central queer concern: an arguable crucible or ground zero of all sexual politics. This especially pertains to the child’s implication in regimes of categorization that are to govern complex coordinations of subjectivity across class, race, gender, maturational, and sexual fault lines (coordinations often related to what anthropologists used to call the incest taboo). At the same time, the child may be considered to harbor potential for resilience in the face of these overarching forms of containment.” (Janssen 2020)

It is in view of the psychological and pedagogical potential mentioned above that diverse representation of sexuality has these last decades been a remarkable feature of children entertainment. Global children television networks such as Walt Disney, Canal+ International and Cartoon Networks have considered the aforementioned potential in the (re)definition of their inclusivity policies (Ramey 2021; Vaz, Janderson & Thiane 2021). As shall be shown in the subsequent sections of this paper, such a diverse representation has been a subtle tool for purveying the LGBTQIA+ movement in African countries.

Cultural Relativism

The second theory considered for this study is cultural relativism, a brainchild of German anthropologist Franz Boas (Tilley 2011). This theory stipulates that the knowledge, values and behaviors of a people must be understood in accordance with the socio-cultural contexts from which they arise. In other words, values such as *methodological neutralism* and *methodological contextualism* must be applied whenever the issue of morality is evoked. In tandem with this, Tilley (2011) contends that cultural relativism simultaneously challenges moral skepticism and moral universalism. In his words,

[The theory] opposes moral skepticism by assuming that some things are genuinely right or wrong—or, as we might put it, that some statements of the form “X is morally right (wrong, good, etc.)” are genuinely true or valid. It opposes moral universalism by asserting that what is genuinely right or wrong varies from one culture to the next. More precisely, no moral principle, not even a very general one (e.g., the Golden Rule) is universally true or valid (except, perhaps, by coincidence). Rather, whatever truth or validity a moral principle may have is confined to one or a few cultures, ruling out any transcultural moral standpoint. This is because right and wrong are ultimately a function of cultural norms. (Tilley 2011: 82)

Further developed by social scientists such as, Ruth Benedict (1887–1948), and Melville Herskovits (1895–1963), cultural relativism emerged partly as a response to the ethnocentrism of nineteenth-century social science. It for instance sought to counter the popular belief of the time that all cultures are evolving along some dominant development models, chief of which are the European ones (Hatch 34).

In tandem with the aforementioned, the cultural relativism theory has often been used in LGBTQIA+ related studies to resist eurocentrism or westernization. Pan-African, conservative and traditionalist critics of African origin have often hinged on this very cultural relativism to question the LGBTQIA+ rights movement in Africa. Such critics have regarded the LGBTQIA+ rights movement as a socio-political scheme that is un-African and which problematically overlooks core African moral and cultural values (Westman 2023, Winker 2021, Onanuga & Aklade 2020, Kohn & McBride 2011). They also argue that the queer rights movement tends to celebrate an essentially Western culture as universal. Their argument stems partly from the popularly belief that heteronormativity is African while homosexuality and queerness is exogenous to Africa.

However, multiple anthropological studies put to question the belief in the exogeneity or un-African-ness of LGBTQIA+ sexualities. In effects, the research of the likes of Nyanzi (2015), Matebini (2011), Appiah and Gates (2005) and Epprecht (2004) have established forms of “African homosexualities” in cultures across the continent. Besides this, the belief in the un-African-ness of homosexuality appears to many LGBTQIA+ rights advocates as the manifestation of a double standard. Jaji (2017: 55) highlights this double standard thus: ‘it is puzzling how African Christians

question the “Africanness” of homosexuality without questioning the “Africanness” of Christianity which was brought to Africa by western missionaries’.

Queer Children Contents in a Homophobic Cameroon

Sub-Saharan African countries are still considerably conservative and religious. Cameroon is no exception. Statistics indicates that over 69.2% of the country’s population identifies as Christians while 20.9% are Muslims. The same statistics suggest that a smaller percentage (1.3%) adhere to the Traditional African Religion (TAR) (US State Department 2021: 5). Although secularity is instituted in the public life of the country, the imported religions mentioned above continue to subtly shape major socio-political institutions – notably the law, politics, education and the media – in the country. This has caused homophobia to be institutionalised and to be reflected in the country’s popular cultures.

