

CHAPTER 17:

CREATIVE PROCESSES AND TECHNIQUES IN A NEW GRAPHIC LITERATURE ON THE NIGERIA/BIAFRA WAR

Contributed by
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INTRODUCTION

Between 2016 and 2023, Chidiebere Onwuekwe embarked on his doctoral journey in the Nsukka Art School. He pursued a PhD in Fine Art and Design which is a new programme in the school. Apart from the dissertation report, the findings of his research birthed a one hundred and forty-page graphic novel on the Nigeria/Biafra conflict. The work focused on Achuzia's exploits as a Biafran Militia and Army officer. Soon after the approval his research topic entitled "A graphic novel of Joseph Achuzia's Exploits in Nigeria/Biafra War, 1967 to 1970, and with the approval of his supervisor, he embarked on his first field trip to the War Museum in Umuahia where he did an archival research. He went into a stretching literature review on the conflict. Again, Onwuekwe conducted oral interviews on selected survivors of the War. With these endeavours successfully completed, he redeployed the data in the studio and worked on comic script, forming a storyline for the work.

The main problem of the research arose as a result of a lack of attention to making print and electronic graphic literature of Nigeria/Biafra niches by Nigerian comic book Artists, and that Achuzia's exploits have never been considered to be recreated as a Graphic literature (Onwuekwe, 2023:4). This is so because most

Nigerian artists focus mainly on African Superheroes that do not differ much from western comic heroes.

For data and fact gathering, the scholar used literature review, oral interview and field trip to War museum in umuahia. During ideation and concept development, he studied war-niche movies, war photos from online archives and made preliminary sketches according to the story. The processes went as follows: pencilling, colouring with Manga Studio application, Page layout design (Onwuekwe, 2023:44)

At the end of the research, a one hundred and forty-page colour booklet was produced after a rigorous procedure. The work titled “Hannibal of theSun Country” is the first graphic novel of Nigeria/Biafra War niche.

Thus, this chapter identifies and discusses of the various creative processes applied by the the artist in arriving at a full colour graphic novel at the end of his programme.

Purpose of the Study

- This study focuses on identifying various creative process used in making the first Graphic Novel on Nigeria/Biafra Conflict.
- The identified processes will be arranged such that they can be replicated by other scholars.

About the Book

Onwuekwe and Uka (2023:26) describe the work in full detail:

The project is a graphic novel, and it typically looks like a comic book, but it is longer and more substantial work, with a more intricate and involving storyline. The work is titled “Achuzia: Surviving Federal Onslaught”. The Front Matter has a cover page, copyright, foreword and table of contents, the body matter contains 9 chapters. The end matter is just a

leaf with an epilogue. Every chapter has a sub-heading and a picture that follows it. The novel combines elements of traditional literature with sequential art, using images and text, including figures of sound, to tell the story. The format of a graphic novel can vary, but this work includes multiple panels on each page, with a minimum of two, and one panel on rare occasions. with text and dialogue incorporated into the panels themselves or in captions below them. The artworks have been rendered to have sharp tonal contrasts between the mid-tone and shades.

The title of the work was changed from “Achuzia: Surviving the Federal Onslaught” to “Hannibal of the Rising Sun”. Culled from the encomium of the work, the following extract gives a brief description of the work:

“In the heart of Nigeria's darkest hour, a hero emerged from the ashes of war. This work is a gripping graphic novel that transports you to the tumultuous landscape and sections of the Biafra War, a conflict that tore a nation apart. Colonel Joe Achuzia, a symbol of unwavering resistance, takes centre stage in this epic tale of courage, and survival.

As Nigeria plunges into chaos and violence, follow Achuzia and a cast of unforgettable characters as they navigate the treacherous terrain of war, forging bonds, making sacrifices, and finding hope in the most unlikely of places. Through vividly illustrated pages and a compelling narrative, *Hannibal of the Sun Country* immerses you in the harsh realities of a war-torn nation, where every decision carries life-or-death consequences. This graphic novel is more than a historical account; it's a tribute to the resilience of the Biafran people and a reminder that in the face of adversity, ordinary individuals can become extraordinary heroes.”

This brief summary has given a hint to what any curious reader would expect on perusing through the pages of the work.

