

JOURNAL OF ISSUES IN LANGUAGE AND LITERARY STUDIES (IL&LS)

of the

Department of English

Faculty of Humanities

Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo

Oyo State, Nigeria.

Volume 11, Number 1, June 2025

ISSN: 2659-0212

eISSN: 1595-3440

Online access to and submission of articles: Old email: editors.ills@gmail.com

New email: illseditors.acu@gmail.com

Volume's Website: <https://illsjournal.acuoyo.net/index.php/ills/issue>

Telephone: +234 8036661540

MANAGING EDITOR

Professor Solanke, S. O

*Department of English,
Faculty of Humanities,
Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo
Oyo State, Nigeria
+234 8036661540*

EDITORS

Oduola, M. O. Ph.D.

*Department of English,
Faculty of Humanities,
Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo
Oyo State, Nigeria*

Agboola, O.T. Ph.D.

*Department of English,
Faculty of Humanities,
Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo
Oyo State, Nigeria*

EDITORIAL CONSULTANTS

Professor Olu Obafemi FNAL

*Department of English,
University of Ilorin,
Ilorin, Nigeria*
omoajon@yahoo.com

Professor Ayo Kehinde

*Department of English,
University of Ibadan,
Ibadan, Nigeria*
ayobamikehinde2000@yahoo.com

Professor Duro Adeleke

*Department of Linguistics and
African Languages,
University of Ibadan,
Ibadan, Nigeria*
duroadeleke@yahoo.com

Professor Sola T. Babatunde

*Department of English,
University of Ilorin,
Ilorin, Nigeria*
solababatunde2012@gmail.com

Professor Olatunde Ayodabo

*Department of English,
Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo
Oyo State, Nigeria*
ayodabolatunde@yahoo.com

Professor Ahmad K. Babajo

*Department of English & Drama,
Kaduna State University,
Kaduna, Nigeria*
drbabajo@yahoo.com

Nahum U. Butari, U. Ph.D.

*Department of English & Drama
Kaduna State University,
Kaduna, Nigeria*
nwunubete@yahoo.com

Journal of Issues in Language and Literary Studies (IL&LS) is a bi-annual peer-reviewed journal of the Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, focusing on essays and research works in linguistic theory, general language and literary studies. Given the volume and quality of patronage from diverse backgrounds and the acceptance of earlier editions published from 2013, the Journal has now metamorphosed into a full-fledged University-based journal published biannually, with reputable scholars as consultants. The establishment of the journal is considered a milestone development, given the tremendous scholarly interest that English and Nigerian languages and studies of Literature in English and English Literature attract locally, nationally and internationally at different academic fora.

Contributors are, therefore, invited to submit reports of original research for consideration in *IL&LS*. Preference shall be given to the presentation of new theories, as well as data-based papers.

Instructions for Contributors

The *Journal of Issues in Language and Literary Studies (IL&LS)* is a bi-annual (June and September) publication of the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo. The focus of *IL&LS* is to capture all the levels of English usage globally, drawing from classical theories and principles of language, literature and linguistics, and with case studies, data and illustrations from activities, experiences and situations around the globe. In this regard, we welcome papers that cover the following areas:

- a) General Linguistics- Psycholinguistics, Historical Linguistics, Computational Linguistics;
- b) English in Nigeria- History of English in Nigeria, Phonology of English in Nigeria, Morphological processes, Syntax, Semantics of English in Nigeria;
- c) Pragmatics- Analysis of language in use;
- d) Applied Linguistics- Utility values of applied linguistics (Stylistics, Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics);
- e) Sociolinguistics- Language variation: regional, social, occupational, etc. varieties;
- f) Oral Literature, Cultural Studies and the New Media
- g) Postcolonial Literature, Migration and Globalisation
- h) Medical Literature (representation of illnesses, diseases and therapeutics in literary texts)
- i) Popular Culture (films, music and stand-up comedy)
- j) Gender Discourse (with a focus on contemporary theories)

- k) Literature and Law (recreation of legal and judicial matters in literary texts)
- l) Literature and Environmental Studies
- m) Any other topic(s) reflecting language, literature and linguistics not mentioned.

Note to Contributors

Language: This should be simple and communicative enough for the target audience (students at the tertiary level, scholars, and researchers). Illustrations should be devoid of religious, political, racial, or gender colourations except where the context demands. Contributors should explain technical words, where applicable.

Structure and Formatting: The Title should be a brief phrase describing the paper's contents. The title page should include the authors' full names and affiliations, as well as the name of the corresponding author, along with phone and e-mail information. Present addresses of authors should appear as a footnote.

Referencing: Contributions can be in MLA or APA, depending on the contributor's choice.

Abstract: This should not be more than 300 words with no more than 6 Keywords.

Introduction: This should provide a clear statement of the problem, the relevant literature on the subject, and the proposed approach or solution. It should be understandable to colleagues from a broad range of scientific disciplines.

The volume of an article: A chapter contribution should be between 3000 and 5000 words processed in MS Word format. All manuscript portions must be typed double-spaced, and all pages numbered starting from the title page.

Quotations: Quotations of more than three lines should be displayed and indented. Check that the page numbers of the source have been provided.

A list of non-standard abbreviations should be added. Generally, non-standard abbreviations should be used only when the full term is exceptionally long and often used. Each abbreviation should be spelt out and introduced in parentheses the first time it is used in the text.

Texts in Nigerian and other tonal languages should be tone-marked, and musical examples should be camera-ready. Except when necessary, photographs and heavy graphic works should be avoided.

Authors are responsible for securing permissions from copyright works, as well as for providing high-resolution files of images for reproduction. If your chapter contains extracts from other works, especially Figures, Tables, Poetry, etc., please obtain permission from the authors and publishers before submitting the final version to *IL&LS*.

The journal is online, domiciled and hosted on the website of Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, Nigeria. There are no hard copies.

All contributions, correspondences and inquiries should be sent to editors.ills@gmail.com.

Managing Editor

Content

Volume 11, Number 1, June 2025

1. Olanike Olaleru, *PhD*. **Patriarchy and the Concept of Power in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*.**
2. Azeez, Adeshina Taofiq, *PhD* and Tiamiyu, Abiola Jamiu, *PhD*. **Discourse Strategies of Defendant's Responses in Court: A Study of Maryam Sanda's *Murder Case*.**
3. Matthew Alugbin, *PhD*. **"Nigeria Shall Exist": Legitimation Strategies in President Bola Tinubu's Inaugural Speech.**
4. Sunday OlaOluwagbamila Dawodu, *PhD*. **Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Nigerian-Japanese Transnational Environmental Poetry.**
5. Monsurat Aramide Nurudeen. **The Generic Structure Potential of Printed Advertisements: A Multi-Semiotic Analysis of Selected Nollywood Film Advertisement Posters.**
6. Ifeoma E. Nwashili, *PhD* and Bolanle O. Sogunro, *PhD*. **Ethical Analysis of Selected Igbo-English Proverbs in Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children Of The Eagle*.**
7. Akinwumi Olutola Olafisayo, Iroegbu Obinna Inns and Odor Marycynthia Ijeoma. **The Dynamics of Tradition and Complexity in Ahmed Yerima's *Ajidewe*.**
8. Ajayi, Omobonike Deborah. **The Vibrant Intensity of Nigerian Music.**
9. Lateef Iyanda Kugbayi. **Understanding Metaphor as an Embodiment Simulation of Agitation in Selected Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) Camps in Zamfara State.**
10. Oluyemi Odunsi, *PhD*. **Contextual Persuasion Strategies in Presidential Election Campaign Advertisements in Selected Nigerian Newspapers.**
11. David Mikailu, *PhD*. **Clashing Ontologies in African Science Fiction: The Posthuman Condition, Technological Alterity and Identity Crisis in Sarah Lotz's *Home Affairs*.**
12. Ogugua Omajuwa and Solomon Onovwiona. **Literary Representation of The Effects of Betrayal in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Zikora: A Short Story".**
13. Chinwendu Cynthia Eze and Chiamaka Amalachukwu Ugoka. **Trauma Of Becoming in Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika's *Tamara*.**
14. Imoh Sunday Obot, *PhD*. **Deepening Spirit-Spouse Concept through Plot Structure and Characterisation in Daniel Oriahi's "Sylvia".**
15. Agboola, Olubunmi Tayo, *PhD*. **Representation of Female Trauma in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*.**
16. Abasi Tortivie Sorbo and Jonathan Eddington Obaro. **Proportions of Psychological Projection in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*.**
17. Nelson Orkaan Alyebo, *PhD* and Meshach Terfa Zayol, *PhD*. **Semiotic Analysis of Dress Code and Picture Postures of G5 Governors.**
18. Olaoba Olaitan Oyedele, *PhD*. **Faith and Farming: A Historical Study of Anglican Missionaries and Food Security in Ekitiland (1894-2024).**
19. Princess O. Idialu, *PhD*. **Pictorial Language and Symbolism in Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's *Devil On The Cross*.**

20. Michael Olamide Okekunle and Ikpemhinoghena Ewedemi. **Gender, Racial, And Social Discrimination in *Straw* (2025): Portraying the Struggles and Mental Health Challenges of Black Women.**
21. Stephen Kekeghe, *PhD.* and Emmanuel Babatunde Omobowale, *PhD.* **Niger Delta Poetry: Trauma, Blues and Bibliotherapy.**
22. Ayodabo, Joel Olatunde, *PhD.*, Ayinuola, Ojo Akinleye, *PhD.*, and Ajayi Enoch Siyanbola. **Proverbs As Tapestry: Pragmatic Analysis of Conflict-Motivated Proverbs in Stephen O. Solanke's *Alaafin Aole Arogangan*.**
23. Timi Oyabara, *PhD.* **Kenya's Rural Landscapes and Colonial Destructive Will in Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*.**
24. Stephen O. Solanke, *PhD.* **2 Poems: *If I love* and *religious mathematics*.**

Patriarchy and the Concept of Power in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*

Olanike Olaleru, PhD.

Department of English and Linguistics,

Kwara State University

olanike.olaleru@kwasu.edu.ng, orisunayomi@gmail.com

Abstract

Whereas the human species is biologically and inherently delineated in dispositions, yet socio-cultural and even religious institutions continually project other attributes onto them. These contrived gender attributes, largely synthetic, tend to mould the genders into forced constructs within which they must operate, or else society will be displeased. Moreover, the contrived male-female categorisations determine their personalities, abilities and capability, in short, their power of being.

Within the African cultural space, behavioural attitudes, reinforced by entrenched belief systems, persistently endow the man as characteristically strong, honourable, and having authority, but the woman as feeble, of minimal intellect and emotionally unstable, and therefore feeble in critical decision-making capabilities.

This paper sets out to debunk the fallacy of this patently false portraiture of the gender types, and argues rather that women can, and have taken courageous actions in the face of difficult challenges, just as men. The paper also contends that women are not emotionally stable, but they are no less secure than men when dealing with difficulties in life.

Employing the Liberal hypothesis of the Feminist theory, the paper argues using a qualitative analytical method that the patriarchal concept of power being strictly male-domiciled is demonstrably false, as it overlooks the particular variables of personality, inner strength, as well as the resourcefulness and intelligence of individual women.

*This paper's textual analysis of Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* reveals how the well-judged actions of Ramatoulaye and Aissatou rescued them from becoming victims of their strongly patriarchal society, thus upturning the prevailing male-female power dynamics. Having suffered societal-enabled and devastating marital betrayals, these women competently handled the accompanying fallouts without falling apart. Their individual and successful overcoming of culturally-engendered tragedies disproves received notions about male superiority. Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, by their strong actions in the face of overwhelming societal opposition and hostility, proved that when women strategically confront cultural stereotyping, the status quo is reversible.*

The paper, therefore, concluded that the concept of absolute male power and female feebleness is only a false contrivance of the patriarchal system.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Power, Culture, Tradition, Resistance

Introduction

Patriarchy, which devolves into different forms of women's oppression in diverse societies, is a system of male dominance that seeks to consign the female gender to the bottom, or at best, to the back burner, in almost all aspects of life. While matrilineality is also a way of life in some societies, patriarchal practices tend to dominate modern gender discourses more. Several scholars, especially within the African society, have made significant contributions to

conversations concerning marginalisation and oppression of women, while some have challenged foreign, particularly Western feminist frameworks within which African women are being evaluated and gauged, to the disadvantage of their real values and self-worth. Even though the origin of women's marginalisation may be a hard-to-determine question, history does reveal that the practice is quite as old as humankind's presence on earth. These scholarly works, observations, and interventions consistently provide robust discussion on various gender-related issues, which help to shed light on various aspects of the gender discourse.

Renowned feminist writer and activist, Nawal El-Saadawi, in her influential novel *Woman at Point Zero* (1975), encapsulates important issues around women's oppression in Arab society, through her lead character, Firdaus, to portray the grim reality of gender-based violence, fuelled by entrenched patriarchal tendencies. Characterised by the frankness of personal experience and the author's observations of women's lives in the Arab country of Egypt, El Sadaawi's work greatly captures the fight for women's empowerment and support, particularly in patriarchal societies. Renowned feminist scholar, author, and critic, Ifi Amadiume, in several critical works, has raised issues on gender, culture, and identity, particularly in African contexts, to emphasise how cultural specificity, stereotyping, and women's struggles are handled in typical male-dominated societies. In *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* (1997), Amadiume critiques feminist theories that seem to ignore or cancel in principle the realities of cultural specificities when addressing women's issues. The work calls for a re-evaluation of analytical tools that do not account for cultural specificities, advocating rather for analysis rooted in the realities of African women's lives. Oyeronke Oyewumi, just as Amadiume, has done, specifically challenged Western feminist frameworks, which tend to fail in recognising the peculiarities of the situation of African women in the politics of gender discourses.

Amadiume's *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* has been particularly vital in contributing to African feminist scholarship, as it strongly emphasises the importance of understanding African gender issues through cultural lenses. It is in this work also that Amadiume discusses intersections of gender and class, explaining how class, economic factors, and even age intersect with gender issues, thus complicating the understanding or appreciation of women's peculiar experiences in the African situation. Set specifically within the Igbo culture in Nigeria, Amadiume illustrates her position, using strong characterisation, elderly women and matronly figures, who become influential in their society through guiding and upholding cultural practices. These female characters are projected as prominent because they are made to take on male roles within the culture. They inherit property just as if they were men and take on as

well as embody roles traditionally assigned to men. Characterisations such as this break the stereotype of male superiority over women in terms of custodial duties and responsibilities.

Noted Nigerian writer and scholar, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, has, through story writing, particularly her novels, strongly communicated the complexities of gender-based issues in women's lives in African settings. For example, in *That Thing Around Your Neck* (2009), Adichie, through Nkem, a quite headstrong young woman, portrays the strength and resilience of a woman in a typical patriarchal society. Nkem challenges the traditional expectations of obedience and subservience, choosing rather to navigate her role in a male-dominated world. Even though displaying typical female vulnerability, she nevertheless demonstrates strength through her journey of self-discovery. Her personal experience helped in revealing her self-worth, by which she became empowered. By the end of her story, Nkem asserts her own identity, by which Adichie was able to demonstrate that women's voices are crucial in shaping cultural narratives. Another prominent female character, Ifeka, was used by Adichie to illustrate the complexities of marital relationships and the negotiation of power within them. Ifeka's experience reflects the challenges women face in finding freedom within the constraints imposed by societal expectations and marital roles for women.

Like Mariama Ba has done in *So Long a Letter*, Adichie constantly challenges and urges fellow women to call to question societal norms and practices that relegate them to the background. She makes clear calls on societies to, as a matter of urgency, and sign of modernity, embrace a more equitable and inclusive worldview regarding gender equality. Ramatoulaye and Aissatou are women champions with whom Ba signposts her proof that women are important stakeholders in the stability of society, and that culture and religion should cease to endanger this balance by constantly discounting women's identity and roles.

While the focus of this paper is the African society in particular, it is nevertheless pertinent to state that female oppression was not always an African-denominated problem. Today's modern countries of the West have had their share of brazen women's oppression in the past. However, over time and with education, civilisation, women suffrage, including policies that offer women inclusivity in socio-political participation and basic civil and domestic rights, many of today's advanced democracies have moved beyond the past barbarous acts against women, while the African brand of this retrogressive practice remains largely in its gross state.

The flawed traditional belief system that energises the gender power imbalance against women and some of the attendant socio-cultural problems that it engenders is the focus of this paper.

Power and Patriarchy in African Literature

Our working definition of power in the context of this paper is the ability to do whatever is needed to achieve positive outcomes in a given situation. This definition relies on an aspect of power described by Peter van Ham as “social power” (2010). This concept is regularly used in discussions that have to do with effective and egalitarian governing or administering modern societies. The term, while not new, is more often used in sociology than in literary circles; however, its description, which aptly captures the situation under discussion here, has informed its adoption.

“Social power,” as described by Ham, is conceived from the word “social”, and it is said to derive from the understanding that: “power is fluid and non-linear, and that it moves through relationships and communication” (3). As such, Ham clarified “social power” as something which “is contingent upon interaction, communication, relationships, and institutions” (3). The foregoing makes clear that power is not necessarily some divine right of one (higher) species available for the control of another (lesser) species, as assumed by patriarchal practitioners. Rather, power is more like a set of **resources** compounded into an instrument or a tool, to be deployed through the channels of interaction and communication of a given society, for effective regulation of its social institutions. This clarification implies that one group in a given society may not expect to dominate or dictate to another what it alone wants or prefers, nor indeed thinks, at the expense of the other. This is because relationships and institutions of society consist of people with diverse personalities, views, opinions, and feelings. Therefore, governing instruments such as “social power” are the key tools for the achievement of equal representation. The idea of power as a social instrument, therefore, is about the mutual sharing of definable responsibilities in a given situation, such that reasonable co-existence is achieved. Otherwise, it becomes a dictatorship. And for a dictatorship to thrive, other forms of power, than “social power” have to be relied upon; whereas, as pointed out by Ham, the correct use of power as a social instrument is supposed to have:

...the ability to set standards, create norms and values that are deemed legitimate and desirable, without resorting to coercion or payment (Ham, 2010).

While problems are a regular part of normal human life, so also is the fact of conflict resolution instruments, which help to sort out problems arising in any given society. Where the institutions adopt the mechanisms of “social power”, they will have internally self-regulating systems that protect them from constant breakdown or recurrent incidents of total collapse. Secondly, the

government and its agencies would be greatly helped in their efforts to maintain socially healthy institutions that make governance easier.

Where principles of “social power” are put to proper use, specific social problems such as broken-down marriages which result in traumatised or socially mal-adjusted children and adults, widows vulnerable to labour and/or sexual exploitation and other forms of gender harassment, and other social complications will be minimised. The problems highlighted here are mainly centred on women and children because the focus of the paper is on how patriarchal societies, because they misunderstand the social functions of power and consequent misapplication of their ethics, inadvertently continue to engender avoidable relational problems in society.

The paper also examines how women can successfully confront the patriarchal prerogative of power and take effective counteractions which ensure their survival and that of their community as a whole. The selected text for this analysis is Mariama Ba’s *So Long a Letter*.

“Man,” “Woman” as Defective Cultural Constructs in African Societies

As already mentioned, many conservative societies are wont to concluding that male translates to “strength” or “power” while woman means “feebleness” or “helplessness.” However, the unveiling of the principal male characters on the one hand, and their female counterparts on the other, in the deeply religious and patriarchal society in which the novel, *So Long a Letter* is set, reveals a reality that sharply contradicts the typical traditional evaluations of the sexes.

We closely examine the contradictions because it is the adherence to them that sits firmly at the root of many societies’ low regard for woman and their excessive lionising of men. The real-life situations which placed the particular male characters Modou Fall and Madow Bâ, and the female personalities Ramatoulaye and Aissatou on the spot in this novel prove irrefutably that the cherished constructions of “man” and “woman” by belief systems feeding patriarchal sentiments are grossly faulty.