Cameroon’s legal system for instance, criminalises homosexuality. Article 347(1) of the country’s *Penal Code* states that a penalty ranging from six months to five-year imprisonment is to be meted on anyone found guilty of the act. Framed in gender neutral terms, this provision of the Code applies to sexual intercourse between men and between women. In tandem with the provision mentioned above, Section 52 of *Cameroon Civil Status Registration Ordinance* prohibits same sex marriages in the country. The Ordinance actually stipulates that no marriage may be celebrated in Cameroon if the people intending to get married are of the same sex. Naturally, the aforementioned provisions of the law immensely shape social representations and popular perceptions about LGBTQIA+ sexualities in the country.

In accordance with the laws mentioned above, LGBTQIA+ bashing has become a kind of popular culture in the country. Stories of jailed, lynched, blackmailed, stigmatised and ostracised LGBTQIA+ people are replete in the country. On September 22, 2024 for instance, two gays were publicly lynched in Ekounou, a neighbourhood of Cameroon’s political capital. The two men were caught having sex in a car (Winner 2024). The incident is reminiscent of the 2016 assassination of Eric Ohena Lembembe, a gay activist. Lembembe died under mysterious and extremely brutal circumstances because of his involvement in LGBTQIA+ rights movement (FIDG & OMCJ 2017). Like Lembembe, many LGBTQIA+ rights activists and organisations have been operating under precarious and risky circumstances.

The general atmosphere of criminalisation, brutality and stigmatisation against LGBTQIA+ communities tends to deeply influence the local media production, from music through cinema to TV broadcast. In effect, given that LGBTQIA+ sexualities are taboos in the country, most Cameroonian content creators simply steer clear from representing LGBTQIA+ identities in their artistic and media production. The rare local media productions that evoke these identities aim essentially at reproducing and perpetuating homophobic stereotypes and gloomy social representations in the name of cultural protectionism. A case in point is Francophone artiste Snoopie la Melodie who recently released a popular song titled “*Les Nerfs de Boys*” (The Boys’ Nerves). This very popular song calls for the death of LGBTQIA+ people. It graphically incites

violence against LGBTQIA+ people saying “*poignardez les pédés*” (stab the gays); “*On déteste les pédés*” (we hate gays). The video of the song is even more horrifying as it features young people dancing with daggers stained with blood.

The media laws promulgated in the country are antithetical to diverse representation of sexuality in media contents particularly children entertainment. For instance, Article 32 of *Law No 2000/158* (that regulates audio-visual media in the country) stipulates that ‘private audio-visual media should abstain from broadcasting programs containing scenes that are injurious to good mores and decency, notably programs that could be harmful to children and adolescent [My translation]¹’ (The Republic of Cameroon 2000). The morality and decency principles defended by this provision logically suggest that pro-homosexuality contents in any audio-visual media production will be frowned at. In addition to the bill mentioned above, a June 13, 2023 communique issued by Cameroon media regulatory organ, the National Communication Council (NCC) expressively proscribes LGBTQIA+ broadcast in the country. This communique that targeted a few Western cable television broadcasters, stipulates that:

The NCC is asking the promoters of channels broadcasting homosexuality-themed programs which run contrary to good order and which are susceptible to corrupt the children and the youths in Cameroon to immediately withdraw these programs. The Council stresses that the airing of such programs constitutes a violation of the law, morality and customs of our country. The penalty for not withdrawing these programs would be the outright suspension of the media concerned. [My translation]² (NCC 2023: 1)

Furthermore, impromptus censorship systems have hampered the distribution and screening of imported cinema and audio-visual productions that are LGBTQIA+ inclusive. A case in point is Cameroon Office of Cinematographic and Audio-Visual Production’s interdiction³ of the screening and distribution of the film *Barbie* (Greta Gerwig, 2023). Adopted in August 17, 2023, the interdiction claimed *Barbie* promotes LGBTQIA+ sexual orientations and might be morally and culturally harmful to the youths in Cameroun (Bobo 2023).