Describing the features and content of the work, Onwuekwe (2023) in his First Critic Session, writes on the content of the work thus:

Identified Design Processes in the Novel

a. Ideation and Concept development: Ideation is a crucial phase in the creative process as it lays the foundation for the final artwork or design. Ideation also involves exploring various visual concepts, themes, and artistic techniques. Artists may experiment with different materials, styles, colours, compositions, and subjects to develop their ideas. A combination of the resources from a field trip, literature review and oral interviews aided in the study of the settings and time of occurrence of the conflict. Again, further studies were carried out on architectural style, civilian vehicles, apparel, hairstyle, camouflage patterns of officers on both sides, weapons, food, furniture, gadgets, and the environment, among others.

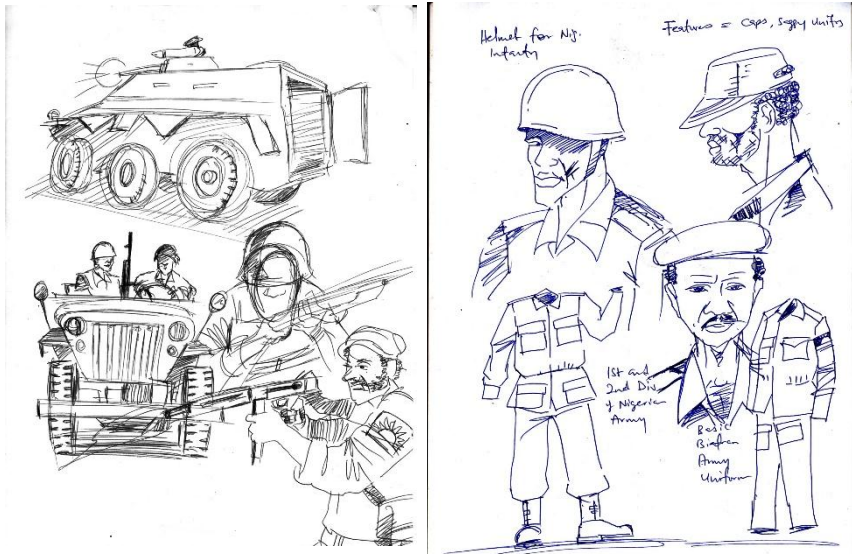


Fig 1: ideation and preliminary sketches:
The researcher's work process

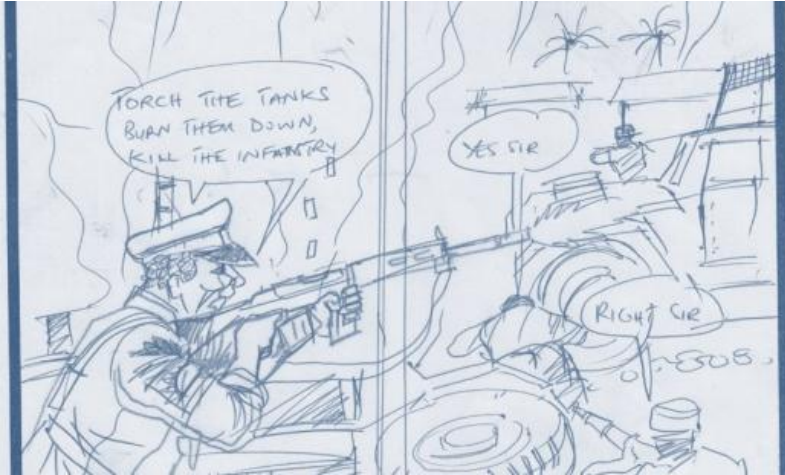


Fig 2: Scanned pencil sketch Source: The researcher's work process

b. Digital Inking: Digital inking allows artists to delineate using digital drawing tablets, styluses, and specialized software which reflects on the screen of the computer or tablet. It offers various advantages, such as the ability to easily correct mistakes, manipulate line thickness, and work in a non-destructive manner. All sketches were scanned and saved as JPEGs.

Pencil lines are traced using ball pens of varying points. Then, the pencil marks are erased before scanning. For the digital procedure, the pencil marks are scanned and traced with the graphic tablet on Manga Studio 5.



Fig 2: Detailed digital inking on Manga studio 5 from scanned drawings.
Source: the researcher's work process

c. Digital Colouring: In the 1990s, with the application of computer technology, digital painting art was born, its full use of computer science and technology perfected painting art to a new realm, as the darling of the new era, covering many industries such as film, packaging, advertising, comics, animation, games, the Internet and so on. Digital painting art is not only a simple change in the traditional art of painting but also the perfect fusion of science and technology and the representative of the development of space, larger than we cannot imagine (Cui, 2017 p 1430).