Secondly, the paper argues that except as the genders themselves determinedly cast off the one-size-fits-all constructions, thereby rebuffing the unrealistic assumptions foisted on them therefrom, they stand in constant danger of continually becoming victims of a certain cruel fate. Moreover, should men in particular persist in compromising their real personal identities in deference to so-called tradition, so will they continue to get ensnared in destructive mires of traditional practices that are otherwise avoidable.

The above summarises the circumstances that birthed the tragic life stories of Modou Fall with his wife Ramatoulaye and of Madow Bâ and his wife, Aissatou, who otherwise started with a big promise of making a difference in their highly conservative religious society, but eventually

did not make it. The two marriages crashed woefully, but ironically on the hardened rocks of the same tradition that they had hitherto jointly spurned. In each case, one marriage partner reneged on their earlier professions against tradition, while the other partner stuck to the original path. The ensuing conflicts ultimately wrecked both marriages. The high point of the conflict, however, as raised by Mariama Bâ in the novel, is that it is not the female gender who traditional society has tagged as being fickle and unstable that buckled, but the male gender who is traditionally extolled as the strong one.

Who has Power: “Man” or “Woman”? - *So Long a Letter*

As their conservative society presumed, and very likely the reason for which Modou Fall and Madow Bâ co-operated with the active players in their sad decline and personal losses, there really should be no consequence to a man’s flagrant behaviour against his wife. This basic presumption precipitated the entire tragedy that befell these men, and ironically, also, released the inherent strength of their wives, which they had to deploy in salvaging the ensuing confusion triggered by the men. The typical patriarchal programming of women before marriage in this society says: “...the first quality in a woman is docility” (29). But the women to whom Modou and Madow were married were anything but docile. And this, their husbands knew quite well before marrying them.

But then, Modou Fall, after a thirty-year marriage relationship with Ramatoulaye, and which had produced twelve children, a jointly-owned home on mortgage and the joint responsibility of training their brood, without prior notice to his wife, formalised a clandestine dalliance with their teenage daughter’s friend and classmate. Modou afterwards completely abandoned his family home, which disclosures following his abrupt decease revealed, he had also incurred a bank loan to finance his new lifestyle. His fall began from the moment he walked out, unprovoked, from his secure home to follow what his friend described as “the force of the instincts in man” (33).

In Madow’s case, the scenario of his betrayal of his wife was quite different. The conflict emanated from his mother’s total disagreement with his choice of a wife. Her problem was that Madow was: “...the son of a princess and you a child from the forges” (19). You see, Aissatou, even though as educated as Madow, her father was a goldsmith, and they were from another clan. These two issues mortally grieved Madow’s mother. And, like it happened with Modou’s family and now Madow’s, the couples were not the ones chosen for each other by family. In this, they both offended traditional societies. While Ramatoulaye’s mother ultimately acquiesced to her daughter’s choice and let her be, Madow’s mother was determined to get her revenge against Aissatou. And even though Madow had assured Aissatou that “his mother’s

rejection did not frighten him” (19), because “marriage is a personal thing” (17), yet his mother “...swore that your existence, Aissatou, would never tarnish her noble descent” (28). So, like the sword of Damocles, Madow’s mother’s displeasure hung permanently over this marriage, and Madow knew this. Now, Madow, knowing the risks he had led Aissatou to take, should he not have realised how vulnerable she could become if their trust with each other was breached in any way? He was her only ally. Given these circumstances, and as a responsible man, should Madow not have realised the incumbency on him to protect his wife from his mother? But he did the exact opposite.

Madow’s subsequent actions, arranged and executed for him by his mother, of course, we discover, came from his flawed thinking about “male” and “female” roles in marriage relationships, especially in male-dominated societies. And this is where Aissatou’s disgust and total loss of respect for her husband came from his wife, which led to her divorcing him. Interestingly, Madow didn’t ‘understand’ why a woman should take action against a man, thus faulting his wife’s decision to leave the marriage.

His thoughts, which he candidly shared with Ramatoulaye after Aissatou had left, represent what went awry with Modou Fall’s thought process, also. These kinds of thoughts in these men represent the kind of mindset regarding male prerogatives that patriarchal societies depend upon to determine and make rules and regulations for how men and women should relate, even in emotional relationships such as marriage. From Madow’s words, it appears as if women are just objects, existing only to please men’s pleasures, and not expected to have opinions or feelings about how they’re treated by the men in their lives. It is what a man wants to do that matters.

For Madow, this presumptuous thought process cost him a formerly happy marriage and his four sons. For Modou Fall, tragically, his actions cost him his life, leaving behind twelve fatherless children, a devastated wife, and mountains of debts incurred by her late husband.

In his discussions with Ramatoulaye after his wife left him, Madow reveals an unusual insight into the workings of the “male” mind, which he submits are: “instincts that dominate him, regardless of his level of intelligence” (33), and according to him, it is this “bestiality of instincts” in the “male” (34) that compel them to commit “betrayals of the flesh” (34). In his opinion, this is “reality in its crude ugliness” (34) which women must accept and thereby “Slough off” their “dreamy sentimentality” (34). And when her husband betrays her in this fashion, “a wife must understand, once and for all, and must forgive...” (34). However, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou did not “understand” this basic male arrogance, which made their husbands hurt them so badly, yet still insisted that they didn’t do anything wrong.

The women's point of view, which they made clear in their subsequent actions, and which tradition also found uncharacteristic, and therefore unacceptable, was that the fashion of their marriages to their husbands was not only against tradition, but was set on the path of progressive thought. These two couples also seemed set on making their marriages an example of how to breach unhelpful traditional practices, setting new standards for coming generations of educated folk like them in this highly conservative society. The subsequent actions of their husbands, going right back to align with the same base traditional practices that they had rejected together, were a betrayal of fundamental principles of working relationships. This hurt the women so badly, and as human beings with their feelings and emotions, they reacted accordingly.

Their conservative patriarchal society, nor indeed their husbands, had no rights, therefore, to feel offended or angry about what Ramatoulaye and Aissatou did in defending themselves against hurtful traditions.

On the day that Modou's ill-advised marriage was going to take place, he would not even as much as grant his wife the courtesy of a mention about it. This was the same woman that he had dated closely from her youth, and avowing to her: "It's you whom I carry within me. You are my protecting black angel" (14). But as he left home this fateful morning, Modou said to his doting wife in a clipped tone: "Don't expect me for lunch" (38). To a woman familiar with her husband's busy and sometimes unpredictable schedule as a highly placed senior civil servant, such an announcement wasn't unusual. But unknown to her, this was an ominous signal of unprecedented, tragic consequences ahead for both husband and wife. For one, this formerly close, highly admired power-couple never saw eye-to-eye again after that day. And exactly five years later, when everything that could go wrong had gone wrong, she received the tragic news that Modou was dead.

On the evening of this eventful day Ramatoulaye was visited by a set of men comprising her husband's closest friend, Madow Bâ, his senior brother, Tamsir, and their Imam, who had popped in to inform her that not only had her husband of thirty years married a new wife that morning, but that:

We have just come from the mosque in Grand Dakar where the marriage took place (37).

This bombshell announcement, in Ramatoulaye's words, marked the beginning of her crisis (35). It was from this delegation that Ramatoulaye also learned the identity of her husband's "new" wife. She was no other than Binetou, her daughter Daba's friend and classmate, who had been a frequent visitor to their home. Ironically, Binetou used to constantly confide in her

friend about a certain “sugar daddy” who was not only spending lavishly on her (35), but whom her mother wanted her to withdraw from school to marry, even though she personally detested him. What she, however, came short of disclosing was that this infamous beau was no other than her own dear friend’s father!

When this impending but unwanted wedding was fixed to a date, Binetou also informed her friend. Daba, in turn, informed her mother, seeking how to help her friend:

The sugar-daddy of the boutique dresses wants to marry Binetou. Just imagine. Her parents want to withdraw her from school, with only a few months to go before the *bac*, to marry her off to the sugar-daddy (35)

And Ramatoulaye’s advice? “Advise her to refuse” (35). She never knew who this unkind man was that was planning to rob a child of her youth, which in Ramatoulaye’s educated view was her own “capital” (35), and which cannot be replaced with materialism. Coupled with the humiliation of her husband’s action, Ramatoulaye pointed out that she never had the privilege of asking him the questions that kept agitating her heart until news of his sudden death was brought to her exactly five years afterwards. But what *killed* Modou? A combination of two main pressures, both directly from his new bride. The first was the young girl’s bitterness about her “forced” marriage. She therefore felt compelled to punish Modou for conniving with her mother to take her future away from her. Her situation, like the author described it through Ramatoulaye’s letter, was that: “Binetou, like many others, was a lamb slaughtered on the altar of affluence” (39). Binetou’s subsequent treatment of Modou became a condition in his life, which, like a debilitating disease, he had to continue coping with, hoping it would not kill him in the end:

...sharply aware of what she was sacrificing by her marriage. A victim, she wanted to be the oppressor. Exiled in the world of adults, which was not her own, she wanted her prison gilded. Demanding, she tormented. Sold, she raised her price daily. What she renounced, those things which before used to be the sap of her life and which she would bitterly enumerate, called for exorbitant compensations, which Modou exhausted himself trying to provide.

The seductive power of mature age, of silvery temples, was unknown to Binetou. And Modou would dye his hair every month. His waistline painfully restrained by old-fashioned trousers, Binetou would never miss a chance of laughing wickedly at him. Modou would leave himself winded trying to imprison youth in its decline, ... He was afraid of disappointing, ... he would create daily celebrations during

which the bright young thing would move, an elf with slender arms who with a laugh could make life beautiful or with a pout bring sadness (48).

Binetou was also completely set against Madow having anything to do with his first family again. Ramatoulaye told her friend in her letter:

One of the new couple's neighbours explained to me that the 'child' would go 'all-a-quiver' each time Modou said my name or showed any desire to see his children (46).

This development, no doubt, created an emotional strain of its own for Modou. The second major contributory factor that ended Modou's life so abruptly was: "the mire of expenses by which he was engulfed" ... "A pile of them" (9). The sordid details of this problem came to light after Modou was dead, and a reckoning of his debts and assets had to be made before his entire family. Ramatoulaye was present, and she was aghast at what she described as "the extent of Modou's betrayal" of their former joint financial life (9), which she bitterly observed has now left him "Dead without a penny saved" (9).

But how exactly did Modou come to incur so much indebtedness? The *mirasse* (Islamic procedure for estate reckoning of the dead) revealed it all:

...cloth and gold traders, home delivery grocers and butchers, car-purchase instalments" (9). "...the elegant SICAP villa, four bedrooms, two bathrooms, pink and blue, large sitting-room, a three-room flat, built at his own expense ...for Lady Mother-in-Law. And furniture from France for his new wife and furniture constructed by local carpenters for Lady Mother-in-Law. This house and its chic contents were acquired by a bank loan granted on the mortgage of 'Villa Fallene,' where I live. ...Four million francs borrowed ...which had enabled him to pay for Lady Mother-in-Law and her husband to visit Mecca to acquire the titles of *Alhaja* and *Alhaji*... (10).

And then having withdrawn Binetou from school, he paid her a monthly allowance of fifty thousand francs, just like a salary due to her (10).

Modou further imperilled himself:

The young girl, who was very gifted, wanted to continue her studies, to sit for her *baccalauréat*. So as to establish his rule, Modou, wickedly, determined to remove her from the critical and unsparing world of the young. He therefore gave in to all the conditions of the grasping Lady Mother-in-Law and even signed a paper committing himself... (10).

Presuming that his “maleness” was only being fêted, Modou foolishly committed his entire life resources, family, career, and even his life in the end into the hands of Binetou’s scheming mother, who desperately needed to avoid poverty, and became the ultimate loser. Surely, this is not how to be a “man.”

Although Madow Bâ did not die physically like his friend, he suffered heavy losses of his own, too, which he constantly regretted. Aissatou’s severance letter as she sadly departed their marriage revealed that not only had their joint dreams become a mirage, but that she had also lost all respect for this man who had personally brought her up on the progressive principles that she still held on to:

Mawdo,

Princes master their feelings to fulfil their duties. ‘Others bend their heads and, in silence, accept a destiny that oppresses them.

That, briefly put, is the internal ordering of our society, with its absurd divisions. I will not yield to it. I cannot accept what you are offering me today in place of the happiness we once had. ...

If you can procreate without loving, merely to satisfy the pride of your declining mother, then I find you despicable. At that moment you tumbled from the highest rung of respect on which I have always placed you. Your reasoning, which makes a distinction, is unacceptable to me: on one side, me, your life, your love, your choice,’ on the other, ‘young Nabou, to be tolerated for reasons of duty.’ ...

I am stripping myself of your love, your name. Clothed in my dignity, the only worthy garment, I go my way (31-32).

Madow’s non-resistance to his mother’s cleverly contrived scheme earned him this blighting memoir. Secondly, he became a defeated man. Now a shadow of his real self, he constantly railed at everything about his mother’s choice for him, but he felt helpless to do anything about.

I am completely disoriented. You can’t change the habits of a grown man. I look for shirts and trousers in the old places and I touch only emptiness.” (33).

My house is a suburb of Diakhao. I find it impossible to get any rest there. Everything there is dirty. Young Nabou gives my food and my clothes away to visitors (33)

Whenever he visited with Ramatoulaye, he constantly asked after his departed family:

Somebody told me he’d seen you with Aissatou yesterday. Is it true? Is she around? How is she? What about my sons? (33).

Madow cut a pitiable picture here, but we blame only him. His instability and inconsistency brought this anguish upon him. The same firmness with which he had resisted his mother to be able to marry his choice of wife should have been followed through. The argument here is, if he did it that time, and his mother didn't die, like she was threatening him now, and which he was using to buy Aissatou over, she wouldn't die either if he maintained his path, like his mother had maintained hers. This means he had the power to refuse his mother's foisting of Nabou on him. But Madow's mother won, and he lost because her position of staunch opposition to Aissatou as his wife was never shifted. It was Madow who shifted, thereby exposing his wife and children to the floods of tradition which swept them away from him. Tradition exposed Madow to be not a real man.

On the day that Ramatoulaye's crisis, precipitated by her husband, and aided by Tamsir and the Imam, would commence, Madow was present, but despite his eloquent self, he was dumb. As Ramatoulaye related it to his wife:

Madow said nothing. He was reliving his own experience. He was thinking of your letter, your reaction, He was being wary. He kept his head lowered, in the attitude of those who accept defeat before the battle (37).

From the above, one could judge that Madow did not believe in the mission that had brought them to Ramatoulaye's house. He had been through that path and had been scarred badly. Yet, he remained silent, standing with other men to execute that same kind of hatchet job. Why? So, who has power here? Madow, who kept silent, or Ramatoulaye, who spoke out against the wrong that was being perpetrated? Like Ramatoulaye pointed out, even though these men did not seem to realise it, the final decision of what becomes of her life lay with her, not with them (39). She rose courageously in defence of herself and of every woman facing her kind of ordeal. Tradition was dazed and embarrassed by the unanticipated, but to them, very bewildering actions of these betrayed women in this story. Yet the questions remain- what should they have done in the face of the calamities that their husbands had created for them? How fair was it of their husbands to try to use cultural proxies to get their wives to compromise now?

Where was tradition when Modou convinced Ramatoulaye to spurn her mother's choice and invariably her family's preference of Dauoda Dieng as her marriage candidate? (16). And where was tradition when Madow, impressing on Aissatou that marriage was "a personal thing" (17), had a "controversial" wedding ceremony with her that broke all cultural norms? (17).

The best that tradition offered a woman like Ramatoulaye, after thirty years in marriage and twelve children, was to be acquired as property by her late husband's senior brother, who

already had three wives of his own that he could hardly provide for. She vehemently rejected this tradition.

The scene took place in her house, and during the fortieth-day ceremony of mourning for her late husband. Her response, borne out of a mixture of anger and, in her words, the urge for revenge against these men, sent all of them reeling. This same set of men had been nothing else in her life but constant harbingers of pain. She had her opportunity to hit back at them now. Tamsir hit her first:

When you have “come out” (that is to say, of mourning), I shall marry you. You suit me as a wife, ...you are my good luck. I shall marry you (57).

In a typical, egoistic patriarchal attitude, Tamsir, so sure that this was a foregone conclusion, added:

I prefer you to the other one, too frivolous, too young. I advised Modou against that marriage (57).

This self-same Tamsir had said to the same Ramatoulaye in the presence of the same characters present now, five years before, that:

Modou ... says it is fate that decides men and things: God intended him to have a second wife, there is nothing he can do about it (37).

He had professed at that time that “fate” was joining his brother to a child-bride that he had removed from school to marry, and also agreed with the Imam that the marriage was the immutable “will of Allah” (36), which “no one” could do anything about. But now, just to support his greedy grab for his brother’s grieving wife, he was singing a new song of fate. Fate had transmuted now to “good luck” in his favour.

Apart from his flagrant male sauciness, Tamsir also shamelessly revealed the treachery of this uncertain tradition. But really, nothing else was going on other than that an idle man was just playing games of chance with the emotions of a woman, who became his potential toy in the name of some tradition.

Like Ramatoulaye told him and the other men present today, she had had enough: “My voice had known thirty years of silence, thirty years of harassment” (58). She hit back so hard; they hardly could remain in her presence afterwards: Tamsir was hit first:

Did you ever have any affection for your brother? Already you want to build a new home for yourself, over a body that is still warm. ...

‘Ah, yes! Your strategy is to get in before any other suitor...You forget that I have a heart, a mind, that I am not an object to be passed from hand to hand. ...

What of your wives, Tamsir? Your income can meet neither their needs nor those of your numerous children. To help you out with your financial obligations, one of your wives dyes, another sells fruit, the third untiringly turns the handle of her sewing machine. You, the revered lord, you take it easy, obeyed at the crook of a finger. I shall never be the one to complete your collection. My house shall never be for you the coveted oasis: no extra burden; my “turn” every day; cleanliness and luxury, abundance and calm! No, Tamsir (58)

In utter shock, Madow frantically “signalled with his hand for me to stop, screaming at her to: “Shut up! Shut up” Stop! Stop” (58). But it was too late, Ramatoulaye was determined to fight for her life this time, and fight she did. When she had finished, the Imam in consternation, “prayed God to be his witness” as he exclaimed: “Such profane words...!” (58). Tamsir, on his part, in utter shame: “got up without a word” (59).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper discovers, through the character portraits of Modou Fall and Madow Bâ, that men, being pre-conditioned by cultural presumptions and religious sentiments, may discountenance, discount, and thereby mishandle their marriage partners. As a result, as we find through the characters, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, they will fail to harness the potential strength of women and the value it could add to their lives, including even prolonging their lives. Modou Fall’s sudden, untimely death and debt-ridden life were remotely caused by his discarding of Ramatoulaye, a prudent planner of their economic and financial future, an efficient mother to their children, and above all, his honest lover. As Ramatoulaye concluded in her letter to her friend, Aissatou, the men figure in her husband’s family, not realising that they were dealing with a “thinking woman” (20), whose best “quality” as a wife was not “docility” (29), presumed that just as they had assisted her (now) late husband in destroying himself, they could do same to her, in full assurance of no consequence. They were proceeding to take their own decisions as if Ramatoulaye didn’t exist, even though it was her life situation that they were discussing and deciding, but they got the shock of their lives. Aissatou stood up to them, asserted her rights and stated in clear tones that she had well taken care of the consequences of her husband’s ill-informed actions, which could have jeopardised her future and those of her children. She was the one left standing after the whole encounter. This showed who had “power”- between the “man” and the “woman”, as the patriarchal society had tried to determine it.

The paper, therefore, concluded that the concept of absolute male power and female feebleness is only a false contrivance of the patriarchal system. Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, by their strong actions in the face of overwhelming societal opposition and hostility, proved that when women strategically confront cultural stereotyping, the status quo is reversible.