It is in this homophobic environment that Western cable television have been broadcasting LGBTQIA+ inclusive children entertainment, particularly animated cartoons, thereby contributing to the gay rights movement in Cameroon. Queered contents are mainly observed in the animated cartoons broadcast over such Western channels as Canal + Elles, Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network and Disney Junior.

French TV channel *Canal+ Elles* for instance has since 2015 been airing *Miraculous: Les Aventures de Ladybug et Chat Noir* (2015-present), an animated series with pro-LGBTQIA+ scenes. The series is about two adolescents Marinette (female) and Adrien (male) who morph into superheroes anytime there is an emergency in the town of Paris. They transform to assist citizens in distress and restore order and security. In some of its episodes, the series recounts the amorous lives of some lesbian and minority identities. For instance, in the 17th episode of series’ 5th season,

the production suggests a love affair between Zoe a lesbian and Marinette the female protagonist. The homosexual relation is suggested explicitly through dialogues and actions.

Similarly, *The Owl House*, (Disney, 2020–2023) broadcast on Cartoon Network depicts and celebrates LGBTQIA sexualities. The show is actually an animated cartoon series about a teenage human Luz, who finds herself in a new witchy universe after crossing a magic threshold accidentally. In the series' season 2, Luz falls in love with Amity, a lesbian witch. A third example is *Adventure Time: Distant Lands* (Cartoon Network, 2020–2021) also broadcast on Cartoon Network. The series is about the love story of Marceline and Princess Chewing Gum, two lesbians who eventually become a couple at the end of the series.

Last but not list in this paper's sample is *Doc McStuffins* (Disney Junior, 2012–2020) aired on Disney Junior. The show recounts the daily life of a nurturing 6-year-old girl who cares for toys and dolls in her playhouse. The little girl who dreams of following the footsteps of her nurse-mother, has a stethoscope with magical powers. Anytime she puts on this stethoscope, her toys and dolls magically become animate and she can communicate with them. In its episode titled "Rescue Plan", the series evokes the theme of parenting by homosexual couples, an issue susceptible to be an abomination in conservative Cameroon.

Empirical studies are needed to determine the actual psychological and pedagogical effects of Cameroonian children's exposure to the LGBTQIA+ inclusive shows mentioned above. However, in theory, these animated series are susceptible to teach Cameroonian children a variety of values that are key to understanding difference and tolerance *vis-à-vis* non-heterosexual identities. This may be beneficial to the LGBTQIA+ rights movement on one hand and detrimental to Cameroonian conservatism on the other hand. Given that these diverse representations are in stark contrast to local Cameroonian televisions' programing, the children's curiosity may be triggered and this may open up opportunities for parents – particularly those who are queer – to talk with them about LGBTQIA+ people and the latter's plight in the Cameroonian society. However, the flipside of Cameroonian children's exposure to this queered televisual content may be that, they (the little viewers) become confused in the face of what is shown on TV. The children might find it difficult to reconcile the relatively exotic world depicted in the animated cartoons with the realities of the homophobic and conservative Cameroonian society. Yadav and Kalia (2021) highlight this possibility when they argue that:

Cartoons can potentially trivialize and bring humor to adult themes and contribute to an atmosphere in which children view these depictions as normative and acceptable. Television shows, books, and movies with sexually-confusing messages introduce children to falsehoods and immorality and create insecurity among them. A general belief exists in the conventional heterosexual society that children are not equipped to handle these adult themes. (1)

Reliable statistics on the respective reaches of the aforementioned Western channels will also help determine the extent to which their LGBTQIA+ inclusive contents are aiding the

LGBTQIA+ rights movement in Cameroon. It is hard to find such reliable statistics. However, the least one may say at this juncture is that, these channels – particularly Disney Junior, Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network and Canal+ International – are among African children’s favourites (Africa.com 2024; Gultom & Nuru 2024). On the basis of a survey of Western cable television viewership in Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Senegal, and Democratic Republic of Congo, media scientist Clara Verdier (2024) affirms that the five most popular children TV channels in Africa are Disney Junior, Piwi+, Teletoon, Gulli Africa and Nickelodeon. The popularity the aforementioned western children televisions suggest that their LGBTQIA+ inclusive contents may similarly be popular and relatively impactful in Cameroon.