Working on digital interfaces, there are many software packages for digital art. The best among them are Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator. Manga Studio 5 is also proficient. Others are Corel Painter, Clip Studio Paint, Paint Tool, etc. According to Samah, Putih and Hussin (2016: 59)

The application of digital colouring technique allows the artist to create brush strokes on the surface of another image. The image source can also be blurred. The background painting can be manipulated to obtain a more artistic effect. This technique allows the paintings to be constructed in layers. Painting special effects such as various brushes, a colour mixture between layers and strokes joining are also possible. Blending is used to simulate the colour in varying degrees of opacity.

Such creativity and technique was used to render colours on the panels in layers. One of the most important effects used was the gradient shade effect which allows the flow of one colour into another.



Plate 1: The *gradient shade effect* was used to create a smooth flow and to depict depth and aerial perspective. Source: Screenshot from researcher's work process

Note that the gradient effect was applied mainly on the background layer to shade large expanse of spaces. What follows next is the selective filling using the magic wand and the paint bucket tools. The Magic Wand Tool is a feature commonly found in graphic design and image editing software, such as Adobe Photoshop. It is a selection tool that allows users to quickly and automatically select areas of an image based on colour similarity (Shadid, 2023), or even an enclosed space such as a line drawing. Once an enclosed space is selected, it is easy to further render that portion alone with digital inks and brushes such as seen below:



Plate 2: A paint bucket tool was used to fill ink-enclosed areas occasionally, and brush tools were used to paint the darker tones and faded shrubs.

Source: Screenshot from researcher's work process

Design of Camouflage Patterns

During the Civil War, fighters on both sides wore varying camouflage patterns. The reason was to identify the foe on the battlefield. While the Biafran side wore lighter green khaki with circular patterns of dark green and brown, the Nigerian side wore a darker khaki with striped dark green and brown patterns. However, only officers of the regular Biafran army, starting from the lieutenant, wore the camouflage pattern. It is not the case all the time as there was a scarcity of uniforms during the War, and efforts were made to manufacture them locally. In an interview with Njelita (2020), he affirmed that certain artists of Nsukka Art School championed the dyeing of camouflaged uniforms with his crew in Orlu province. In the Nigerian Army, Commando units in all divisions wore camouflage patterns. This was so because there was a sufficient supply of arms and uniforms by both Britain and Russia during the War.

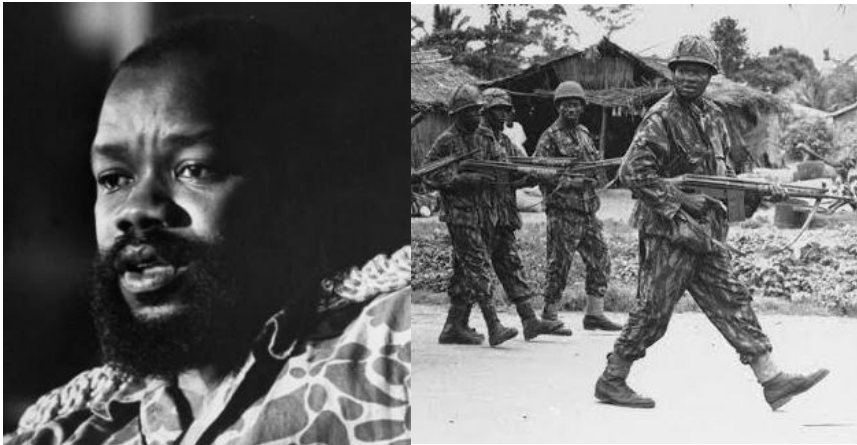


Plate 3: Note that the camouflage patterns on Biafran and Nigerian sides are not the same. Source: google.com

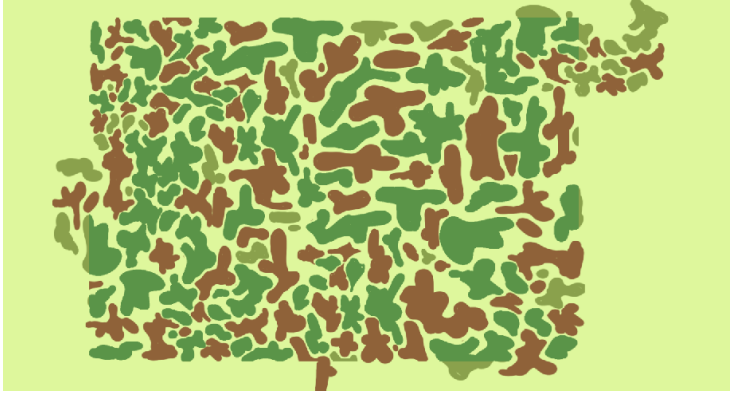


Plate 4: The camouflage design was done on Photoshop application through layering and tracing, then saved as a PSD file. Source: Researcher's work process



Plate 5: The PSD file was opened on Manga Studio, dragged and dropped on the spot where it was needed. Source: Researcher's work process.