References

- Ahaotu, J. O. 2013. Gender politics in *So Long a Letter*: Mariama Ba's peculiar approach to a common issue, in *Language, literature & literacy in a developing nation*. Chap. 4: 25-35 Research Gate
- Ali, K., Religious practices: obedience and disobedience in Islamic discourses: overview, in *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures*. General Editor: Suad Joseph. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1872-0953>
- Ani, C.K.C., 2011. *Rethinking gender and women empowerment in Africa*, TAISS Publishers, Ndola.
- Ba, Mariama, 1989. *So Long a Letter*. (Trans. Modupe Thomas). Oxford: Heinemann.
- Bhasin, K. 2006. *What is patriarchy?* Women Unlimited: New Delhi.
- Donatus, P. U & Essien, A. M. 2012. Patriarchy and gender inequality: the persistence of religious and cultural prejudice in contemporary Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, 2. 4: 286-289.
- French, M., 1985. *Beyond power: on women, men and morals*. Ballantine Books, New York.
- Ham, Peter van. 2010. *Social power in international politics*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Hooks, B., 2013. Understanding patriarchy. (online) <http://imagineoborders.org/pdf/zines/understandingpatriarchy.pdf>
- Lerner, G. 1989. *The creation of patriarchy*. Oxford University Press: New York
- Lorber, J. 2010. *Gender inequality: Feminist theories and politics*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Marie, U. (ed.) 1996. *Emerging perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*. African World Press, New Jersey.
- Maseno, L. & Kilonzo, S.M., 2011. Engendering development: Demystifying patriarchy and its effects on women in rural Kenya. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 3(2), 45-55.
- Ngara, C.O. & Ayabam, A.T. 2013. Women in politics and decision making in Nigeria: challenges and prospects. *Journal of Business and Social Sciences*, 2 (8), 47-58.
- Okebukola, F. O. 2008. Gender equity in Nigeria: A critical analysis of contexts and conditions. *Journal of Nigerian Languages and Culture*. 10: 89-98.
- Okon, E. 2011. *Religion and human rights education*. University of Calabar Press.
- Okoroafor, E.C. 2014. Patriarchy, gender equality and the implications for productive development of the Nigerian worker. *European Scientific Journal*, vol. 10, 23. ISSN: 1857-7881(print). E-ISSN 1857-7431: 106-126.
- Rogers, M. F. 1998. *Contemporary feminist theory: a text/reader*. Boston: McGraw-Hill. Print.
- Sultana, A. 2011. Patriarchy and women's subordination: a theoretical analysis. *The Faculty of Arts Journal*, July 2010- June 2011 (1-16).
- Walby, S. 1990. *Theorising patriarchy*. Blackwell Publishers Ltd.: Oxford, UK & Cambridge, USA
- Wood, H. J. 2019. Gender inequality: The problem of harmful, patriarchal, traditional and cultural practices in the church. *HTS Teoloiese/Theological Studies*. ISSN: (online) 2072-8050, (print) 0259-9422. 1-8.

Discourse Strategies of Defendant's Responses in Court: A Study of Maryam Sanda's Murder Case

Azeez, Adeshina Taofiq, PhD.

Department of English, University of Abuja

Correspondence: taofiq.azeez@uniabuja.edu.ng

08038037156

and

Tiamiyu, Abiola Jamiu, PhD.

Department of English, University of Abuja

Email: tiamiyu.abiola@uniabuja.edu.ng

08071730911

Abstract

Forensic Discourse Analysis is gaining momentum in the world of linguistics today, especially in Europe and America. However, this field of study has enjoyed fairly little attention from scholars in Nigeria. It is domiciled in Applied Linguistics. This paper deploys discourse-linguistic tools to interrogate the discourse strategies in the responses of Maryam Sanda, accused of murder during cross-examination and re-examination in court. It also deploys framing and stance-taking as essential tools for effective analysis in Forensic Discourse. Teun van Dijk's (2001) Socio-Cognitive Model was found suitable for the analysis of the 112-page document of judgment delivered by Justice Y. Halilu of the Federal High Court, Jabi, Abuja. Purposive sampling method was deployed to select the corpus. The paper found that Maryam Sanda's responses reveal key discourse strategies that align with Van Dijk's Ideological Square Model, including self-positive representation and others-negative representation. Through carefully structured verbal constructions, she portrays herself as a loving wife and mother while subtly demonising the deceased by emphasising his alleged aggression. Findings also reveal that she employs blame-framing and stance-taking to shift responsibility, strategically denying incriminating evidence and portraying the incident as an unfortunate consequence of her husband's actions rather than her own. These findings contribute to forensic linguistics by demonstrating how accused persons use linguistic strategies to construct narratives that mitigate guilt, influence courtroom perceptions, and navigate legal proceedings.

Keywords: *Forensic Discourse Analysis, Defendant, Discourse Strategy, Stance-Taking, Framing*

Introduction

Forensic discourse analysis has grown as a critical tool in examining legal language, shedding light on how language is used within judicial processes to persuade, defend, or accuse. Discourse analysis in forensic settings often emphasises the study of linguistic structures, speech acts, and pragmatic implications in the context of criminal investigations and court proceedings (Gibbons, 2003). Such analysis can help identify patterns of evasion, mitigation, or self-representation that reveal deeper motivations and psychological states during

testimony (Coulthard, 2004). Additionally, the focus on individual responses within the court, as seen in Sanda's case, highlights how language is not only a means of communication but also an active tool used to shape legal outcomes (Olsson, 2008). The linguistic choices made by defendants are often carefully crafted, either consciously or subconsciously, to align with legal advice or personal defence strategies. Forensic discourse analysis allows researchers to explore the subtleties in word choice, sentence structure, and the framing of events by defendants, which may reveal attempts to justify actions or shift blame (Heydon, 2005). Forensic Discourse analyses how language is utilised to elicit sympathy, establish credibility, or subtly challenge accusations. Studies show that defendants addressing accusations may deploy certain rhetorical strategies that signal denial, evasion, or admission, thereby shaping the narrative for both the court and the public (Ehrlich, 2014). This approach underlines the importance of examining discourse as a social practice that reflects power dynamics, especially in cases where public interest is heightened.

Further, forensic discourse explores how external factors, such as cultural norms and societal expectations, influence the speech patterns of individuals in court (Solan & Tiersma, 2005). Such cultural lenses can affect the interpretation of language by the jury, the judge, and the broader public (Cotterill, 2003). Therefore, the study of discourse focuses on how cultural and linguistic elements intersect in legal discourse, providing insights into broader socio-legal themes.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, there appears to be limited attention towards a significant forensic field of study, especially in the direction of the strategies used by the accused in getting themselves out of intricate legal matters and implicating others in more complicated situations. This phenomenon is an interesting language use activity deserving of conscious intellectual attention to establish the need to engage the services of linguists where such matters deadlock. Considering the scholarships reviewed in the empirical studies section of this paper, especially in Nigeria, most early contributions were geared towards providing insights into the field (FL)- examples are: Shuy (1984), John Olsson (2004), Mohsen Ghasemi Ariani (2014), Mel Greenlee 2012, Yuan Chuanyou (2013), Kadiri Rosma 2020, Sanni Oluwale Oluwatobi, Farinde Raifu Olanrewaju (2016), etcetera. What is obvious from the studies is that scholars have made frantic efforts to apply the principles and elements of forensic linguistics in combination with some linguistic tools, such as Discourse, CDA, Pragmatics, Stylistics, etc., to their study to proffer a solution to some social problems, at least linguistically. The most

important parts of this research that have attracted the interest of our study are those from Nigerian linguists. So far, in Nigeria, to the best of our knowledge, there are not many studies focused on *live murder* cases, especially in finding discourse strategies deployed by accused persons in removing oneself from a complex legal jam like murder. Therefore, there is a need for Nigerian linguists to join their counterparts in other fields of study, especially law, to find linguistic solutions to some encumbering social issues. This study, therefore, believes that interrogating the discourse strategies used by accused persons while answering questions in court will add value to existing literature in FL in Nigeria. The paper applies the Forensic Discourse Approach to interrogate the discourse strategies deployed by an accused person named Maryam Sanda in an attempt to get herself out of a legal jam in a criminal suit judgment delivered at the High Court of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja on Monday 27th, January, 2020. Maryam was condemned to death for killing her husband.

Research Questions

- i. In what way(s) can discourse-linguistic tools be applied to interrogate the discourse strategies in the responses of Maryam Sanda during cross-examination and re-examination in court?
- ii. How can framing and stance-taking, which are concepts in Media Discourse, be deployed as essential tools for effective analysis in Forensic Discourse?

Objectives

- i. I. To apply discourse-linguistic tools to interrogate the discourse strategies in the responses of Maryam Sanda during cross-examination and re-examination in court.
- ii. To deploy Framing and Stance-Taking as essential tools for effective analysis in Forensic Discourse

Methodology

The study is a Qualitative Content Analysis based on Teun van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Model (2001). Dijk's SCM provides insights into the responsibility of a critical discourse analyst. He asserts that the main point of critical discourse analysis is to show how various ideologies are expressed in various kinds of structures. The choice of the model helps to unravel the discourse's ideological strategies used by the accused to emphasise her goodness by de-emphasising the bad of her victim.

The paper heavily relies on secondary data, which comprises the 112-page document of judgment delivered by Justice Y. Halilu on the 27th January, 2020 and collected from the

library of the Federal High Court, Jabi, Abuja. The purposive sampling method was deployed to select the parts of documents that can help to drive the analysis. Data were analysed using the above-mentioned theory with particular focus on the various discourse linguistic resources deployed by the accused during the examinations.

Theoretical Framework

Teun van Dijk's Social Cognitive Model (2001)

van Dijk's Social Cognitive (2001), also known as the Ideological Square Model, is adopted as the theoretical framework and analytic tool for the study because it provides insights into the responsibility of a Critical Discourse Analyst. van Dijk's SCM (2001) analyses how discourse constructs and reinforces ideologies by emphasising positive representations of in-groups and negative portrayals of out-groups. This model is suitable for this study as it helps uncover how Maryam Sanda's discourse strategies were deployed to frame her narrative to mitigate culpability, construct innocence, or shift blame. The framework provides some illustrations of the categories that he believes to be important in doing CDA studies. He asserts that the main point of the analysis is to show how various ideologies are expressed in various kinds of structures. To van Dijk, a discourse analyst must *read the mind* and find the *intention* of participants in any discourse event. Examining ideological biases or ideologies in discourse is important to the socio-cognitive approach. van Dijk (2001) further maintains that ideologies are "the basic social representations of social groups" that serve as the foundation for a group's beliefs and behaviour. Knowledge, attitudes and ideologies, norms and values are all part of social cognitions".

According to Bamgbose and Alugbin (2023), "the ideological square is a key strategy in van Dijk's approach to CDA. They corroborate that the concept is premised on positive-self description of those considered the in-group and negative-self description of others considered to be the out-group". In this work, however, the study has deployed van Dijk's Ideological Square to examine Maryam Sanda's case, emphasising the positive action of the in-group (ie, the accused) and the negative action of the out-group (ie, the deceased husband). They also de-emphasise the negative actions of the in-group and the positive actions of the out-group. The diagram below represents these strategies:

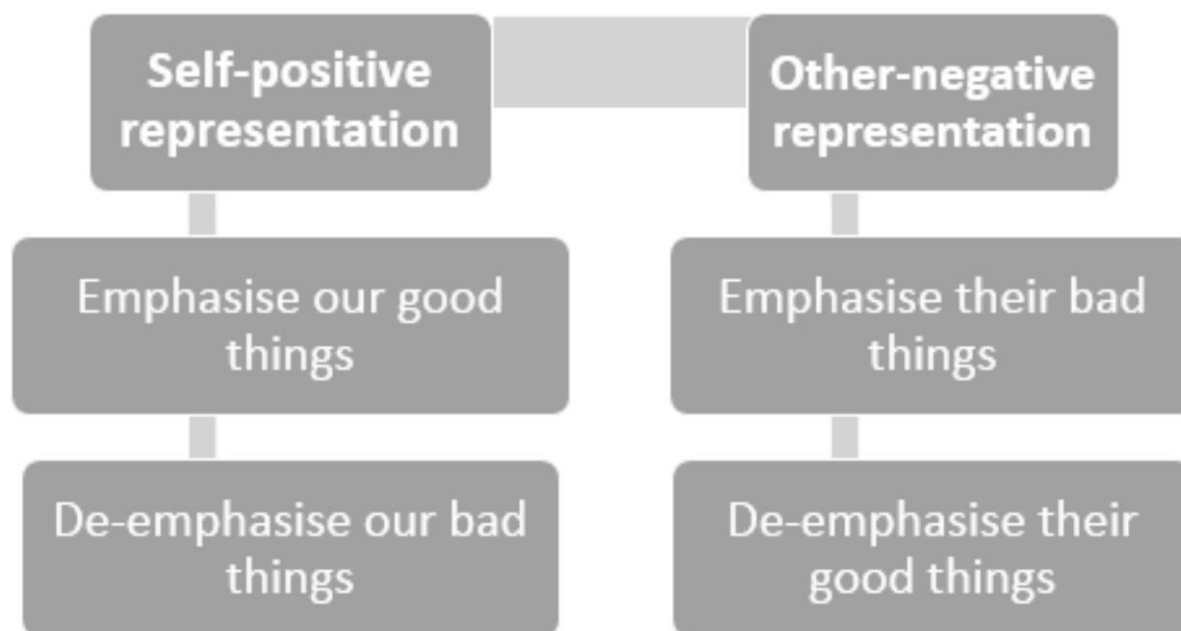


Figure 1: Teun van Dijk Ideological Square 2001

Empirical Review

John Olsson (2004) describes Forensic Linguistics as the interface between linguistics (the science of language) and the law, including law enforcement. He also outlines the history and development of Forensic Linguistics from its beginnings in the 1950s and 1960s to the present day, including the Forensic Phonetics content. The article points up how Forensic Linguistics works in the justice system and some of the difficulties that linguists and lawyers may have in understanding each other's viewpoints. The article raises a concern by suggesting that lawyers and linguists work more closely with each other in the interests of justice, and that linguists seek to widen their understanding of international law, of international human rights issues, and of how law and language relate to each other across the globe. It suggests that the future of Forensic Linguistics will be bright if linguists work on these issues, and also on acquiring skills, knowledge and qualifications in other disciplines to better prepare them for working in and with courts. This study, no doubt, incites, motivates and challenges further study, hence, the need for this current paper.

In his contribution to FL in 2012, Mel Greenlee in *I object, or did I* examine the language of trial objections in a small set of California cases. The study briefly discusses the three audiences' views of trial objections, focusing particularly on the appellate court. It provides case examples of the adjudication of trial objections from California criminal appeals where, in his view, the appellate court has elevated 'form over substance' in its review of the objection and its pragmatic effect. He found that even in capital appeals, interpretation may be counter

to normal understanding of language, resulting in overly broad forfeiture of grounds for appeal. The influence of Greenlee's study on this work cannot be overemphasised. She was interested in the language of trial objections, while we are interested in the language of defence by the accused person (Maryam Sanda) in a criminal case. The influence her study has over this one is that since she could do a study of a court trial in Europe, similar research can be replicated in Nigeria.

In 2012, Janet Ainsworth (2012) studied the construction of admissions of fault through American rules of evidence: speech, silence, and significance in the legal creation of liability. The rules of evidence in law both govern the admissibility of evidence in trials and determine the scope of meaning to be accorded to it. According to her, an examination of two common law evidentiary rules reveals that such rules incorporate normative and ideological assumptions about language usage. The adoptive admissions rule provides that, when a person is confronted with an accusation of wrongdoing without expressly denying it, the allegation is presumed to be true. The evidence rule construing apology as an admission of fault presumes that apologetic language means 'I'm sorry I did something wrong' rather than 'I'm sorry that something bad has happened to you.' Evidence rules such as these operate as ideological "gates" to channel and constrain the legal interpretation of language used by juridical actors, and additionally serve as one of the means through which the linguistic ideology in law is exercised to create and maintain social hierarchies.

Ainsworth's study was concerned with admission of fault through American rules of evidence, but this paper is dovetailing into determining the discourse strategies used by an accused to evade guilt in a murder case.

Yuan Chuanyou (2013), on his part, published a paper titled *Appreciate others' beauty as well as one's own: a contrastive multimodal discourse analysis of two courtroom trials*. The paper makes a multimodal and contrastive analysis of a Chinese courtroom extract and an American counterpart. It studied the courtroom discourses from multiple visual and verbal modes, focusing on participants' gestures and movements as well as their speech. The analysis is based on systemic-functional linguistics, including the metafunctions and appraisal theory. It presents a contrastive study of two similar criminal trials, one an American murder case, referred to as the Harvard graduate murder case, and the other a Chinese intentional homicide case, referred to as the Ma Jiajue homicide case. Both cases involve the killings of university students. In the American case, Alexander Pring Wilson, a graduate student from Harvard University, was tried for killing a stranger with a knife in a street fight. He was accused of first-degree murder, but claimed self-defence. He was convicted of voluntary manslaughter

and sentenced to 6—8 years in prison. In the Chinese case, Ma Jiajue, a senior undergraduate student from Yunnan University, was tried for killing four classmates over a quarrel arising out of a card game. He was charged with intentional homicide, and was convicted and sentenced to death.

Yuan's study is one of the major influences on the current work. He studied the courtroom discourses from multiple visual and verbal modes, focusing on participants' gestures and movements as well as their speech; our paper interrogates the speech of an accused in a murder trial with keen interest in her defence narratives aimed at exonerating herself of any guilt and implicating her victim. Yuan's analysis is based on systemic-functional linguistics, including the metafunctions and Appraisal theory, while ours is based on Teun van Dijk's (2001) Model. The current study is simply an extension of what Yuan did in China to Nigeria to demonstrate that linguists can be interested in anything in society.

Mohsen Ghasemi Ariani (2014) scrutinised a framework and brief overview of the key elements of forensic linguistics, covering the discipline, the history and development of it, and the use of linguistic evidence in legal proceedings. The typical types of linguistic evidence, such as author identification, forensic stylistics, discourse analysis, forensic phonetics, forensic transcription and variation (intra-author and inter-author), are explored. He also introduced a section on document examination, software forensics, semiotics and plagiarism detection in the paper. Besides, the study pays attention to some forensic applications of descriptive linguistics, such as forensic linguistics, text types, author, and the linguistic investigation of authorship. He concludes by suggesting that lawyers and linguists should work more closely with each other in the interests of justice and that not only should linguists improve their understanding of law issues but also lawyers should benefit from the hindsight experiences of linguists as consultants and expert witnesses. Ariani's work gave necessary and complementary insights and motivations to the current work. It provides a good foundation for forensic linguistics and helps the analyst to understand their responsibility (ies).

In Nigeria, Sanni Oluwale Oluwatobi studied *The Role of Forensic Linguists in Courtroom Cross-Examinations* (2018). The research examined the legal process of courtroom cross-examination, which is believed by the literature to be hostile and uncooperative since it is usually face-threatening. The study findings reveal that some indices, like age, social status, educational qualifications, etc., are criteria that determine politeness in the Nigerian courtroom cross-examinations and conclude that forensic linguists need to be actively involved in courtroom discourse to ensure that judgments are not only dispensed but that

justice is also carried out. Considering Sanni's conclusion that forensic linguists need to be actively involved in courtroom discourse, this study believes that interrogating the discourse strategies used by accused persons while answering questions in court will add value to existing literature in FL in Nigeria.

Kadiri Rosma (2020) describes the application of legal language using a forensic linguistics approach through discourse analysis, text, speech act, meaning, and language style. His research applies a qualitative method and was conducted in the state courts of Gorontalo. Data were collected from verdicts of the state court of Gorontalo. Kadiri selected these data using the literature review technique. He then analysed based on the substance of the problem. Data analyses were conducted in several steps. Verdicts were analysed using 1) discourse form, 2) language style, and 3) speech acts. His study was used to help law enforcement officials solve legal problems from a language use point of view. This is due to the unresolved issues of legal language. He concluded that linguists have the intellectual capacity to help society find truths and justice by examining language content through comprehensive legal evidence. This conclusion serves as a motivating factor for this study. Since Kadiri's research was used to assist law enforcement officials in solving legal problems from a language use point of view, there is no doubt that our paper shall replicate similar results.