Cameroon Government’s Muscular Reaction

Western television networks’ inclusive programing is rooted in some values which the West may perceived as universally moral. This programing is specifically founded on the belief that LGBTQIA+ sexualities should universally be accepted. However, when exported to Africa, the aforementioned values are interpreted along methodological contextualism. The moral universalism and eurocentrism of inclusive programing are put to question. This questioning is done along local African moral and cultural frames (Tilley 2011, Baggett 2023, Ruth 1934). It is in line with this methodological contextualism that censorial forces and social arbiters in Cameroon have been responding to foreign television channels’ queer children contents.

It is important, from the outset, to underline the cultural essentialism that has over the years, characterised Cameroonian audiences’ and social critics’ reception of Western children media as a whole. In effect, the Western animated cartoons that dominate the broadcast media landscape in Cameroon are popularly associated with westernisation and Western cultural intoxication (Njankou 2018). In the popular fantasy, these animated cartoons mainly reflect Western symbolism and worldview (Kindzeka 2023). Cameroon animated content creator Youmbi (2016) shares corollaries. In a position paper meant to defend his pan-African animated cartoon project entitled *Tales of Africa*, Youmbi actually contends that:

African animated contents may reflect the talent of local artists. The latter’s artistic productivity undoubtedly represents an index of originality and a mark that distinguishes African artists from their European, American and Asian counterparts. In view of this, the creation of a fund dedicated to the production of African animated cartoons is imperative. This imperative is even rationalized by the fact that the African audiences do not find images shown by Western cable televisions as an authentic representation of African realities. This new African artistic initiative [*(Tales of Africa)*] is a major innovative scheme in the African cinema and television industry. The initiative is in line with African audiences’ aspirations and African nations’ cultural policies. [My translation]⁴ (Youmbi 2016: 4)

The aforementioned essentialist views have spectacularly been exacerbated by the rise of LGBTQIA+ inclusive contents over Western children television networks. As a matter of fact, this rise of inclusive media has brought to the fore the popular all manner of conspiracy theories stipulating that some powerful and well-coordinated Western institutions are using a wide range of tools – including inclusive children media – to push LGBTQIA+ rights proselytism in Cameroon. In line with this conspiracy theory, Cameroon audio-visual media regulatory organ, the National Communication Council (NCC) deployed prompt and muscular strategies to neutralise what it perceived as cultural intoxication and unethical practices by Western broadcaster.

The Council started by issuing a June 13, 2023 warning against broadcasters that air diversity programs in Cameroon. Contained in a strongly-worded communiqué, the warning states that the airing of homosexuality-related contents constitutes a breach of Cameroon Penal Code and media laws and could attract serious sanctions to its perpetrators. These sanctions could range from fines to suppression. In its words, ‘the National Communication Council can suspend a media outlet for promoting values that go contrary to our cultural practices and also the laws of our republic [...] We can suspend the media outlet from one month to six months or suspend its broadcast or its presence in Cameroon’ (NCC 2023: 1)

The communique doesn’t pinpoint a particular local or Western broadcaster. But it makes sufficient reference to some Western television channels. It actually stipulates that the problematic TV contents are “usually released by foreign publishers [and] involve ordinary series. [These contents] are increasingly found in cartoons for children and minor” (NCC 2013:1).

Although popularly acclaimed in Cameroon as a bold move towards preserving local cultures, The NCC’s warning didn’t produce immediate fruits. Most Western television channels – notably Canal+ International, Disney and Cartoon Network – that were subtly targeted by the edict simply ignored the communique or made insignificant changes in their programming. In view of this scenario, the NCC stepped-up its coercive move by issuing a second communiqué more aggressive than the first. Issued on September 22, 2013, this edict cracked down on French TV channel Canal+ Elles, one of the purveyors of pro-LGBTQIA+ contents in Cameroon. It stipulates that the French channel is suspended with immediate effect and until further notice.