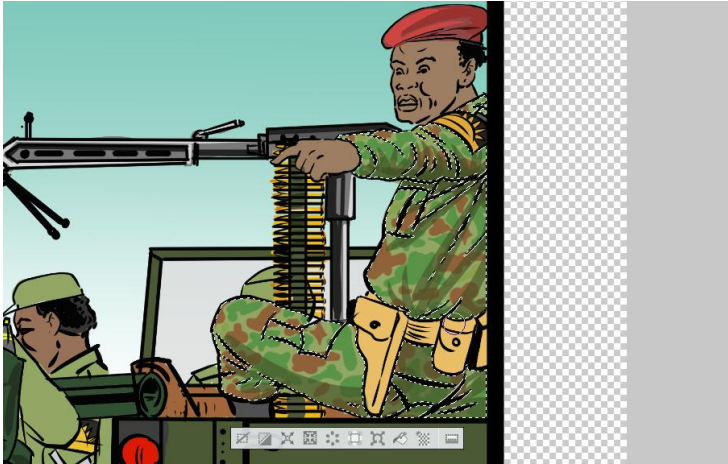


Plate 6: With the *auto selection still tool* active, a pen tool was used to shade the body, adding tonal value to it Source: Researcher's work process.

Design and fixture of Insignias

Whether it is called a logo, badge, marker, banner, coat of arms, or insignia, it is a visible design which represents a phenomenon, a country, an idea, a society, or an organization. Insignias come with beliefs and ideologies. For example, the Christian insignia is the Crucifix. The Red Cross is noted by the red equal-armed cross on a white background. For nearly 150 years, the emblem of the Red Cross against a white background has served as an internationally recognized symbol and the visible expression of the neutral assistance and protection to which the wounded and sick are entitled in times of armed conflict (ICRC, 2020). During the Nigerian Civil War, both sides had a national coat of arms, and the Military on both sides had differing military badges, and different flag patches representing various units. It was easy to identify one another on the battlefield at the beginning of the War. Images of the insignias were not sketched but downloaded and modified on Photoshop, and fixed in places where necessary on the panels.

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Plate 7: Placed side by side is the Biafran and Nigerian coat of arms, fixed on the caps of high-ranking officers with horps leaves, especially during ceremonies. Source: Google images



Plate 8: Shaded illustration of a Biafran officer giving an order for his men to retreat. As a high-ranking officer, the insignias must be present. Source: Screenshot from the researcher's work process.



Plate 9: The badges and rank insignia were cropped, filtered with effects, scaled and skewed to fit the given space. Source: Screenshot from the researcher's work process.

Speech Balloons, Narrative Captions, and Sound Effects

Speech balloons and thought bubbles are graphical outlines used to present characters' speeches and thoughts as the pictures unfold in two-dimensional space. Cohn (2013:1) opines that speech balloons and thought bubbles are among the most recognizable visual signs of the visual language used in comics and that the enclosed graphic containers provide a way in which text and image can interface with each other. Integration of texts with images makes the work whole and meaningful. Below, steps undertaken to form befitting speech balloons are explained hereunder. The shapes of the balloons and narrative boxes are drawn according to the positions of the images in the boxes.

The importance of lettering in narrative art such as comics and graphic novels can no longer be over-emphasized as it forms the dialogues within the panels. It is also the letters that position the readers in an omnipresent point of view, in the sense that

readers see or hear things before they happen, by way of reading the letters within the pages.

It is preferable to create custom speech balloon tools using the vector shape tools on CorelDraw. This allows for more flexibility and handling in rigid spaces. Shape tools were required to create the balloon, and the pointers were created with the shape tool. Once the nodes are closed, it becomes a completely modifiable vector shape.