Also, in 2020, Farinde Raifu Olanrewaju et al did a study titled *Interpreting and Markers in Nigerian Courtroom Discourse*. The study investigated power management strategies in Nigerian courtroom discourse, focusing on the asymmetrical distribution of power between the courtroom officials, such as Judges and lawyers on one hand, and the defendants and the witnesses on the other. This was aimed at bringing about a positive change in the Nigerian courtroom discourse in line with the Nigerian government's change agenda. They adopted a new approach to the study of courtroom discourse in Nigeria, with the application of Discourse Markers proposed by Deborah Schiffrin (1987) and Sandra Hale (1999) and courtroom interpreting proposed by Berk-Seligson (1990; 1997). The paper ranges question types according to their degree of control and found that those with a high degree of control lost their power and control through the process of interpreting. It also found that since lawyers always maintain power and control through the type of questions they ask (such as declarative, yes/no, alternative questions), they are at a losing end whenever there is a need for a court interpreter. Similarly, the use of discourse markers in the court (such as now, so, and, ok) also signifies the lawyer's power and control over the witnesses and defendants, and these are always used to further enhance the power, coercion and challenging nature of the lawyers. However, while Farinde *et al.* in their research dabbled into investigating power management

strategies in Nigerian courtroom discourse, our study is interrogating the use of language by accused persons in a criminal matter to evade punishment, to complement and advance the frontiers of knowledge in FL in Nigeria. Considering the above reviewed scholarships to this study, most early contributions were geared towards providing insights into the field (FL)-examples are: Shuy (1984), John Olsson (2004), Mohsen Ghasemi Ariani (2014), Mel Greenlee 2012, Yuan Chuanyou (2013), Kadiri Rosma 2020, Sanni Oluwale Oluwatobi, Farinde Raifu Olanrewaju (2016), etcetera. What is obvious from the studies is that scholars have made frantic efforts to apply the principles and elements of forensic linguistics in combination with some linguistic tools such as Discourse, CDA, Pragmatics, Stylistics, etc., to their study with a view to proffering solutions to some social problems, at least linguistically. The identified research gaps in the review highlight the limited attention given to discourse strategies of accused persons in live murder cases within forensic linguistics, particularly in Nigeria. While previous studies have explored courtroom discourse, forensic linguistics applications, trial objections, and power dynamics, they have largely overlooked the linguistic strategies accused individuals use to navigate legal proceedings and mitigate culpability. This study seeks to fill that gap by analysing the courtroom discourse of Maryam Sanda, providing insights into how defendants employ language to construct narratives of innocence or shift blame. By focusing on discourse strategies in a high-profile Nigerian murder trial, this research expands forensic linguistic scholarship in Nigeria and underscores the relevance of linguistic analysis in legal contexts.

Result

van Dijk's Ideological Square Strategy in Maryam's Responses to Questions during the Proceedings.

Deployment of Verbal Constructions as Discourse Strategies

In some instances, Maryam creatively deploys **Transitive Verbs (V+NP)** and **Transitive Locative Verbs (V+NP+PP)** as Discourse Strategy for Self-Positive Representation. Transitive verbs (TVs) are verbs that are accompanied by direct or indirect objects, while Transitive Locative Verbs (TLVs) are accompanied by NP and followed by PP. Examples from the data include:

Text One: ...My *husband came back home* and

I Went downstairs to *welcome him* and I **met him** with his friend (Ibrahim).

We chatted together and I reminded him that I wanted to go for a wedding and wanted to make a call because I didn't have credit on my phone, my husband gave me his phone...

Text Two...*woke up and took my bath,*

fed my daughter,

went upstairs with my cousin,

came back to the living room,

came back home,

Went downstairs to welcome him,

met him with his friend (Ibrahim)....,

charted together...

From the above text, we may deduce that she deliberately used those verbal constructions to maintain a positive representation of herself as not just a good wife but mother to their daughter (as she kept mentioning her daughter repeatedly). She also kept referring to the deceased as my husband during her response, perhaps to arouse the judge's sympathy that she loves him even in death (emphasis on her good personality). This could also be interpreted as another ploy to maintain a good reputation before the court.

On the other hand, her responses show a negative representation as another discourse strategy deployed to demonise the deceased. Again, the accused uses some other verbal constructions like the ones identified below to de-emphasise the good personality of her husband in the following expressions:

Text three...*saw nude girls' picture..., was a message above the picture, suggested that it was my husband that requested for the picture... cried for a while, rushed downstairs to call my husband, could talk about it..., came upstairs with me..., started talking and became an argument..., asked him to divorce me, cango back home..., called my cousin (Sadiya) to call his friend (Ibrahim), was downstairs to come over and interfere...became very angry, did not want a third party..., wanted to leave the room, blocked him , can talk about it..., pushed me, went to the kitchen..., held my neck, chucked before his hand was removed, met my husband in the kitchen, started yelling at me, ignored him, kept yelling at me..., left the kitchen, went to the living room to get my charger, wanted to leave, was angry, should*

not walk out on him. dragged me from behind... etcetera. The above highlighted excerpts imply that she was never responsible for the negative outcome of the fight between them that night. It is clear from the data that she persists in maintaining good conduct throughout the night. However, her response shows that it is the husband who is the violent one. This is simply what van Dijk refers to as self-positive representation; emphasis on the good conduct or behaviours of the in-group by de-emphasising their bad personality. And, others negative-representation with emphasis on their bad personality while de-emphasising their good conduct.

Blame-Frame and Victimisation as Discourse Strategy

To Osinsanwo (2020), blame-frame strategies include: blame-frame as a propaganda tactic, finger-pointing and demonisation strategy, buck passing and social control technique. The study observed elements of blame-frame in the language of the accused; thus, there is a need to unearth this phenomenon. Although blame-frame, like ‘stance taking’, is a media discourse strategy, the study has deployed both concepts to be instrumental to an effective discourse strategy in criminal proceedings. We may infer that the accused person deliberately deploys some linguistic constructions to not only protect her personality as a good person but also to victimise the deceased. This, no doubt, points to what Osinsanwo (2020) refers to as buck-passing, finger-pointing and demonisation strategies. For example, Maryam used some declarative constructions and complex sentences such as:

Text four... *I wanted to leave, he pushed me and as I was falling, I mistakenly pushed sisha bottle.. the sisha bottle broke, spill off my husband pinned me to the ground and I bit him.., He also bit me in retaliation, I could hear our daughter crying and I asked him to allow, I struggled to my feet, when he loosened up...*

Text five... *I was walking away, he wanted to hold me again and he fell. He was calling me to come and help him and I thought he was pretending, when I went upstairs, he was calling me and...*

Text six... *I asked my Cousin (Sadiya) to go downstairs to see, she rushed back up to say that she saw him holding his chest...* to deliberately demonize the deceased as not just the victim of his own violence but the harbinger of his own death.

Stance-Taking as Discourse Strategy

According to Biber (2000), stance refers to “lexical and grammatical expression of attitude, feeling or judgments or commitment concerning the propositional content of the message”. In other words, stance refers to the position people take about themselves, to what is said, and to other people or objects.

Like framing, stance is a concept in media discourse that has been integrated into forensic discourse in this paper because of the value it adds to unearthing the underlying discourse strategies the accused may deploy to exonerate self from any legal encumbrances. There is no doubt that Maryam’s responses throughout the cross-examination and re-examination proceedings in court can be assumed to be stance-taking. Maryam deliberately chooses her words strategically to escape any kind of legal implication, as observed in the following excerpts:

Text seven... *I left the kitchen and went to the living room to get my charger. I plugged my charger and wanted to leave but my husband was angry and that I should not walk out on him. He dragged me from behind. I wanted to leave, he now pushed me and as I was falling, I mistakenly pushed sisha bottle.*

Text eight... *The sisha bottle broke and the water inside spill off my husband pinned me to the ground and I bit him.*

Text nine: *He also bit me in retaliation I could hear our daughter crying and I asked him to allow me so I attend to our daughter. I struggled to my feet when he loosened up... I was walking way, he wanted to hold me again and he fell. He was calling me to come and help him and I thought he was pretending, when I went upstairs, he was calling me and...* This study can posit that the above excerpts have further solidified the study’s claim that Maryam deliberately and strategically deployed these grammatical constructs as further evidence of **Self-Positive Representation** (emphasising her good personality) and **Others-Negative Representation of her husband.**

In addition, she denies everything from the eyewitness submission- Ibrahim, who was the first prosecuting witness and her husband’s friend, whom Maryam had confirmed was around when the incident occurred, except during the death of the deceased. She also denies being

responsible for the death of her husband; rather, she tried to blame the deceased for wanting to kill her when he choked her with the broken shisha bottle on the floor, as in this excerpt:

Text ten... *I mistakenly pushed sisha bottle.. the sisha bottle broke and the water inside spill off my husband pinned me to the ground and I bit him...*She also denies that as at the time of leaving the room, there was no blood; she tries to feign ignorance of witnessing her husband's death. This is against the police witness submission. The policeman who is also the first security personnel at the scene, claimed, in his submission, that the blood stain had already been cleaned as at the time of reaching the residence. In short, she tried to maintain a positive stance throughout by denying every topic that could incriminate her.

The above analysis of Maryam Sanda's responses reveals key discourse strategies that align with van Dijk's Ideological Square Model, including *self-positive representation* and *others-negative representation*. Through carefully structured verbal constructions, she portrays herself as a loving wife and mother while subtly demonising the deceased by emphasising his alleged aggression. Additionally, she employs *blame-framing* and *stance-taking* to shift responsibility, strategically denying incriminating evidence and portraying the incident as an unfortunate consequence of her husband's actions rather than her own. These findings contribute to forensic linguistics by demonstrating how accused persons use linguistic strategies to construct narratives that mitigate guilt, influence courtroom perceptions, and navigate legal proceedings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, drawing inference from the analysis of Maryam's responses to examination questions in court and the findings has shown that accused persons have at their disposal infinite discourse strategies to deploy to exonerate themselves from any legal jam and, in turn, demonise their victims. The study may conclude that Nigerian linguists can explore other untapped areas of forensic linguistics that concern intricate legal matters such as this. This will, in turn, give them the most anticipated recognition as social problem solvers, not just social critics.

References

- Ainsworth, J. E. (2012) "The construction of admissions of fault through American rules of evidence: speech, silence, and significance in the legal creation of liability". Proceedings of The International Association of Forensic Linguists. Tenth Biennial Conference. Centre for Forensic Linguistics. Aston University.
- Ariani, M.G., Sajedi, F.& Sajedi, M. (2014) "Forensic Linguistics: A brief Overview of the Key Elements". *Procedia-Social and Behavioural Sciences*, p154, 222- 225.
- Bamgbose, G & Alugbin, M. (2023). "Ideological Constructs in Placards on the #ENDSARS Protest in Nigeria". *Ibadan Journal of Humanities*.
- Biber, D. (2000). Stance in spoken and written university registers. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*. p. 97–116.
- Coulthard, M. (2004). Author Identification, Idiolect, and Linguistic Uniqueness. *Applied Linguistics*.
- Cotterill, J. (2003). *Language and Power in Court: A Linguistic Analysis of the O.J. Simpson Trial*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Chuanyou, Y. (2012). "Appreciate others' beauty as well as one's own: a contrastive multimodal discourse analysis of two courtroom trials".
- Ehrlich, S. (2014). *The Discursive Construction of Sexual Consent*. Oxford University Press.
- Farinde R, O, Oyedokun-A and Wasiu A. (2020). "Interpreting and Markers in Nigerian Courtroom Discourse". *Advances in Language and Literary* www.all.s.aiaa.org.au
- Gibbons, J. (2003). *Forensic Linguistics: An Introduction to Language in the Justice System*. Blackwell.
- Greenlee, M. (2012) "I object, or did I?" *Proceedings of the International Association of Forensic Linguists*. Tenth Biennial Conference. Centre for Forensic Linguistics. Aston University.
- Heydon, G. (2005). *The Language of Police Interviewing: A Critical Analysis*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- High Court of the Federal Capital Territory, The Abuja Judicial Division, Maitama Justice Y. Halilu 27th January, 2020
- Olsson, J. (2008). *Forensic Linguistics*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Oluwole, S. (2016). "The Role Of Forensic Linguists in Courtroom Cross-Examinations". *Ife Studies in English Language*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328130843>
- Solan, L. M., & Tiersma, P. M. (2005). *Speaking of Crime: The Language of Criminal Justice*. University of Chicago Press.
- Shuy, R. (1993). *Language Crimes: The Use and Abuse of Language Evidence in the courtroom*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell . 1993
- (1997). *The Language of Confession, Interrogation, and Deception* (vol.2). Sage Publications.
- (2002). *Applied Linguistics in the Legal Arena*. Incadlin, Chris and Srikant Saraangi (eds.) *Handbook of Applied Linguistics* Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- (2005). *Creating Language Crimes: How Law Enforcement Uses (and Misuses) Language*. New York: Oxford U Press.
- van Dijk, Teun A. (1998). *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. SAGE Publications.
- (2008). *Discourse and Power*. Palgrave Macmillan, p. 29.
- van Dijk, Teun A (2001). "Critical Discourse Analysis." *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, edited by Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen, and Heidi E. Hamilton, Blackwell, pp. 352-371.

“Nigeria Shall Exist”: Legitimation Strategies in President Bola Tinubu’s Inaugural Speech

Matthew Alugbin

Department of English,

Edo State University, Uzairue

Email: matthewalugbin@yahoo.com

Abstract

Political systems aim to establish belief in their legitimacy and, as a core principle, devise diverse strategies to validate people’s acceptance. Extant works on inaugural speeches have identified discourse strategies, ideologies, and grammatical resources, leaving a gap in legitimation strategies. This study adopts van Leeuwen’s (2007: 2008) framework of legitimation to analyse President Bola Tinubu’s 2023 Inaugural Speech, focusing on how he constructs legitimacy and democratic validation. Through a qualitative content analysis, the study identifies authorisation, moralisation, and rationalisation as legitimation strategies deployed to reinforce acceptability. Personal and collective pronouns, metaphors, and imagery are used to assert authority. Through the use of imperatives, declaratives, and references, Tinubu aligns his presidency with Nigeria’s shared democratic principles. This study contends that inaugural speeches serve as strategic tools for consolidating leadership authority and shaping public perception. This study concludes that linguistic choices in inaugural speeches can be deployed as critical instruments to reinforce leadership acceptance.

Keywords: *legitimation strategies, inaugural speech, discourse strategies, Nigeria’s election, Bola Ahmed Tinubu*

Introduction

Leaders have a significant impact on how meaning is constructed and understood within a group or organisation (Clifton, 2017). The way leaders organise and facilitate discussions, as well as how they present information and narrative, can shape the interpretation and perception of ideas, events, and issues among the citizenry. This reflects that there exists “a symbiotic relationship between language and democratic governance all over the world (Opeibi, 2008, p. 106). They play a crucial role in guiding the direction of conversations and influencing the shared understanding and interpretation of concepts and information within the group. As Fairclough (1992) asserts, discourse serves as a potent tool for both maintaining and contesting existing power structures, enabling leaders to assert dominance and perpetuate particular narratives. Leaders strategically employ language to convey specific messages, ideologies, and values to the public. Chilton and Schäffner (2011, 305) argue that “political realities are constructed in and through discourse,” suggesting that realities, such as beliefs, opinions, ideologies, and perceptions, are shaped, formed, and communicated through language. This perspective emphasises the role of language and discourse in shaping political understanding and constructions. Just as leaders within organisations shape the discourse to assert power and

promote particular narratives, presidents utilise their inaugural speeches to establish their authority, set the agenda for their term, and frame their vision for the nation. The relationship between leaders, discourse, and the construction of meaning is particularly evident in the context of inaugural speeches.

Presidents-elect use their inaugural speeches as newly elected leaders to address their nations for the first time in their official capacity (Manzano and Orquijo, 2020). These speeches are not mere formalities; they are strategic acts of communication that encapsulate the leader's vision, values, and intended policies. Through their linguistic choices, leaders signal the boundaries of acceptable discourse and frame the parameters within which ideas and information are to be interpreted (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Critical discourse analysis emphasises that leaders' language not only reflects but also constructs reality (van Dijk, 1997). Their framing of issues, the selection of salient points, and the emphasis placed on certain aspects over others contribute to the shaping of meaning, thereby influencing the collective sense-making process of group members. Leaders' role in steering conversations and influencing the shared understanding of concepts is pivotal in organisational dynamics. The concept of "discourse as practice" (Gee, 1996) underscores how leaders' linguistic choices and strategies serve to enact power and legitimise certain perspectives. By setting the agenda and defining the terms of discussion, leaders subtly position themselves as authoritative figures, while potentially marginalising alternative viewpoints (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). Through this process, leaders contribute to the construction of a dominant ideology that supports their aims and sustains their influence and power.

Legitimation, as a discourse strategy, has been examined in various Nigerian contexts, including media discourse (Igwebuike & Chimuanya, 2021), terrorist discourse (Osisanwo, 2024a; Osisanwo, 2024b; Isiaka, 2024), and political activism (Igwebuike & Akoh, 2022). However, little attention has been given to its application in Nigerian presidential inaugural speeches. Existing studies on presidential inaugural speeches in Nigeria have primarily focused on pragmatic acts (Ayeomoni & Akinkuolere, 2012; Osisanwo, 2017; Aremu, 2017; Adeagbo, 2023), generic structure potential (Awoyemi & Ajayi, 2023), and ideology and lexicogrammatical choices (Ezeifeke, 2013). This present study examines President Bola Tinubu's inaugural speech, not as a mere ceremonial address but as a strategic act of political communication. It investigates how Tinubu strategically employs legitimation strategies to shape national perception and reinforce his leadership. Guided by this perspective, the research seeks to answer the following questions: (1) How does Bola Tinubu linguistically deploy

legitimation strategies to construct legitimacy and authority in his inaugural speech? (2) What are the implications of these linguistic choices for national unity and public acceptance?

Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Political Trajectory

Bola Tinubu ventured into politics in the early 1990s and was elected as a Senator for Lagos West during the short-lived Third Republic. Following the annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential election, he became a key pro-democracy activist, opposing military rule. In 1999, he was elected Governor of Lagos State, where he served two terms (1999–2007). He played a key role in the formation of the All Progressives Congress (APC), which brought Muhammadu Buhari to power in 2015. In 2023, he was elected the President of Nigeria, delivering his inaugural speech on May 29, 2023, which is the focus of this study. In an election conducted on February 25, 2023, he was declared the winner by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on March 1, 2023 (*Punch*, 2023). He delivered his inaugural speech (which is the focus of this study) on May 29, 2023, during his swearing-in ceremony as Nigeria's elected president.

Conceptualising Nigerian Inaugural Speech as a Genre

The tradition of delivering an inaugural speech can be traced back to George Washington's address in 1789, which subsequently set a precedent for future American presidents. This practice has evolved into a ritualised genre characterised by distinct communicative functions and structures (Osisanwo & Alugbin, 2019). Given that Nigeria's democratic practices have their roots in the British political system, newly elected Nigerian presidents have also adopted this tradition. Inaugural speeches have gained recognition as a genre and serve as a measure of the president-elect's legitimacy (Liu, 2012). Nnamdi Azikiwe holds the distinction of being the first Nigerian president to deliver an inaugural speech, wherein he emphasised the restoration of African identity and the reclamation of freedom through mental emancipation, political autonomy, economic liberation, and cultural preservation (Azikiwe, 1961; Obotetukudo, 2010). His vision was underpinned by pan-Africanism and nationalism, reflecting the anti-colonial struggle that characterised the fight for independence. Subsequent Nigerian presidents have continued this practice. Notably, while the Nigerian constitution does not mandate the delivery of an inaugural speech, it has become an esteemed tradition, observed every four years by incoming presidents before assuming office.