Implications and the Future of Queer Children Entertainment in Cameroon

The censorship of pro-LGBTQIA+ broadcast in Cameroon warrants the adoption of flexible broadcast and business strategies. Such flexibility should be based on cultural relativist principles in that, it should seriously consider contextualism. By definition, methodological contextualism implies that ‘every custom, belief, or action must be studied [and understood] in the context of the history and traditions, problems and opportunities, and total body of customs of the culture in which it is found; otherwise, we can gain little insight into other cultures’ (Tilley 2011). This implies that application of LGBTQIA+ inclusive broadcast in Cameroon should be mindful of the local socio-cultural and political context.

The Western television channels operating in Cameroon are thus compelled for the moment to comply with the homophobic media laws or risk suppression. These channels are somewhat obliged to adapt their children contents in particular to Cameroon's cultural values and policies. This adaptation is imperative. It should even be rooted in the understanding that resisting the NCC's edict may not be ideal for business. Also, one should understand that the airing of inclusive contents is ideal and key to inculcating children such values as the understanding of difference and tolerance. But the truth remains that genuine acceptance of diverse sexualities is a distant dream in the country. According to Njankou (2019) mentalities are just slowly evolving in favour of acceptance.

Canal + International finally understood this imperative. Shortly after NCC's suspensive action, the digital television platform redefined Canal+ Elles' contents according to NCC's recommendations. The platform created a gatekeeping department aimed at checking LGBTQIA+ related contents in all Canal+ International programs. In a communique cited in Ecofin (2023), the platforms' regional director explains in details their new gatekeeping policy. He noted that henceforth, any explicit depiction of LGBTQIA+ sexualities destined to the adult viewers will not be allowed to go in the Canal+ Elles; while contents destined specifically to children will be stripped of LGBTQIA themes and characters. In addition to this, Canal+ International revealed that it has conceived 'a pedagogical spot explaining its newly adopted Parental Code. This spot is to be aired regularly as from October 2023'. The platform added that 'It now enables all its subscribers to control the contents they receive at home. It is now possible to block any LGBTQIA inclusive channel using a four-digit code thereby, disabling access to channels whose contents are deemed inappropriate for children'. [My translation]⁵ (cited in Ecofin 2023).

Another implication is that the representation of non-heterosexual identities in Western Channels' children entertainment could, for the moment, hinged predominantly on subliminal cues. At first sight, this may appear only consolatory and a little bit obsolete to LGBTQIA+ rights activists. However, this strategy is clearly pragmatic, given the intransigency of media regulatory bodies in Cameroon. Moreover, this strategy had often been in use in the production of old pro-gay TV shows. In their review of inclusive content in Disney's animated series, Yadav and Kalia (2021) for instance, highlight a number of such subliminal clues. A case in point is the technique of using the trope of the princess who ascends to the throne, doesn't seek to have a male companion or to get married to a man, and is very successful in her leadership without the assistance of a male character. Yadav and Kalia (2021) contend that such a trope had often been considered as being indicative of the lesbianism of the princess depicted in the show.

It is important, at this juncture, to argue that inclusivity must not be overt through characterisation, plot or dialogues for it to be present in a children TV show and for it to be effective in communicating LGBTQIA+ messages. A good number of Western children TV contents use various archetypes of the Other in their shows, to suggest diversity, inclusivity and tolerance. This subliminal approach may, to some extent, be a working tool to convey difference and LGBTQIA+ inclusivity. A good example is the Vamparinna character, in the eponym animated cartoon that is

broadcast on Disney Junior (Disney Junior, 2012–2020). The cartoon actually follows a family of vampires who happily live in the fictive town of Transylvania. In the show's episodes, emphasis is placed on revealing the humanity and relevance of the Other. This "Other" could, to some extent, symbolically be associated with the LGBTQIA+ person. Fox makes allusion to such subliminal way of conveying LGBTQIA+ messages when it points out that:

It's cool that we always look at the movies trying to see something beyond the obvious that they show. I believe that nowadays more and more drawings show this kind of thing [representativeness]. They try to be more inclusive. They talk about various issues of gender, sexuality, even in an almost subliminal way. But who is affected, perceives the marks and identifies itself and feels happy. (cited in Vaz, Janderson and Thiaiane 2021: 227)

Thus, the aforementioned subliminal techniques could be harnessed to avoid explicit representation of LGBTQIA+ identities and still construct a narrative on the plight and humanity of these sexual identities.

Conclusion

This paper examined the ways in which Western cable television channels practice inclusive programming and systematically support the LGBTQIA+ rights movement in Cameroon. It also explored Cameroon homophobic institutions' reaction to this TV-assisted right movement and the future of queered contents broadcast in Cameroon. The paper argued that through animated series such as Canal+ Elles' *Miraculous: The Stories of Ladybug and Cat Noir*, Cartoon Networks' *Adventure Time* and Disney Junior's *Doc McStuffins* and the like, Western children television channels have broadcast pro-LGBTQIA+ representations. This broadcast is susceptible to subtly groom Cameroonian children into accepting difference and non-heterosexual identities.

The paper also argued that Cameroon government's muscular reaction to the airing of pro-LGBTQIA+ contents should be understood along the cultural relativism framework. The reaction is reminiscent of a broader conservative African struggle against Western cultural intoxication and Eurocentrism on the continent. The muscular reaction also warrants that Western broadcasters adapt their broadcasting and business strategies to Cameroon cultural values and policies, and explore subliminal approaches to representing LGBTQIA+ sexualities in their programs and TV shows destined specifically to Cameroonian or African children. The scope of this paper was limited to Cameroon NCC's struggle against LGBTQIA+ inclusive children contents and Western cable televisions' ability to adapt to the homophobic socio-political atmosphere in Cameroon. Subsequent research may focus on Cameroonian audiences' perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ inclusive contents.

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¹ L'entreprise privée de communication audiovisuelle doit s'abstenir de diffuser des émissions comportant des scènes de nature à porter atteinte aux bonnes mœurs et à la pudeur, notamment, celles des enfants et des adolescents

² Le CNC demande aux promoteurs des chaînes diffusant au Cameroun des programmes laissant apparaître des scènes d'homosexualité, préjudiciable au bon ordre social, a fortiori à l'enfance et à la jeunesse, de retirer sans délai ces programmes qui violent la loi, les bonnes mœurs et les coutumes de notre pays, sous peine, le cas échéant, de la suspension pure et simple des médias concernés.

³ The Office of Cinematographic and Audio-Visual Production is an organ of the Cameroon Ministry of Arts and Culture

⁴ Les films d'animation et [les] dessins animés peuvent véhiculer le talent des artistes africains. Sans aucun doute, ils peuvent s'affirmer par leur originalité aux côtés des autres expressions d'art du genre, à l'instar du dessin animé européen, américain ou asiatique. C'est pourquoi un fonds pour la production doit être accordé à ce genre d'expression, d'autant que les populations ne se retrouvent pas dans les images projetées qu'elles voient sur leur écran. Cette ambitieuse initiative d'origine africaine, est un nouveau mécanisme qui pourrait marquer un tournant majeur dans le

paysage cinématographique et télévisuel de l'Afrique et qui répondrait aux aspirations du public africain par des programmes conformes à leurs canevas culturels.

⁵ Un spot pédagogique concernant le paramétrage du Code Parental sera en diffusion dès le 2 octobre 2023. Pour rappel ils offrent à tous les abonnés un contrôle absolu de ce qui est diffusé dans leur foyer. Il est possible de verrouiller n'importe quelle chaîne avec un code de quatre chiffres, ce qui permet à tout moment aux parents d'empêcher l'accès à certaine(s) chaîne(s) qu'ils estimerait non souhaitable(s) pour leurs enfants