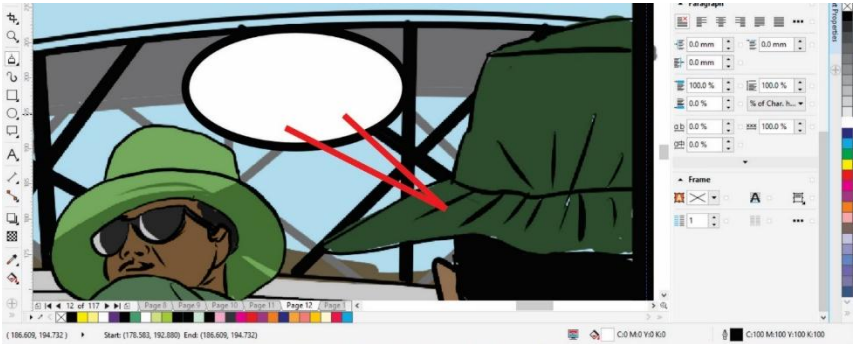


Plate 10: Clicking of points to draw vector lines. Source: Screenshot from researcher's work process

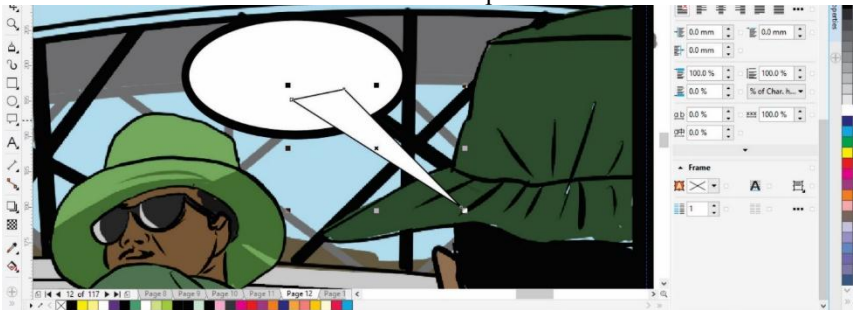


Plate 11: New vector pointer shape created on CorelDraw layout using the 'shape tool'. Source: Screenshot from researcher's work process



Plate 12: The two shapes joined eventually to form a new one.
Source: Screenshot from researcher's work process.

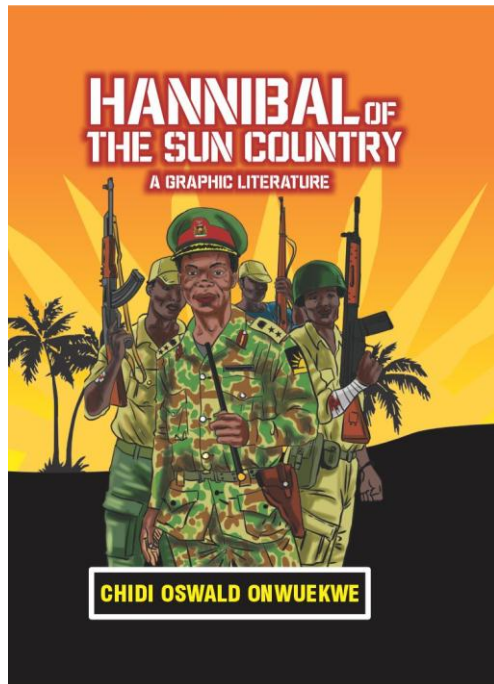


Plate 13: Cover Art by Chidiebere Onwuekwe, 2023

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PAGE 47



PAGE 51

Plate 14: Page 47 and 51 of the book with all the narrative features.
Chidiebere Onwuekwe, 2023

Summary

This chapter described the creative processes applied in birthing a graphic novel on Nigeria/Biafra conflict entitled “Hannibal of the Rising Sun”. It started with Ideation and concept development where the weapons, apparels, buildings and vehicles used at that time were studied via sketches. The next step was the digitization of the pencil line via tracing on a new layer. Following was adding of colours; from gradient shade, fills to detailed brush and ink shading. The study hinted on the importance of paint bucket and magic wand tools in color renderings. Again, the study explain the process of fixture of insignias on caps and uniforms of soldiers on both sides. Finally, the study narrated the steps applied making of

custom speech balloons and narrative boxes for the panels, using the CorelDraw vector application.

Questions

- What are the various creative steps used in birthing the Graphic novel entitled *Hannibal of the Rising Sun*?
- What are the following tools used for: Magic Wand tool and Paint Bucket tool
- Explain the process of creating camouflage textures on flat uniforms using Photoshop

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