Awoyemi and Ajayi (2023) conducted a study that focuses on analysing the typical structure present in Nigerian presidential inauguration speeches from 1999 to 2015. Utilising Halliday

and Hasan's Generic Structure Potential Theory, the researchers analysed a range of Nigerian presidential inauguration speeches, leading to the identification of ten distinct discourse elements. Their argument revolves around the assertion that inaugural speeches adhere to a consistent and well-defined sequence. The presence of this underlying structural coherence in the analysed inauguration speeches suggests a shared genre, implying the existence of established conventions and patterns within Nigerian presidential inauguration speeches during the specified timeframe. Aremu's research (2017) takes a broader perspective, exploring metaphorical mappings within the inaugural speeches of Nigerian executive presidents from 1979 to 2015. Drawing upon conceptual metaphor theory by Lakoff and Johnson, critical metaphor theory by Charteris-Black, and an adapted model of Mey's pragmeme, the findings reveal the strategic use of metaphorical mappings to convey pragmatics, linking concepts with other domains to express gratitude, make appeals, issue commands, give warnings, and offer promises. The study underscores the significance of cultural context and shared audience comprehension in interpreting inaugural speeches. It suggests that, while metaphors play a role in these speeches, familiarity with the cultural context is crucial for understanding the implications of the communication. Maritz and Van Rooy's (2021) study also provides insights into communication strategy in political communications, with a focus on how former South African President, Jacob Zuma, used metaphors to structure his self-defence in narrative construction.

The reviews above suggest that Nigerian presidential inaugural speeches form a distinctive genre with specific communicative functions, rhetorical strategies, and structural conventions. Despite the existing research on Nigerian presidential inaugural speeches, there is merit in examining how linguistic choices are employed in inaugural speeches to project and solidify political legitimacy. This study specifically examines how Bola Tinubu linguistically deploys legitimation strategies to construct authority in his inaugural speech, addressing the question of how his linguistic choices reinforce his leadership and acceptance. Analysing both the language and content of the inaugural speech provides insights into how political leaders establish authority and convey values in the face of challenging circumstances.

Literature review

Political speeches have been extensively studied across various genres, including campaign speeches (Ayodabo & Ayinuola, 2025), acceptance speeches (Akinwotu, 2013), concession speeches (Osisanwo & Alugbin, 2019; Osisanwo & Chinaguh, 2020), and farewell addresses

(Adedun & Atolagbe, 2011). Other works have examined political debates, national addresses, and collections of political speeches (Odebunmi & Oni). Specific studies on Nigerian presidential inaugural speeches have explored pragmatic features and strategies (Osisanwo, 2017; Aremu, 2017; Adeagbo, 2023), generic structure potential (Awoyemi & Ajayi, 2023), intertextuality (Ellah, 2022), and rhetorical strategies (Akinseye, 2023).

Osisanwo (2017) examines how former President Muhammadu Buhari's inaugural speech was strategically crafted to achieve multiple communicative goals, such as expressing intent, acknowledging responsibilities, appreciating the electorate, setting national direction, and explicating governance priorities. The study establishes inaugural speeches as a distinct communicative event that bridges the gap between political leaders and society. Similarly, Adeagbo (2023) investigates Buhari's 2015 inaugural speech, reinforcing the notion that language is a crucial instrument for democratic engagement and governance. These studies emphasise the functional and performative aspects of inaugural addresses, illustrating how political leaders use language to shape national discourse. Awoyemi and Ajayi (2023) conduct a generic structure analysis of Nigerian inaugural speeches from 1999 to 2015. Their study identifies recurring structural patterns, demonstrating that these speeches adhere to a consistent and recognisable genre. The analysis underscores how Nigerian presidents deploy predictable rhetorical structures to introduce their governance vision, affirm legitimacy, and engage with the public. The findings position inaugural speeches as a ritualised form of political communication.

Akinseye (2023) analyses President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's inaugural speech, employing van Dijk's ideological stance and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics to explore discursive strategies, ideological functions, and power dynamics. The study highlights themes of unity and polarisation, lexical techniques for rhetorical impact, and the use of modal verbs and personal pronouns to convey commitment, responsibility, and connection with the audience. Ellah (2022) examines Muhammadu Buhari's 2015 Inaugural Speech as a discourse that incorporates various elements, including political, religious, literary, and historical discourses, within the communication, arguing that presupposition, negation and reference are patterns of intertextuality used as a tool of ideological construct in the speech. Fowobaje *et al.* (2022) provide a comprehensive analysis of the ascension or inaugural speeches of military heads of state and civilian presidents from 1960 to 2019 using text-mining techniques. Their comparative analysis used frequency term analysis to reveal that civilian presidents expressed more positive emotions and were more favourable in terms of sentiment scores in their

speeches than military presidents, even though there were similarities in topic distribution among the ascension/inaugural speeches of different leaders.

While these studies offer valuable insights into the pragmatic, rhetorical, and structural features of Nigerian inaugural speeches, they do not sufficiently explore the role of legitimization strategies in reinforcing political authority and leadership acceptance. The application of the legitimization framework to examine presidential inaugural speeches is a worthy addition, particularly in examining how linguistic strategies construct legitimacy. This study addresses this gap by focusing on the linguistic legitimization strategies in President Bola Tinubu's 2023 inaugural speech.

Theoretical exploration of legitimization in linguistic studies

Legitimation, as a concept, has been examined from diverse disciplines. The study of political legitimacy is not only an endeavour in the field of discourse analysis. A political analyst assesses it in terms of the acceptability of a leader; a philosopher evaluates it based on alignment with societal rules and mores; and a lawyer appraises it in the context of legal conformity and adherence to governing regulations. Despite the varying perspectives that have enriched the concept of legitimization, (critical) discourse analysis offers a robust framework to engage the concept, taking into account the various contexts within which legitimacy is enacted. Legitimation framework recognises the potential of legitimacy to be eroded, challenged, negotiated, enacted, and re-enacted because "acts of legitimization are always discursive" (van Dijk, 1997, 1998; van Leeuwen, 2007, 2008). van Dijk (1998) further asserts that legitimization as a social practice holds significant implications for understanding how power, ideology, and language intersect in shaping and maintaining social structures since legitimization involves producing power dynamics, social hierarchies, and dominant ideologies. The linguistic perception of legitimization has to do with the analysis of language use for justification of certain belief systems within a society, as linguistic legitimization is a means to reinforce, sustain, and maintain power.

The interaction between leaders' discourse and the broader socio-political context cannot be overlooked. Critical Discourse Analysis acknowledges that language is embedded in social structures and reflects the power dynamics at play (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Thus, leaders' communication practices are not isolated acts but are intertwined with the prevailing societal norms, values, and ideologies. This interaction shapes how their discourse resonates within the group and how it reinforces or challenges established hierarchies and narratives. van Leeuwen's

(2007) framework on legitimisation offers a comprehensive understanding of how discourse is used to establish and reinforce legitimacy in various contexts. His theory defines legitimisation as the process of justifying a decision and providing reasons to support a specific course of action. In the discourse of legitimisation, various strategies are employed to establish and reinforce the perceived legitimacy of certain actions, decisions, or policies. The framework consists of four distinct categories, each contributing to the process of (de)legitimation (van Leeuwen's, 2007; 2008, 105).

- i. Authorisation involves referencing established sources of authority to validate and legitimise these actions. Personal authority, expert authority, role model authority, impersonal authority, tradition authority, and conformity authority are categories of authorisation.
- ii. Moral evaluation emphasises aligning concepts or things with accepted moral standards and portraying them as just and virtuous. This involves categories such as evaluation, abstraction, and analogies.
- iii. Rationalisation comes into play by providing logical and reasoned explanations for the pursued course of action, demonstrating its practicality and effectiveness. It is sub-categorised into instrumental and theoretical. Instrumental rationalisation refers to justification based on practicality and efficiency, while theoretical rationalisation, on the other hand, involves justification through abstract principles or expert opinions
- iv. Mythopoesis employs the power of storytelling and narratives to craft compelling and persuasive accounts that evoke emotions and resonate with the audience's values, thereby enhancing the perceived legitimacy of the subject in question. Moral and cautionary tales are sub-categories of mythopoesis.

Table 1: Categories of Legitimation

Category	Sub-categories	Description
Authorisation	Personal Expert Role Model Impersonal Tradition Conformity	Referring to established sources of authority to validate and legitimise actions.

Moral Evaluation	Evaluation Abstraction Analogies	Aligning actions with accepted moral standards and portraying them as just and virtuous.
Rationalisation	Instrumental Theoretical	Providing logical and reasoned explanations for actions, demonstrating practicality and effectiveness
Mythopoesis	Moral Tales Cautionary Tales	Using storytelling and narratives to craft compelling and persuasive accounts that evoke emotions

(Adapted from van Leeuwen, 2007; 2008: 105)

The data: 2023 Presidential Inaugural Speech

The study relies on the 2023 Presidential Inaugural Speech delivered by the 17th President of Nigeria, Bola Tinubu, on 29th May, 2023, equal to his victory at the election conducted on 25th February, 2023. Bola Tinubu was declared the winner of the 2023 presidential election by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), defeating 17 other candidates, among whom are Atiku Abubakar of the People’s Democratic Party and Peter Obi of the Labour Party. The 2023 presidential election was very significant in the country’s democratic journey. It was preceded by certain uncertainties. Okwelum (2023) claims that the election received an unusually high amount of unfavourable attention and criticism in comparison to any previous election in the country's history. The 2023 presidential inaugural speech is titled “The Nigerian Ideal.” The legitimisation strategies deployed in the speech were identified through content analysis.

Methodology

The data for this study consists of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu’s 2023 Presidential Inaugural Speech, delivered on May 29, 2023, during his swearing-in ceremony. The speech was retrieved from the official Federal Government of Nigeria website (<https://statehouse.gov.ng/category/speeches>), which serves as a primary source for government communications. The selection of this speech is based on its significance as a political discourse event, marking the beginning of a new administration and setting the tone for governance and leadership legitimacy. A qualitative content analysis was conducted, focusing on van Leeuwen’s (2007, 2008) legitimisation framework. The speech was examined for key linguistic legitimisation strategies, including authorisation, moral evaluation, and

rationalisation. These categories were systematically identified based on explicit and implicit linguistic markers within the text.

Analysis

The thematic focus of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's inaugural speech is on national unity, resilience, and the "Nigerian Ideal" of shared humanity and progress. The speech highlights democracy, the rule of law, and inclusivity. The president's pledge to govern impartially and address social justice. Key priorities in the speech include economic reform, job creation, food security, and poverty reduction, alongside infrastructure development and agricultural modernisation. He also lists security as a top focus, highlighting plans to reform and equip security forces. Tinubu commits to monetary policy reform, regional stability, and foreign policy leadership. He calls for collective effort and urges Nigerians to unite in building a prosperous and peaceful nation. The analysis below examines the linguistic strategies of legitimisation employed by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu in his inaugural speech to legitimise his leadership and emergence. It presents the use of authorisation, personal authority, socio-spiritual authority, and metaphorical moral evaluation in the inaugural speech.

Authorisation strategy through the linguistic device of pronominalisation

Personal authority is a significant facet of the authorisation legitimisation process, although it can also be rooted in the people or instruments of power (van Leeuwen, 2017). Personal authority legitimisation derives its effectiveness from the authoritative utterances made by the individual. Thus, the use of personal authority revolves around the personality of Bola Tinubu as an individual and a public figure who has been entrusted with specific responsibilities in the Nigerian political system.

Text 1: FIRST INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT BOLA AHMED TINUBU 29 MAY 2023

Text 1 portrays legitimisation through personal authorisation by presenting Bola Tinubu as the President of Nigeria, who has assumed office and is delivering his first inaugural address, thereby presupposing the legitimacy of his presidency and implying the expectation of a second term. The title of the speech as being the "First Inaugural Address", presupposes the existence of a second inaugural address in the future. This suggests that Bola Tinubu assumes his presidency will continue beyond the first term and that there will be a second term, reinforcing his legitimacy as the sitting president. He invokes his official position and legitimises his right to deliver an inaugural speech as an exercise of this authority

Text 2: With full confidence in our ability, **I declare** that these things are within our proximate reach because my name is Bola Ahmed Tinubu, and **I am** the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Bola Tinubu explicitly names himself and his title, which not only reinforces his credibility but also implies that his declaration carries weight because of who he is and the position he holds. Bola Tinubu deploys the use of pronouns in Text 2 to legitimise his ability to take on the responsibility that the power of the office has conferred on him. While emphasising shared goals and collective effort, the speaker takes personal ownership of the declaration, reinforcing that leadership is not a distant or abstract concept but involves real individuals with specific roles and responsibilities. The authoritative declaration through the personal pronoun "I" serves to legitimise his readiness and ability to make decisions that affect the country.

Legitimation through spiritual authority

Spiritual authorisation emphasises the role of faith and the divine in legitimising and guiding the actions and leadership of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. Legitimation through spiritual credibility often involves seeking validation or authority from a higher, spiritual source or entity, such as a deity or a divine power.

Text 3: "This nation's journey has been shaped by the prayers of millions, and the collective sacrifices of us all."

Referencing "prayers" in Text 3 suggests that spiritual guidance and divine intervention play a significant role in the assumption of office by Bola Tinubu. It emphasises the collective spiritual effort of a large portion of the electorate. This implies that the nation's journey is not solely a result of human effort but also divine intervention, guided and supported by the prayers of the people. The idea that the nation's history has been "shaped" by these prayers suggests that spiritual forces play a crucial role in the nation's destiny.

Text 4: This **handover** symbolises our trust in **God**, our enduring faith in representative governance and our belief in our ability to reshape this nation into the society it was always meant to be.

In text 4, socio-religious authorisation plays a significant role in establishing unquestionable legitimacy within religious circles. It reinforces the validation and approval of Tinubu's authority within the context of religion. By invoking God, it signifies that the authority and legitimacy of the government are grounded in divine approval. The lexical choice of "handover" as a symbol carries socio-religious significance. It implies that the act of transferring power is not merely a bureaucratic or legal process but a symbolic gesture with deep spiritual meaning. This reinforces the idea that the government's legitimacy is tied to its

alignment with religious and moral values. The text explicitly connects the political process, the “handover” to spiritual faith, noting that it is an indication of “trust in God.” By linking the peaceful transition of power to trust in God, the text implies that the nation’s political system is underpinned by divine approval and guidance. This not only legitimises the handover but also suggests that it is a divinely sanctioned event, reinforcing the spiritual legitimacy of the new leadership.

Socio-religious authorisation often stems from a perceived connection to spiritual authority or divine guidance. When a religious leader is seen as spiritually authorised, their decisions and actions are believed to align with the will of a higher power. This bolsters their legitimacy in religious circles because followers are more likely to trust and follow someone they believe is chosen or anointed by God or a divine source.

Moral evaluation strategy through metaphor

Metaphors condense complicated thoughts into simpler, easier-to-understand forms. They offer a technique to translate complex ideas into understandable and tangible terms, making them simpler to understand and communicate within a group. Within the discourse, Tinubu deploys the use of metaphors as persuasive techniques to support particular viewpoints or beliefs. This gives a sense of familiarity and credibility by making analogies between a well-known notion and a novel one, increasing the acceptability and legitimacy of specific ideas. By capturing common experiences, attitudes, and ideas, metaphors are deployed to embody communal understanding. Individuals within a group can tie their experiences and perceptions to a shared frame of reference.

Legitimation through metaphorical moral evaluation encapsulates the idea of using metaphors to emphasise and evaluate actions or leadership in terms of their alignment with accepted moral standards and virtues, ultimately seeking to enhance their perceived legitimacy. Abstraction is one of the sub-categories used for moral evaluation. Metaphorical expressions are tools suitable for driving abstraction. It involves the process of moving from concrete, specific details to more general concepts or ideas. By likening moral concepts to more relatable scenarios, metaphors help individuals grasp the nuances of morality and engage in meaningful moral discourse.

Text 5:

Today, **Fate** and **Destiny** join together to place the **torch** of human progress in our very hands. We dare not let it slip"

"Fate" and "Destiny" are personified in Text 5 as if they are conscious beings with the ability to make decisions and take action. By personifying Fate and Destiny and suggesting that they are actively involved in the events, Text 5 conveys a sense of inevitability and divine intervention. It implies that Tinubu's assumption of leadership is not merely a result of human choice but is guided by higher forces, reinforcing the idea of a divine mandate. This also incorporates a spiritual dimension, legitimising divine intervention in the assumption of leadership by Tinubu. In familiar domains, a torch is used to provide light in the darkness, symbolising illumination and clarity.

Text 6:

We lift high this **torch** so that it might shine on every household and in every heart that calls itself Nigerian. We hold this beam aloft because it lights our path with compassion, brotherhood, and peace. May this great **light** never EXTINGUISH."

The use of "torch" in text 6 suggests that the speaker's leadership will bring enlightenment and understanding to a situation that may be clouded by challenges or uncertainties. These metaphors naturally evoke positive emotions such as hope, optimism, and inspiration. Light is a universal symbol of guidance and direction. Metaphorically, a torch or light source shows the way in the dark. In the context of leadership, these metaphors convey the idea that the speaker's leadership will provide a clear path and guidance for the nation, especially when there may be doubts, uncertainties, or challenges.

Legitimation through validity and truth claims (Rationalisation)

Rationalisation in the speech is used to provide logical and reasoned explanations for specific courses of action, demonstrating their practicality and effectiveness. This is reflected in various sectors such as security, economy, agriculture, infrastructure, fuel subsidy, and foreign policy, where Bola Tinubu promises to make interventions. Both subcategories of rationalisation work together to construct legitimacy to secure acceptance of Bola Tinubu's authority. Instrumental rationalisation emphasises the validity of Tinubu's election victory by presenting it as a legitimate democratic outcome that aligns with the principles of electoral integrity while theoretical rationalisation points to the necessity of governance decisions to ensure support.

Table 2: Subcategories of Rationalisation

Category	Subtype	Intention
Instrumental	Goal and means	Election validity
Theoretical	Truth claims - explanation	Governmental reforms

Text 7: The outcome reflected the will of the people. However, my victory does not render me any more Nigerian than my opponents. Nor does it render them any less patriotic.

Text 8: "To effectively tackle this menace, we shall reform both our security DOCTRINE and its ARCHITECTURE."

In Text 7, Tinubu justifies his presidency as a result of democratic choice, emphasising the practicality and effectiveness of the democratic process. By stating that his victory doesn't make him "any more Nigerian" than his opponents, he emphasises equality under the law and the legitimacy of dissent within the democratic process. This rationalisation is intended to legitimise his position as president by presenting it as a natural and just outcome based on the will of the Nigerian citizens, reinforcing the idea that he is a leader chosen by the people and for the people. Rationalisation is employed to approve of the election's legitimacy, emphasising that it aligns with the principles of democracy and the rule of law. Tinubu rationalises the legitimacy of the election outcome by asserting that it accurately represents the will of the people. This is a logical explanation that justifies the election's legitimacy by emphasising the democratic principle of the people's choice. The text also argues that the victory does not diminish the opponents' patriotism or elevate the speaker's own Nigerian identity. This rationalisation aims to emphasise the fairness and inclusivity of the election process to present the idea that the election was conducted in a just and democratic manner.

Rationalisation is used to justify the need for security reforms in Text 8, citing the importance of adapting security strategies to address emerging threats. Tinubu presents the proposed changes as a practical and effective solution to the security challenges. This suggests that the government is taking necessary steps to protect its citizens.

Text 9: "The South must not only seek good for itself but must understand that its interests are served when good comes to the North. The North must see the South likewise."

The modal verb "must" conveys a strong sense of moral imperative and obligation. It emphasises that certain actions or attitudes are not merely desirable but are morally necessary. "Must" sets a normative standard for behaviour and expectations. It implies that seeking the common good and understanding the interdependence of regions is the expected and morally right course of action. It establishes a norm for what is considered appropriate behaviour. Overall, the use of "must" in this context serves as a moral call to action, urging both regions to prioritise the common good and mutual understanding, which contributes to the moral evaluation of what is right and normal in the context of national unity and cooperation.

Text 10:

As citizens, we declare as one unified people devoted to one unified national cause, that as long as this world exists, NIGERIA SHALL EXIST.

There is the use of declarative language in "we declare" and "NIGERIA SHALL EXIST," which contributes to the authoritative tone of the statement. President Bola Tinubu assumes the mandate bestowed on him by the people to make the proclamation. The continued existence and unity of Nigeria are foregrounded through the phrase in upper case to assert Nigeria's cohesion as a central theme in the speech. Text 10 presents a logical assertion for the existence of Nigeria. The reference to the existence of Nigeria "as long as this world exists" introduces a temporal dimension, conveying a sense of enduring permanence. This temporal framing contributes to the legitimation by presenting the idea of Nigeria's existence as timeless and unwavering. The use of "we" as a collective plural pronoun implies a unified voice representing all citizens. While this creates a sense of unity, it also superimposes a singular collective identity, potentially overlooking diverse perspectives within the citizenry, who may not be pleased with the outcome of the election. This presents a possibility that promoting a singular perspective could overlook dissenting views.

Establishing authority through reference to shared history and values

This strategy is used to validate leadership by connecting to the collective experiences, traditions, and beliefs of the nation. This form of legitimation emphasises continuity with the past and alignment with the cultural or national values. This makes the present actions or leadership seem natural and aligned with the nation's identity.

Text 11:

"Over six decades ago, our founding fathers gave bravely of themselves to place Nigeria on the map as an independent nation. We must never allow the labour

of those who came before us to wither in vain but to blossom and bring forth a better reality."

The text references Nigeria's historical struggles and achievements, particularly the endurance of hardships and the establishment of democracy. By highlighting the nation's journey and the efforts of its founding fathers, Tinubu aligns his leadership with the legacy of those who fought for Nigeria's independence and democratic governance. By referencing the sacrifices of Nigeria's founding fathers and the long journey towards independence, Tinubu situates his presidency within a broader historical narrative. He links his administration to the enduring legacy of Nigeria's past leaders, thus framing his leadership as a continuation of their vision and efforts. This historical connection serves to legitimise his authority by suggesting that his presidency is part of the ongoing project of nation-building initiated by respected historical figures.

Text 12:

"Whether from the winding creeks of the Niger Delta, the vastness of the northern savannah, the boardrooms of Lagos, the bustling capital of Abuja, or the busy markets of Onitsha, you are all my people."

Tinubu's rhetoric emphasises unity and inclusion, explicitly stating that his administration will govern for all Nigerians, regardless of their region, ethnicity, or political views. The text acknowledges the country's diversity while affirming that all citizens are equal under his leadership. It emphasises national unity and the idea of a "Nigerian ideal" that transcends ethnic, regional, and political differences. By calling for a unified effort toward the nation's development, he seeks to legitimise his leadership as one that is inclusive and focused on the common good.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the legitimisation strategies in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 2023 Inaugural Speech to identify how the speech reinforces leadership and governance legitimacy. Tinubu deploys pronominalisation, self-referencing, and socio-spiritual authority to assert his legitimacy as Nigeria's elected leader. He draws on spiritual authorisation and moral imperatives to establish his legitimacy as a leader chosen by the people and guided by divine intervention. Metaphor is also used to shape perceptions of his leadership and national progress. Through instrumental rationalisation, he frames his election victory as an outcome of democratic choice and presents it as a logical and valid result that aligns with electoral integrity. Through the use of reference, Tinubu draws on Nigeria's historical struggles and shared national values to legitimise his presidency. He invokes the sacrifices of Nigeria's early leaders

and projects his image as a leader for all Nigerians through regional inclusivity. These strategies are used to garner support, trust, and acceptance from various segments of the population and emphasise the moral and practical foundations of his leadership.

This study explored legitimation in political discourse with the orientation that the concept goes beyond the question of legality, as the notion also depends on certain cultural and political factors (Amossy, 2022). Legitimacy, in addition to encompassing an evaluation of the leader's entitlement to rule the people, inherently encompasses a critical appraisal of the leader's competence in comprehending the challenges that the people face. The inaugural speech is one of the yardsticks to measure this ability in a leader. The findings show that language is important in shaping political legitimacy and governance narratives in Nigeria. This study argues that legitimacy is not absolute and is susceptible to limitations and challenges that require additional forms of democratic validation. This is one of the functions that inaugural speeches perform.

Beyond the identification of subcategories of authorisation: personal, expert, role model, impersonal, tradition and conformity, this study notes that spiritual authorisation is also present in Nigeria's discourse situation. This suggests that, given Nigeria's deeply religious society, where Christianity and Islam influence public and political life, leaders frequently reference God, prayers, and divine approval to strengthen their legitimacy. President Bola Tinubu's inaugural speech, he aligns his leadership with spiritual validation, stating that Nigeria's journey has been shaped by prayers and collective sacrifices. This shows how political rhetoric in Nigeria not only draws from democratic processes and institutional structures but also from religious beliefs and moral convictions.

Linguistic choices and discourse strategies in the 2023 Presidential Inaugural Speech have profound implications for the interpretation of ideas and events. By emphasising certain themes and omitting others, President Bola Tinubu directs attention and shapes public opinion on key issues. The selection of language to evoke emotions, aspirations, and shared values serves to create a sense of unity and purpose among the citizenry. Most importantly, the use of persuasive language establishes the president's legitimacy and fosters a sense of national identity. This study agrees with Rojo and van Dijk (1997, 528) that legitimation discourse seeks to establish the ruler's actions as legally, morally and ethically justifiable.

References

- Adeagbo, E. O. (2023). Pragmatic Analyses of President Muhammadu Buhari's 2015 Inaugural Speech. *Issues in Language and Literary Studies*, 7(1): 102 – 120.
- Adedun EA and Agnes A (2011) "A man in whom I have great confidence": A Discourse Analysis of Former President Olusegun Obasanjo's Farewell Speech to Nigerians. *Akadeimeia*, 1(1), 1923-1504.
- Akinseye TA (2023) Persuasion and Connection of Words: Discursive Strategies and Interpersonal Resources in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Inaugural Speech of May 29, 2023. *ATRAS*, 143-179.
- Akinwotu SA. (2013). A speech act analysis of the acceptance of nomination speeches of Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief MKO Abiola. *English Linguistics Research*, 2(1): 43-51.
- Amossy R (2022). Constructing political legitimacy and authority in discourse. *Argumentation et Analyse du discours*, 28:1–19.
- Aremu M (2017) Pragmatic analysis of conceptual mappings in inaugural speeches of Nigerian presidents. *Covenant Journal of Language Studies*, 5(2): 32-47.
- Awoyemi O and Ajayi T (2023) A Generic Structure Analysis of Nigerian Presidential Inauguration Speeches from 1999 to 2015. *International Journal of Language Education and Applied Linguistics*, 13(1): 36-46.
- Ayeomoni, O. M., & Akinkuolere, O. S. (2012). A Pragmatic Analysis of Victory and Inaugural Speeches of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. *Theory & Practice in Language Studies (TPLS)*, 2(3): 461 – 468.
- Ayodabo, J. O., & Ayinuola, O. A. (2025). Lexical Constructions of Emilokan Strategies in Political Campaign Speeches of Bola Ahmed Tinubu. *Arusha Working Papers in African Linguistics*, 7(1): 79-94.
- Azikiwe, N. (1961) *Zik: A Selection from the Speeches of Nnamdi Azikiwe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961.
- Chilton P and Schäffner C (2011) Discourse and politics. In: *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*. Edited by T. A. Van Dijk. 303–330. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Chouliaraki L and Fairclough N (1999) *Discourse in late modernity: Rethinking critical discourse analysis*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Clifton, J. (2017). Leaders as ventriloquists. Leader identity and influencing the communicative construction of the organisation. *Leadership*, 13(3), 301-319.
- Coicaud JM (2002) *Legitimacy and politics: a contribution to the study of political right and political responsibility*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ellah SM. (2022) Intertextuality in political discourse: a study of President Mohammadu Buhari's 2015 inaugural speech. *International Journal of Arts, Languages, Linguistics and Literary Studies*, 11(1): 9 – 17.
- Ezeifeka, C. R. (2013). Critical discourse analysis of interpersonal meaning and power relations in selected inaugural political speeches in Nigeria. *UJAH: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 14(2), 46-65.
- Fairclough N (1992) *Discourse and social change*. Polity Press.
- Fowobaje K, Mashood L, Ekholuenetale M and Ibidoja O (2022) Qualitative content analysis of Nigerian heads-of-state and presidents' inaugural addresses: text mining, topic modelling and sentiment analysis. *SN Social Sciences*, 2:279: 1 – 21.
- Gee J (1996) *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses*. Routledge: London.
- Igwebuike, E. E., & Chimuanya, L. (2021). Legitimizing falsehood in social media: A discourse analysis of political fake news. *Discourse & Communication*, 15(1), 42-58.

- Isiaka, A. (2024). 'Only a tree stands still to be cut down': discoursing legitimization in narratives of the Nigeria-Biafra war and the IPOB movement (1967 to present). *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 35(3), 453-477.
- Liu F (2012) Genre Analysis of American Presidential Inaugural Speech. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*. 2(11): 2407-2411.
- Manzano, J. E., and Orquijo, Z. E. (2020). Political commitments and ideologies: A diachronic transitivity analysis of Philippine presidents' inaugural speeches. *Asian Journal of English Language Studies (AJELS)* 8: 83 – 109.
- Maritz, A and Van Rooy B. 2021. Linking the Dots”: metaphors in the narrative of self-justification by former President Zuma. *Language Matters: Studies in the Languages of Southern Africa*, 52(1), pp.30-49.
- Nnamdi A (1960) Respect for human dignity: An inaugural address. Accessed 17th February 2023 at <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/amed/amedsd/2008700237/2008700237.pdf>
- Obotetukudo, S. W. (2010). The inaugural addresses and ascension speeches of Nigerian elected and non-elected presidents and prime minister, 1960-2010. Maryland: University Press of America.
- Odebunmi A and Oni F (2021) Discursive Construction of Synonymous Relations in Political Speeches: The Case of Some President Olusegun Obasanjo's Speeches. *Ahyu: A Journal of Language and Literature*. 4: 1-11.
- Okwelum C (2023) President Tinubu Inauguration in Nigeria: To Be or Not to Be? *European Journal of Theoretical and Applied Sciences*, 1(3): 285-298.
- Opeibi, T. (2008). Language, politics and democratic governance in Nigeria: A sociolinguistic perspective. *Journal-Issues in Political Discourse Analysis*, 2.(2): 93-111.
- Osisanwo A and Alugin M (2019) Rhetoric of defeat in American presidential concession speeches (APCSs). In *Sociolinguistics, (critical) discourse, pragmatics & Nigerian English: A festschrift in honour of Dele Samuel Adeyanju*, edited by Bello, O. and Hunjo, H. 523-537. Lagos: Digitech Creative Press House.
- Osisanwo, A. (2024a). Self-legitimation in selected speeches of Abubakar Shekau, the Boko Haram terrorists leader. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 1-18.
- Osisanwo, A. (2024b). Delegitimizing the Nigerian State and other anti-Boko Haram in selected messages of Abubakar Shekau. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 1-19.
- Osisanwo A (2017) I belong to everybody yet to nobody: pragmatic acts in President Muhammadu Buhari's inaugural speech. *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications*, 3(4): 297-320.
- Osisanwo A and Chinaguh E (2020). Linguistic representations in selected presidential concession speeches. *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communication*, 6(4): 271-294.
- Punch (2023). INEC declares Tinubu winner of presidential election. Accessed at <https://punchng.com/inec-declares-tinubu-winner-of-presidential-election/>
- Fairclough N (1995) *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Longman.
- Phillips N and Hardy C (2002) *Discourse analysis: Investigating processes of social construction*. Sage Publications.
- Rojo, L. and van Dijk, T. (1997) "There was a Problem, and it was Solved!" Legitimizing the Expulsion of Illegal 'Migrants in Spanish Parliamentary Discourse. *Discourse & Society*, 8(4): 523-566.
- van Dijk T (1997) *Discourse as social interaction*. London: Sage.
- van Dijk T (1998) *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. London: SAGE.
- Wodak R and Meyer M (2009). *Methods for critical discourse analysis*. London: Sage.
- van Leeuwen T (2007) "Legitimation in Discourse and Communication." *Discourse and Communication*, 1(1): 91-112.
- van Leeuwen T (2008) *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Van Leeuwen, T. (2017). Legitimation and multimodality. In *The Routledge handbook of language and politics* (pp. 218-232). Routledge.

Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Nigerian-Japanese Transnational Environmental Poetry

Sunday OlaOluwagbamila Dawodu, PhD.

Holy Cross Church,
Gleadless Valley, Sheffield,
The United Kingdom
Email: dwdinfiniti@gmail.com,
Phone no: +231881605060

Abstract

*Despite growing interest in artificial intelligence (AI) across the humanities, its influence on transnational environmental poetry remains underexplored, particularly within the Nigerian–Japanese literary context. This study investigates how AI shapes thematic concerns, stylistic experimentation, and cultural discourse in contemporary eco-poetry, focusing on Tanure Ojaide’s *When Green was the Lingua Franca* and Lee Ann Roripaugh’s *Ontology of Tsunami*.*

The study draws on Manovich’s (2024) theory of AI as a cultural system, Egya’s (2011) work on Nigerian environmental poetry, and Takahashi’s (2020) study of Japanese ecopoetics. It employs a qualitative comparative literary methodology. This approach allows for a nuanced analysis of the two selected poems, and they help to identify how AI functions not merely as a technical tool but as a cultural force influencing poetic expression and ethical reflection across diverse ecological contexts. The study reveals that AI significantly informs the poets’ portrayal of environmental degradation and natural disasters, introducing algorithmic awareness and digital aesthetics into poetic form. Ojaide’s depiction of the Niger Delta incorporates technological critique, while data-driven representations shape Roripaugh’s response to tsunami trauma. Both poets engage in stylistic innovation, fragmented narratives and intertextual layering, which suggests a creative synergy between human and machine. Through this lens, AI emerges as a mediating presence in the transnational eco-poetic imagination, raising critical questions about sentience, agency, and ecological responsibility.

The study contributes to ecocriticism and transnational poetics by highlighting the complex role of AI in reshaping literary approaches to environmental consciousness and cross-cultural engagement.

Keywords: *artificial intelligence, eco-poetry, transnational literature, cultural poetics, environmental humanities*

Introduction

Background on Environmental Poetry and Its Role in Cultural and Ecological Discourse

Environmental poetry has long provided a compelling and dynamic medium for articulating ecological concerns, reflecting on the interdependence between humanity and nature, and fostering environmental awareness. Through diverse poetic traditions, poets have responded to deforestation, climate change, industrial pollution, and biodiversity loss, often fusing aesthetic expression with environmental advocacy (Bate, 2000). This rich and evolving tradition spans a multitude of cultural and historical contexts. Notably, Nigerian environmental poetry

typically emerges from a background of socio-political activism, where poetry operates as both artistic expression and a call to ecological justice (Nwagbara, 2010). In contrast, Japanese environmental poetry, informed by Zen Buddhism and Shintoism, privileges harmony, transience, and deep ecological reflection, often expressed in minimalist forms such as haiku and tanka (Ueda, 2003).

In Nigeria, poets like Tanure Ojaide and Niyi Osundare draw on indigenous oral traditions and contemporary literary forms to protest environmental degradation, particularly in the ecologically ravaged Niger Delta (Egya, 2011). These poetic works not only critique multinational exploitation but also elevate local environmental narratives to global visibility. Meanwhile, Japanese poets have engaged with environmental issues in more contemplative terms, capturing the ephemerality of nature and the human cost of ecological disasters, such as those following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear catastrophe (Takahashi, 2020). Their poetry reflects the subtle but powerful emotional responses to nature's unpredictability, including sorrow, awe, and resilience (Hass, 1994; Murphy, 2018).

Despite their cultural and stylistic divergences, both Nigerian and Japanese ecopoetic traditions reveal how poetry can operate as a critical mode of ecological discourse. In the contemporary digital age, the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a creative tool raises profound questions about the evolution of these traditions. AI technologies—particularly large language models like GPT—have demonstrated the capacity to generate poetic texts, analyse stylistic patterns, and foster cross-cultural literary exchange (McGregor et al., 2015). However, these developments also provoke concerns regarding the authenticity, emotional depth, and cultural specificity of AI-generated works (Bender & Gebru, 2021; Carr, 2020).

The growing influence of AI in the field of literature, and specifically in poetry, necessitates a critical examination of how such technologies are reshaping creative processes and expressions. Manovich (2024) argues that AI represents a transformative force in cultural production, enabling new aesthetic possibilities but also threatening to blur the lines between human and machine authorship. Similarly, Boden (2016) and McKinnon (2022) assert that AI can enhance poetic creativity by introducing innovative linguistic structures and thematic complexity. Yet, these benefits come with caveats. Hirshfield (2021) acknowledges the utility of AI in facilitating linguistic pattern recognition and stylistic variation but warns of its potential to dilute individual voice and cultural nuance. As Noble (2023) and Crawford (2023)

contend, the homogenising tendencies of algorithmic production risk marginalising historically underrepresented voices and severing the vital link between poetry and lived experience.

Statement of the Research Problem

While AI-driven tools offer unprecedented capabilities for generating and analysing poetic texts, they simultaneously pose critical challenges to the authenticity, cultural depth, and socio-political embeddedness of environmental poetry. This is particularly problematic in the case of Nigerian and Japanese traditions, where poetic expression is closely tied to historical struggles, indigenous epistemologies, and deeply rooted spiritual philosophies. The proliferation of AI-generated poetry risks flattening these culturally specific dimensions, replacing lived experience and historical consciousness with generic or algorithmically patterned outputs. Therefore, the key problem this study seeks to address is: *How does artificial intelligence influence the cultural integrity, thematic expression, and aesthetic form of Nigerian and Japanese environmental poetry in a transnational context?*

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to explore the impact of artificial intelligence on Nigerian and Japanese environmental poetry, with a particular focus on how AI technologies are transforming poetic engagement with ecological concerns. The research seeks to:

1. Investigate the thematic, stylistic, and structural changes introduced into Nigerian and Japanese environmental poetry through the use of AI.
2. Examine the implications of AI on the authenticity and cultural specificity of ecopoetic expression.
3. Analyse how AI might facilitate or hinder transnational poetic dialogues, particularly between the Nigerian and Japanese contexts.
4. Identify the ethical and creative tensions that emerge from the use of AI in the production and dissemination of environmental poetry.

Research Questions

To achieve the above objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. In what ways does artificial intelligence influence the representation of ecological concerns in Nigerian and Japanese environmental poetry?

2. How does AI impact the thematic depth, linguistic texture, and cultural authenticity of poetry rooted in distinct ecological and cultural contexts?
3. Can AI-generated poetry support meaningful cross-cultural exchange between Nigerian and Japanese ecopoetic traditions, or does it risk homogenising diverse literary voices?
4. What ethical and philosophical questions arise from the use of AI in the authorship, dissemination, and interpretation of environmental poetry?

Theoretical Framework

This research is situated at the intersection of three critical theoretical paradigms: ecocriticism, transnational poetics, and AI studies.

Ecocriticism and Environmental Poetry

Ecocriticism provides a valuable framework for analysing the complex interplay between literature and the environment. According to Buell (2009), ecocriticism challenges anthropocentric worldviews and seeks to re-centre nature as an active participant in literary narratives. Within the poetic tradition, ecocritical analysis pays close attention to how language, imagery, and form are mobilised to reflect environmental awareness and inspire ecological advocacy (Clark, 2019). Nigerian environmental poetry often assumes an activist posture, addressing the devastating ecological consequences of oil exploitation and systemic neglect (Egya, 2011). Poets such as Ojaide and Osundare use ecopoetry not only to critique environmental degradation but also to reclaim indigenous ecological knowledge and promote eco-justice (Nwagbara, 2010). Conversely, Japanese ecopoetry tends to embrace a more reflective stance, emphasising impermanence ('mono no aware') and the sanctity of the natural world through minimalist forms like haiku (Ueda, 2003; Sewell, Takahashi, & Ohno, 2019).

Transnational Poetics and Cross-Cultural Exchange

The concept of transnational poetics allows for an exploration of how poetic forms, themes, and philosophies migrate across cultural boundaries, enabling cross-cultural engagement and hybridisation (Ramazani, 2009). Nigerian and Japanese poets, though rooted in vastly different cultural traditions, both contribute to a shared global discourse on ecological crises (Dawodu, 2022; Morton, 2018). Nigerian poetry typically foregrounds resistance and activism, while Japanese poetry explores environmental themes through a lens of contemplation and reverence for nature. The integration of AI into this transnational exchange raises critical questions about

the preservation of cultural specificity. As Manovich (2024) suggests, AI-generated texts often rely on aggregated linguistic databases, which can inadvertently erase nuance and context. This introduces a tension between the global reach of AI and the local rootedness of traditional ecopoetry.

Artificial Intelligence and Artistic Expression

AI studies interrogate how algorithmic systems are reshaping human creativity, particularly in literature and the arts. Scholars such as Boden (2016) and McGregor et al. (2015) acknowledge the potential of AI to augment poetic production by offering novel stylistic possibilities and facilitating creative exploration. However, critics like Bender and Gebru (2021) and Noble (2023) highlight the ethical risks of delegating artistic agency to machines. Algorithmic bias, cultural flattening, and the erosion of emotional resonance are key concerns that inform this study's approach to AI-generated poetry. The use of AI in environmental poetry raises additional questions about whether machine-authored texts can authentically engage with ecological suffering, indigenous knowledge systems, or spiritual connections to the land.

Case Studies and Methodological Orientation

This study employs a comparative textual analysis of selected works, including Ojaide's *When Green was the Lingua Franca* and Roripaugh's *Ontology of Tsunami*, alongside AI-assisted poetic outputs from Nigeria and Japan. Although these texts do not explicitly engage with AI, they provide a baseline for identifying shifts in poetic technique and thematic focus influenced by digital interventions. A mixed-methods approach—combining qualitative textual analysis with digital humanities tools—will be used to explore how AI modifies poetic language, imagery, and narrative structure. The study also considers how AI affects the dissemination of environmental poetry through online platforms, algorithmic recommendations, and machine translation.

As environmental crises intensify and digital technologies become ever more integrated into artistic production, understanding the intersection between artificial intelligence and environmental poetry is both timely and necessary. By drawing on ecocriticism, transnational poetics, and AI studies, this research will illuminate how AI influences the evolving contours of Nigerian and Japanese ecopoetry. It will also contribute to broader discourses on digital creativity, cultural preservation, and ecological consciousness in the 21st century.

Review of Related Literature

Artificial Intelligence and the Process of Creative Production

The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) in literary spaces has prompted a paradigm shift in the understanding of creativity, authorship, and aesthetic originality. Scholars such as Manovich (2024) and Colton and Wiggins (2012) have explored how AI systems increasingly contribute to creative practices, particularly in literary production. These scholars assert that the integration of AI into poetry challenges entrenched notions of authorship by introducing a non-human agent capable of literary composition. While proponents hail this technological shift as revolutionary, others raise substantive concerns regarding the authenticity and emotional integrity of such compositions.

AI-generated poetry operates through algorithms, notably deep learning and natural language processing (NLP), which enable systems to mimic human-like poetic structures by identifying patterns in language, metre and thematic form (McGregor *et al.*, 2015). However, unlike human poets, machines lack subjective consciousness and emotional agency—two elements long held as essential to literary innovation. Lamb *et al.* (2021) caution that despite increasing sophistication, AI's outputs often remain tethered to pre-existing linguistic datasets, thereby reproducing rather than originating poetic expressions.

Comparatively, human poets draw from lived experiences, historical memory and cultural consciousness, positioning their work within specific socio-political or ecological contexts. This contrast becomes critical when examining the application of AI in environmental poetry—a genre that often demands intimate cultural and ecological understanding. Yet, AI continues to offer new methods of exploring literary aesthetics, albeit ones that require careful critical appraisal concerning depth, nuance, and socio-cultural resonance.

Ecological Poetry in the Literary Traditions of Nigeria and Japan

Nigerian Ecological Poetry

Nigerian ecological poetry emerges from a rich tradition of oral narrative, activism, and cultural identity. Poets such as Tanure Ojaide exemplify the ecological consciousness embedded within Nigerian literature, where environmental degradation is frequently portrayed as a legacy of colonial exploitation and capitalist intervention (Egya, 2011; Nwagbara, 2010). In 'When Green was the Lingua Franca', Ojaide invokes both nostalgia and protest, lamenting the devastation of native ecosystems due to oil exploration and deforestation while invoking indigenous knowledge systems endangered by modernity (Dawodu, 2022).

Through metaphor, rhythm, and local idioms, Ojaide's poetry transcends mere documentation—it acts as a socio-political statement, foregrounding themes of ecological justice. His poetic voice is not merely that of an observer but of a custodian of cultural memory and environmental integrity. Such poetic practices challenge AI-generated works to embody a comparable depth of protest and cultural specificity. As Lamb *et al.* (2021) note, algorithmic creativity is often structurally coherent yet may lack the moral urgency and cultural embeddedness found in human expressions like Ojaide's.

Japanese Ecological Poetry

In contrast yet equally profound, Japanese ecological poetry is characterised by its contemplative and minimalist aesthetic, often grounded in natural seasonal cycles. Traditional poetic forms such as haiku and tanka reflect a deep reverence for nature's transience (Ueda, 1999; Hass, 1994). Lee Ann Roripaugh's contemporary collection, *Ontology of Tsunami*, extends this tradition by merging natural imagery with personal and national trauma. Her work engages with the aftermath of environmental disasters—specifically tsunamis—as metaphors for disruption, dislocation, and transformation.

Roripaugh's poetic lens encapsulates both individual grief and communal vulnerability, illustrating how environmental calamities shape identity and collective memory. The capacity of AI to emulate such emotional layering is a point of contention. While AI can recognise thematic patterns associated with disaster or loss, it struggles to convey the existential weight underpinning human narratives shaped by historical and ecological trauma. In this respect, the poetry of Roripaugh stands as a litmus test for the emotional authenticity of AI-generated works.

Comparative Perspectives

The ecological traditions of Nigerian and Japanese poetry, though divergent in form and tone, converge in their articulation of ecological grief, identity, and resistance. Ojaide's poetry embodies an active protest against exploitation, while Roripaugh's work captures the inward devastation wrought by natural calamity. Both reveal how ecological poetry can function as a cultural mirror and an emotional archive.

Here, AI-generated poetry confronts a significant limitation: its difficulty in transcending universalist or homogenised interpretations of nature. While AI may successfully mimic thematic concerns, such as pollution or biodiversity, it risks producing generic representations

that dilute the cultural and political specificity central to Nigerian and Japanese poetics. As McGregor *et al.* (2015) suggest, AI's strength lies in form, not feeling.

Transnationalism and Intercultural Literary Influences

The intersection of Nigerian and Japanese ecological poetry provides fertile ground for exploring transnational literary dynamics. Damrosch (2003) and Apter (2013) emphasise that literature increasingly operates within global circuits of exchange, translation and adaptation. Within this framework, AI serves as both a facilitator and disruptor of literary interconnectedness.

AI's potential for translating and adapting ecological poetry opens new possibilities for cross-cultural dissemination. Yet translation itself is an act of interpretation—one that risks effacing the cultural resonances embedded in indigenous linguistic practices. Nigerian ecological poetry, heavily reliant on oral idioms and mythologies, often undergoes semantic dilution when translated into English or repurposed by AI systems trained on Western literary corpora. Similarly, Japanese poetic forms, with their seasonal and spiritual intricacies, may lose symbolic depth when subject to algorithmic parsing.

Nonetheless, AI's capacity to generate hybrid poetic forms—blending elements of Nigerian and Japanese ecological sensibilities—raises provocative questions about literary innovation. Could machine-generated poetry foster a new kind of transnational aesthetics, or does it merely synthesise without truly synthesising? The answer, as Colton and Wiggins (2012) imply, depends on whether AI is used to augment human creativity or replace it.

Artificial Intelligence and Poetic Aesthetics: Opportunities and Challenges

The primary artistic allure of AI in poetry lies in its ability to model and replicate formal structures across cultural boundaries. Its pattern recognition capabilities allow for the recombination of diverse stylistic elements, potentially generating novel poetic forms. Yet this promise is tempered by critical challenges related to authenticity, authorship, and emotional veracity.

Authorship remains a key concern. AI lacks consciousness, intent, or ethical accountability—qualities central to human artistic agency. Scholars like Lamb *et al.* (2021) argue that the act of poetic creation involves moral judgement and cultural sensitivity, which are beyond the purview of code. For instance, when AI composes verses on environmental loss, can these be considered genuine protest or grief? Ojaide's poetic appeal for ecological justice is born of

lived resistance. Similarly, Roripaugh's tsunami metaphors emerge from cultural mourning. AI, by contrast, can only simulate such affect.

There is also the concern of aesthetic flattening. AI models, trained on dominant poetic datasets, may default to prevailing literary norms, marginalising unique or non-Western expressions. This homogenisation threatens to erode the diversity that ecological poetry seeks to protect and celebrate. In the context of Nigerian and Japanese traditions, where form and meaning are deeply intertwined with local knowledge systems, such flattening is especially problematic.

However, AI also holds potential as a tool for preservation and experimentation. It can be used to archive endangered poetic forms or generate new stylistic models inspired by traditional forms. For example, NLP techniques could be harnessed to catalogue oral Nigerian ecopoetry, while machine learning might simulate seasonal Japanese forms to promote linguistic and ecological awareness.

Despite these opportunities, the fundamental question remains: Can AI-generated poetry ever truly participate in the cultural, ethical and environmental discourses that define human literary traditions? The answer lies not in the technological sophistication of AI, but in the epistemological humility with which it is applied. As McGregor *et al.* (2015) note, AI is not a substitute for cultural engagement but a lens through which it may be re-examined.

In sum, the literature reviewed highlights the dual nature of AI's role in transnational ecological poetry: its potential to innovate and its limitations in capturing cultural nuance. Nigerian and Japanese traditions engage deeply with nature, identity, and trauma. Though AI can mimic structure, it lacks emotional depth. However, a critically informed, culturally sensitive application may help preserve poetic traditions, foster intercultural dialogue, and reshape formal conventions. As Lamb *et al.* (2021) caution, such efforts must prioritise authenticity, ethical authorship, and cultural rootedness to ensure AI's contributions remain meaningful and respectful within diverse poetic landscapes.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, which is particularly suited to exploring meanings, interpretations, and cultural expressions within literary texts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It utilises the method of close reading, a core practice in literary studies that entails an intensive analysis of language, imagery, and textual structure to reveal a work's deeper

thematic and cultural dimensions (Barry, 2017). As such, close reading enables a comparative examination of human-authored and AI-generated Nigerian and Japanese environmental poetry, facilitating a nuanced understanding of how ecological and cultural themes are constructed, interpreted, and potentially transformed through both traditional and technological lenses.

Selection Criteria for Primary Texts

This study examines Tanure Ojaide's 'When Green was the Lingua Franca' and Lee Ann Roripaugh's 'Ontology of Tsunami', selected for their engagement with ecological devastation and human-environment relations. Ojaide critiques environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, while Roripaugh reflects on the socio-ecological consequences of tsunamis, illustrating localised responses to environmental crises (Egya, 2011; Takahashi, 2020). Both texts bridge specific cultural experiences and wider ecological anxieties, thereby contributing to transnational poetics. As such, they exemplify how poetry can transcend national borders while maintaining cultural specificity. Furthermore, both poets utilise innovative poetic strategies—intertextuality, metaphor, and non-linear structures—to explore how artificial intelligence (AI) might shape poetic form and meaning (Manovich, 2024). These techniques not only enrich the formal complexity of the poems but also engage with contemporary digital discourses, further reinforcing the relevance of environmental poetry in a globalised and technologically mediated literary landscape.

Nigerian–Japanese Literary Relations and Analytical Framework

Despite cultural and geographic differences, Nigeria and Japan face shared environmental challenges, including pollution, deforestation, and climate-induced disasters. Nigerian poetry often adopts an activist stance, exposing ecological injustices tied to exploitation (Egya, 2011), while Japanese poetry, shaped by traditions such as haiku and *mono no aware*, reflects on nature's impermanence and current ecological concerns (Takahashi, 2020). This study analyses selected poems through an ecocritical and transnational poetics lens to explore how these shared challenges shape poetic expression. It considers thematic portrayals of ecological crises, the use of devices such as imagery and intertextuality, and the impact of non-linear structures. Additionally, it interrogates how artificial intelligence engages with or disrupts these stylistic features. The study questions whether AI-generated poetry can genuinely capture the cultural depth and environmental urgency of traditional works or if it risks flattening diverse poetic voices in pursuit of technological innovation.

Findings and Analysis

While artificial intelligence (AI) is not overtly mentioned in the poetic texts, it, however, shapes the thematic orientation, stylistic framework, and cultural significance of the selected poems. AI functions as a mediating force, offering both interpretive frameworks and aesthetic analogues that mirror algorithmic logic, computational syntax, and digital culture.

AI and Thematic Reframing of Environmental Memory

In ‘When Green was the Lingua Franca’, Ojaide conjures a vivid picture of ecological harmony from his childhood:

My childhood stretched
One unbroken park,
Teeming with life.
In the forest green was
The lingua franca
With many dialects (Ojaide, 1998, p. 12)

This nostalgic invocation of a biodiverse past is contrasted with the present reality of fragmentation and loss. While rooted in the Niger Delta’s localised environmental degradation, the poem’s structure and vocabulary suggest a digital reprocessing of memory. Terms such as ‘the forest speaks in binary rhythms’ and ‘rusted gears of nature churn in silence’ allude to the mechanistic filtering of natural phenomena, reminiscent of AI’s transformation of ecological complexity into quantifiable data. The poem mimics how machine learning systems disaggregate and reconstruct memory, presenting nature not as a unified whole but as bits of data awaiting reassembly. This resonates with Manovich’s (2024) argument on how algorithmic aesthetics reconstruct the world through selective compression and patterning.

Similarly, Roripaugh’s ‘Ontology of Tsunami’ presents a terrifying yet analytical portrayal of nature’s wrath. Her tsunami is not just an environmental event; it becomes a metaphor for the viral, the computational, and the nameless:

She remained unnamed
Call her the meme

Infecting your screen
Call her the malware

Gone viral' (Roripaugh, 2019, p. 2)

Here, nature is refigured through AI-related metaphors. The tsunami's devastation becomes datafied, reduced to screen images, digital contagions, and code. The analogy between the tsunami and 'malware' reveals the poet's concern with the invasion of nature's forces, similar to the behaviour of technology, where natural disasters become content circulated through the same networks as viral media. This thematic layering aligns with Takahashi's (2020) observation that contemporary Japanese environmental poetry often merges traditional awareness of impermanence (*mono no aware*) with the sterile objectivity of technological observation.

Stylistic Disruptions and Algorithmic Poetics

Both poets use stylistic fragmentation that mirrors computational processing. In 'When Green was the Lingua Franca', the syntax is frequently jagged, interspersed with phrases such as:

So many trees beheaded...

streams mortally poisoned (Ojaide, 1998, p. 13)

These abrupt, declarative clauses resemble lines extracted from a dataset, discrete units of environmental trauma devoid of explanatory context. The poem reads like a series of algorithmic alerts, each pointing to ecological catastrophe. This compression and abruptness align with how AI processes textual input, identifying anomalies and patterns with clinical detachment.

Roripaugh's poem takes this further. Her tsunami is compared to a cobra, lightning, a meme, and 'the magic slate's / crackling cellophane...' (Roripaugh, 2019, p. 2). These metaphors are startling in their juxtaposition of the ancient and the contemporary, the organic and the digital. The poem's shifting imagery, between serpents and screens, gods and software, embodies a hyperlinked poetic, where each line functions as a node in a vast network of associations.

a cobra uncharmed

in a glistening rush ...

lightning / that strikes

and strikes again' (Roripaugh, 2019, p. 1)

This stylistic layering mirrors the way neural network's function: pulling together heterogeneous inputs to generate composite outputs. The tsunami's description is unstable and hybridised, just as AI reconfigures diverse sources into uncanny syntheses.

Both poets use intertextuality and symbolic layering to illustrate the hybridisation of memory, identity, and nature under AI's influence. Ojaide's references to indigenous flora, 'earthworm', 'snails and koto', 'Urhurhu grapes', 'owe apple', and 'cherries and breadfruit' are set against modern violence: 'Then Shell broke the bond / With quakes and a hell' (Ojaide, 1998, p. 13). The poem oscillates between eco-mythology and digital brutality, situating AI not merely as a technological force but as a conceptual metaphor for rupture and reconstruction.

AI as Cultural Disruptor and Ethical Intermediary

Beyond style and theme, both poems interrogate the role of AI as a cultural and ethical force. Ojaide's poem contains an undercurrent of loss, not only of nature but of narrative integrity. The lines:

I see victims of arson
Wherever my restless soles
Take me to bear witness'
(Ojaide, 1998, p. 13)

These suggest a speaker displaced by environmental violence and reduced to a passive observer, much like an AI surveillance system recording data without agency. The transformation of the environment into a spectacle for algorithmic analysis raises questions about the ethical implications of machine mediation in ecological discourse. As McKinnon (2022) warns, AI's potential to aestheticise suffering risks diminishing the lived realities of affected communities.

Roripaugh's 'Ontology of Tsunami', though presented with lyrical reverence, also questions the limits of technological representation. Her refusal to name the tsunami reflects a discomfort with the classification systems inherent to AI:

She goes by no name ...
call her annihilatrix (Roripaugh, 2019, p. 2)

The act of naming, long held sacred in Japanese cultural traditions (Plutschow, 2021), is resisted. AI, with its penchant for tagging and categorising, contrasts sharply with this reverent

ambiguity. Roripaugh's hesitance suggests that some aspects of human-environment relations exceed algorithmic legibility. Her comparison of the tsunami to 'the meme infecting your screen' (p. 2) reflects the way environmental catastrophes are consumed via digital platforms, stripped of depth and moral urgency.

In both poems, AI's influence is palpable not through direct reference but through metaphorical resonances—fractured narratives, disembodied voices, and the disintegration of linear time. The poets imply that in a world saturated by AI, the environment is no longer experienced directly but mediated through layers of abstraction, computation, and simulation.

Through a nuanced interplay of ecological imagery and digital metaphor, both Ojaide and Roripaugh reflect on the transformative, and sometimes distorting, power of artificial intelligence. While AI enables new modes of environmental representation, it also fragments traditional ecological narratives and challenges the ethical boundaries of poetic witness. In both 'When Green was the Lingua Franca' and 'Ontology of Tsunami', AI emerges not just as a tool or theme, but as a conceptual force, reshaping the grammar of ecological mourning and the poetics of environmental memory.

Discussion

The findings and analysis reveal a richly layered interaction between environmental memory, poetic form, and the subtle imprint of artificial intelligence (AI) in Tanure Ojaide's 'When Green was the Lingua Franca' and Lee Ann Roripaugh's 'Ontology of Tsunami'. Though the poets hail from markedly different geopolitical and cultural backgrounds, Nigeria and Japanese-American diasporic experience, respectively, their poetic treatments of environmental crisis converge in their thematic resonance and metaphorical language. At the same time, notable divergences arise in their cultural symbolism, rhetorical strategy, and engagement with technology.

A significant point of convergence lies in the poets' shared concern with environmental loss and the intrusion of industrial or technological forces into the natural world. Ojaide's lament that 'So many trees beheaded... / streams mortally poisoned' (Ojaide, 1998, p. 13) mirrors Roripaugh's depiction of nature's destabilisation: 'a cobra uncharmed / in a glistening rush ... / lightning / that strikes / and strikes again' (Roripaugh, 2019, p. 1). Both poets employ visceral imagery to reflect the violence wrought upon the environment—whether through oil exploitation in the Niger Delta or the catastrophic tsunami in Fukushima. Their work, in this sense, speaks to a shared ecological grief, one filtered through a transnational lens.

Stylistically, both poets experiment with fragmentation and dissonance, a technique that mirrors the algorithmic logic of AI. Ojaide's poem is structured around jagged, abrupt phrases. 'Then Shell broke the bond / With quakes and a hell' (Ojaide, 1998, p. 13), which evokes the data-like segmentation of traumatic memory. Similarly, Roripaugh constructs a poetic syntax that resembles hyperlinks or code fragments: 'Call her the meme / Infecting your screen / Call her the malware / Gone viral' (Roripaugh, 2019, p. 2). This convergence in poetic form signals a broader reflection on how AI conditions our perception of environmental disasters, not as cohesive narratives, but as scattered images and digital echoes.

Yet, the divergence in their approach becomes evident in their cultural framings and metaphysical outlook. Ojaide draws from indigenous African ecological cosmology, where nature is animate and sacred. His use of localised references, 'snails and koto', 'Urhurhu grapes', and 'owe apple' (Ojaide, 1998, p. 12), grounds his poem in a tactile, ancestral intimacy with the land. For Ojaide, the loss of nature is akin to the erasure of language: 'green was / The lingua franca / With many dialects' (p. 12). This metaphor of linguistic extinction underscores the profound cultural dislocation that accompanies ecological destruction.

In contrast, Roripaugh's engagement is steeped in a diasporic, techno-feminist lens that challenges the anthropocentric gaze. Her tsunami is a natural force and a subversive agent, 'Call her annihilatrix' (Roripaugh, 2019, p. 2), defying classification and resisting containment. Where Ojaide mourns the loss of environmental harmony, Roripaugh interrogates the politics of naming and the commodification of disaster. Her refusal to name the tsunami, 'She remained unnamed' (p. 2), is a direct challenge to AI's algorithmic impulse to categorise, sort, and archive.

Furthermore, Ojaide positions himself as a witness: 'I see victims of arson / Wherever my restless soles / Take me to bear witness' (Ojaide, 1998, p. 13), suggesting an ethical responsibility rooted in proximity and memory. Roripaugh, however, blurs the boundaries between witness, victim, and medium. The tsunami 'infects your screen', implicating the reader in the digital dissemination of suffering. This shift from passive observation to participatory media reflects a divergence in the poets' conceptualisation of poetic agency.

Both poets evoke AI not directly but through metaphoric scaffolding—fragmented narrative, digital metaphors, and spectral imagery. Yet, while Ojaide's poem reads as an elegy to a lost environmental order, Roripaugh's is a postmodern interrogation of the very systems—naming, framing, sharing—that shape our understanding of disaster. Thus, convergence occurs in

thematic preoccupation and stylistic experimentation, while divergence emerges through cultural nuance and ideological framing.

Together, Ojaide and Roripaugh offer a poetic cartography of AI-mediated ecological consciousness—one rooted in memory, ethics, and a transnational poetics of resistance. Their works suggest that AI's influence is not merely technological but deeply epistemological, reshaping how poets imagine, record, and respond to environmental catastrophe.

Implications for Understanding the Evolving Relationship between Technology, Culture, and Environmental Consciousness

The findings of this study suggest that AI is not merely a technical tool but a transformative cultural force that redefines the relationship between technology, culture and environmental consciousness. The incorporation of digital motifs and fragmented narratives in eco-poetry challenges traditional modes of representing nature, thereby fostering a more complex dialogue around ecological responsibility. As technological advances continue to permeate artistic domains, poets are increasingly using AI-informed aesthetics to question the ethical implications of environmental exploitation and to highlight the tension between scientific rationality and human sensitivity. This evolving relationship encourages audiences to critically examine the impact of digital mediation on our collective understanding of environmental crises, advocating for a balance between technological innovation and the preservation of cultural memory (Manovich, 2024; McKinnon, 2022).

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that AI's presence, though implicit, significantly shapes the aesthetics, ethics, and epistemologies of their poetry.

Ojaide's 'When Green was the Lingua Franca' presents a deeply personal and culturally embedded lamentation of environmental degradation. His use of metaphor— 'green was / The lingua franca' (Ojaide, 1998, p. 12)—frames nature as a lost language, one that technology has both silenced and corrupted. His fragmented syntax and abrupt imagery echo the data-like structure of AI interpretation, while his cultural references root the poem in an indigenous ontology.

Roripaugh's 'Ontology of Tsunami', meanwhile, uses digital metaphors; 'Call her the meme ... / Gone viral' (Roripaugh, 2019, p. 2), to critique the technological mediation of disaster. Her refusal to name the tsunami and her blending of feminine power with digital virality point

to an AI-shaped world where the boundaries between natural, cultural, and technological are increasingly blurred.

By juxtaposing these two poets, the study has illuminated both convergences and divergences in their approaches. Convergences lie in their shared environmental concerns and stylistic innovations, while divergences emerge from their cultural contexts and conceptual frameworks. Ultimately, this comparative exploration affirms the central thesis: that AI, as both subject and structure, profoundly influences how contemporary poets articulate environmental memory and crisis.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should examine AI's broader impact on eco-poetics and its role in promoting global environmental awareness. Comparative studies could reveal whether AI fosters a unified ecological narrative or erases cultural distinctiveness. Ethical inquiries into AI-generated poetry may also clarify tensions between creativity and code. These explorations are vital for understanding how AI influences eco-poetry, cultural expression, and sustainable environmental discourse in an increasingly digital world.

References

- Apter, E. (2013). *Against world literature: On the politics of untranslatability*. Verso Books.
- Barry, P. (2017). *Beginning theory: An introduction to literary and cultural theory* (4th ed.). Manchester University Press.
- Bate, J. (2000). *The song of the earth*. Harvard University Press.
- Bender, E. M., & Gebru, T. (2021). On the dangers of stochastic parrots: Can language models be too big? In *Proceedings of the 2021 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency* (pp. 610–623). ACM.
- Boden, M. A. (2016). *AI: Its nature and future*. Oxford University Press.
- Buell, L. (2009). *The future of environmental criticism: Environmental crisis and literary imagination*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Carr, N. (2020). *The shallows: What the internet is doing to our brains*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Clark, T. (2019). *The value of ecocriticism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Colton, S., & Wiggins, G. A. (2012). Computational creativity: The final frontier? In *Proceedings of the 20th European Conference on Artificial Intelligence* (pp. 21–26). IOS Press.
- Crawford, K. (2023). *Atlas of AI: Power, politics, and the planetary costs of artificial intelligence*. Yale University Press.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Damrosch, D. (2003). *What is world literature?* Princeton University Press.
- Dawodu, S. (2022). Portraiture of ecocatastrophes in Nigerian and Japanese poetry. Unpublished Thesis. English. Arts, University of Ibadan. viii+212pp.
- Egya, S. E. (2011). Art and outrage: A critical survey of recent Nigerian poetry. *Research in African Literatures*, 43(1), 49–70. <https://doi.org/10.2979/reseafrilite.43.1.49>

- Hass, R. (1994). *The essential haiku: Versions of Bashō, Buson, and Issa*. Ecco Press.
- Hirshfield, J. (2021). *Ledger: Poems*. Knopf.
- Lamb, C., Brown, D. G., & Clarke, C. L. (2021). Evaluating the poetic competence of AI systems. *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, *15*(3).
- Manovich, L. (2024). *Cultural analytics*. MIT Press.
- McGregor, S., Agres, K., Purver, M., & Wiggins, G. A. (2015). From distributional semantics to conceptual spaces: A novel computational method for concept creation. *Journal of Artificial General Intelligence*, 6(1), 55.
- McKinnon, T. (2022). *Algorithmic culture: How big data and artificial intelligence transform society*. Routledge.
- Morton, T. (2018). *Being ecological*. MIT Press.
- Murphy, P. D. (2018). *Transversal ecocritical praxis: Theoretical arguments, literary analysis, and cultural critique*. Lexington Books.
- Noble, S. U. (2023). *Algorithms of oppression: How search engines reinforce racism*. NYU Press.
- Nwagbara, U. (2010). Poetics of Resistance: Ecocritical Reading of Ojaide's Delta Blues & Home Songs and Daydream of Ants and Other Poems. *African Study Monographs*, 31(1), 17-30.
- Ojaide, T. (1998). *When green was the lingua franca*. Kraft Books.
- Plutschow, H. (2021). *Chaos and cosmos: Ritual in early and medieval Japanese literature*. Brill.
- Ramazani, J. (2009). *A transnational poetics*. University of Chicago Press.
- Roripaugh, L. A. (2019). *Ontology of tsunami*. Milkweed Editions.
- Sewell, F., Takahashi, M., & Ohno, M. (2019). *On Two Shores: New and Selected Poems by Mutsuo Takahashi*. Dedalus Press.
- Takahashi, S. (2023). Fukushima Futures: Survival Stories in a Repeatedly Ruined Seascape. In *Fukushima Futures*. University of Washington Press.
- Ueda, M. (1999). *Modern Japanese haiku: An anthology*. University of Toronto Press.
- Ueda, M. (2003). *The path of flowering thorn: The life and poetry of Yosa Buson*. Stanford University Press.

The Generic Structure Potential of Printed Advertisements: A Multi-Semiotic Analysis of Selected Nollywood Film Advertisement Posters

Monsurat Aramide Nurudeen

Department of English, University of Ilorin

monsurat.a@unilorin.edu.ng

Abstract

As complex forms of visual communication primarily employed to create awareness about movies, posters consist of highly interpretative systems of modes of multimodal communication aimed at encouraging patronage. This study, therefore, investigates how these multimodal elements are embedded in film posters and how they communicate with the audience. Yuen's (2004) Generic Structure Potential and Royce's (1998) Ideational Intersemiotic Complementarity frameworks serve to unearth the visual and linguistic semiotic resources and their interaction in film advertisement posters. The data comprises five selected Nollywood film advertisement posters accessed through online platforms. Findings reveal that visual modes are more prominent and frequently employed in the advertisement posters than the linguistic modes. However, the combination of the visual and the linguistic modes offers a complementary relationship in communicating and persuading viewers to patronage. The study concludes that the semiotic resources deployed in the posters about the shared knowledge of the image producers and prospective viewers, as well as the Nigerian socio-cultural context, all work concurrently to positively affect the sales and marketing of the films.

Keywords: *nollywood; advertisement; ideational intersemiosis; generic structure*

Introduction

The Nigerian film industry has provided an opportunity for the world to view and appreciate the socio-cultural values and experiences of Nigerians. Nigerian films are veritable means for socialising, informing, educating and also empowering the human resources of Nigeria. Nigerian film producers express their didactic and informative intentions via Nigerian indigenous languages, Nigerian Pidgin and Nigerian English.

The popularity of the Nigerian film industry, or Nollywood, can be traced to the new cinema culture in the country, which is a paradigm shift from the traditional cinema that features live presentation to the production of recorded films in a new theatre. Nollywood films are broadcast in cinemas nationwide and are available online for download by prospective subscribers. A prominent station that serves as a platform to showcase Nollywood films internationally is African Magic DSTV/GOTV, where there are several channels tagged under different names such as African Magic Yoruba, Showcase, Epic, Igbo, Hausa and many more to reach out to different audiences, particularly in terms of religion and ethnicity. In addition

to YouTube, a new online platform called NETFLIX has emerged, which features Nollywood for the consumption of local and international subscribers.

A major tool used by film producers to increase the patronage of their films is film publicity, which plays a central role in the movie production process. Essentially, Nollywood films are produced from time to time. Hence, to sustain themselves in the rather flooded and competitive market, Nollywood film producers and marketers use different publicity techniques. One of these publicity techniques employed in achieving their desired objectives is film posters. Anyawu (2015, p.130) expresses that “Nollywood film posters, which are subsumed under the print media, are the strongest outlets of movie publicity in Nigeria. They are considered highly effective because they usually get their message across to the target audience.”

Nollywood film poster designers employ a plethora of semiotic resources on film posters, which often reflect the Nigerian socio-cultural context. There is a need to interpret these highly context-based semiotic modes employed in getting the attention of the viewers. Thus, this study aims to uncover how these semiotic resources reveal the intention of the film producers and how they communicate with the audience. This research is a different from other previous studies on film posters such as Sahid, Bokil, and Dharmalingam’s (2015) Title design in Bollywood film posters: a semiotic analysis, Ihekwoaba and Ihekwoaba’s (2024), Nollywood and Hollywood Posters: A comparative analysis of design principles, and Anurudu, Igboanugo, & Onu’s (2023) multimodal discourse analysis of selected Nollywood posters. These existing studies focus only on the visual resources of film posters or their aesthetic design. This current study investigates how various modalities and semiotic tools are organised and presented concurrently to create meaning in Nollywood film posters. In other words, it creates another perspective for the interpretation of texts by examining semiotic resources that cater for the overall meanings in Nollywood film advertisement posters, how the meanings from the posters can be derived, the intention of the advertisers, the structure of the posters, and how they aid meaning recovery.

Review of Related Empirical Studies

Relevant scholarly works have been undertaken on the Generic structure and multimodal discourse analysis of various genres, including films, film posters and Nollywood film poster advertisements in linguistic scholarship. Some of these previous studies are hereby examined:

Nugroho’s (2009) research titled ‘Generic structure potential of print advertisement of Elizabeth Arden’s Intervene: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis’, utilised the systemic

functional linguistic and multimodal discourse analysis approaches to analyse text and images in print media advertisement. The study adopted Yuen's (2004) model of the generic structure of print advertisement. The study revealed that visual and linguistic items in the advertisement are coherently placed and they complement and support one another to project a positive image to attract the viewers to patronise the advertised product. The study fails to properly account for meaning derivation from textual resources using systemic functional linguistics.

Dwelling on 'Narrative Music, Visuals and Meaning in Film', Wingstedt and Jan Berg (2010) revealed the intermodal relationships of music and image in short scenes of two films. Using Halliday's (1978) metafunctions of communication, the study brought to light the fact that visual expressions unite to form multimodal statements where the whole is different from the sum of the parts.

Another earlier study related to this current one is Febrianti's (2013) work on 'Multimodal discourse analysis in Indonesian print advertisements'. The essence of the work was to examine how the multimodality of semiotic resources in several Indonesian print advertisements expresses meanings and how the verbal elements strengthen the meaning of the visual elements and vice versa. The work observed that print advertisements consist of a synergic collaboration of verbal texts and visual images that carry with them the manifestation of culture. The focus of the study was on the interaction between linguistic and visual semiotic resources. The limitation of this work is that adequate attention is not given to the visual and linguistic multimodes in their independent forms before explaining the interaction of the two resources.

'A multimodal discourse analysis of movie posters' by Chen (2013) is another previous study. In this study, the researcher expressed that the theory of multimodal discourse analysis (MDA), which, to a considerable extent, is theoretically based on Systemic-Functional Linguistics, solves the problem of comprehensively accounting for the integrative meaning generated by the interaction of different modes in movie poster discourse. To this end, the study attempted to set up a model for MDA of movie posters based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996/2006) grammar of visual design for the analysis of visual and linguistic modes in movie posters. Though this previous study explored multimodal discourse analysis of movie posters, its tenet is different from the current study. The profundity of this current study and the theoretical model adapted make the difference from the previous study. In essence, the scope of the current study is not limited to film titles, images and tag lines but also on other paramount linguistic features of film posters, such as the cast and call-and-visit information. The analytical

framework of this current study surpasses the sole reliance on Yuen's generic structure of printed advertisements. It also considers intersemiotic relations between visual and textual semiotic modes.

The exploration of film posters in the context of Nollywood is contained in Anurudu, Igboanugo, & Onu's (2023) research titled 'multimodal discourse analysis of selected Nollywood posters'. This study investigated the application of multimodal features to construct meaning in movie posters using Kress and van Leeuwen's theory of visual grammar. The study revealed that modality arrangement is deliberately used by movie producers to achieve visual impressions that promote semantics of visual design.

'A Study of Multimodal Communicative Acts in Selected Nollywood Film Advertisement Posters' was a study conducted by Nurudeen (2004). The study reflected on the pragmatic functions of Nollywood film posters' advertising language (text and image) as a form of language in action and intention in the situational context of users. The findings from the analysis of the data revealed that communicative acts of informing, stating, expressing, describing and asserting are frequently demonstrated via visual and verbal modes. These multimodal communicative acts demonstrate the persuasive illocutionary and communicative intentions of Nollywood film advertisers, which are primarily aimed at influencing viewers to patronise the films. In contrast to this existing study, this current study extends scholarship on multimodal analysis of film posters as it investigates not only the pragmatic functions of the data via the intention of the advertisers and social context, but also the structure of the posters in terms of the visual and linguistic semiotic resources and how they interact and aid meaning recovery.

Conceptual and Theoretical Thrusts

Multimodality/ Multimodal Discourse Analysis: A Purview

Multimodality accounts for multiple meanings conveyed via different modes in discourses. Norris (2002) notes that most of the studies on discourse analysis problematically allot primacy to language over other modes of communication, especially in identity construction and that such an approach may result in individual identity being analysed in an obscured way. The viability of all modes for communication of meaning in discourses is that all modes of communication are "of equal significance in representation and communication as all modes have potential for meaning" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 104).

Baldry (2000, p. ix) observes that humans live in a multimodal world; thus, they experience multimodality and, in turn, make meaning of their experiences multimodally. Also, Machin (2007), cited in Liu (2013, p.1), opines that multimodality explains the grammar of visual communication that is used by image producers. It is an analysis of the rules and principles that allow viewers to understand the meaning potential of relative placement of elements, framing, salience, proximity, colour saturations, styles of typeface, etc. Thus, from the purview, the concept of multimodality is indeed a useful benchmark to assess the varied ways of meaning-making in discourse. The application of a multimodal approach for this study, therefore, is informed by the nature of the data studied, as the posters are examples of the complex linguistic advertisement media that use multimodal features which are reflectors of both international and national worldviews.

Social Semiotic Approach to Multimodal Discourse Analysis

The theoretical foundation of the social semiotic approach to multimodal discourse analysis is derived from the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) view of language as a social semiotic or social phenomenon (Halliday 1978, 1985). Halliday (1978) states, “that semiotics is a process of making meanings by selecting from the total set of options that constitute what can be meant.” Therefore, O’Halloran (2008, p. 444) postulates that “the systemic functional approach or social semiotic to multimodal discourse analysis is concerned with the theory and practice of analysing meaning arising from the use of multiple semiotic resources from discourses which range from written, printed and electronic texts to material lived-in reality.” O’Toole (1994) and Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) laid the foundation for MDA from the systemic functional perspective. More scholars have since used the theoretical principles of SF theory in the analysis of other semiotic systems other than language and or their interrelationship, to name a few, are: Royce (1998), Yuen (2004), Martinec (1996), Lim (2004), van Leeuwen (1999) among others.

The Generic Structure Potential of Printed Advertisements

The Generic structure potential accounts for the multi-semiotic interaction between visual images and linguistic text in print advertisements. The theory hinges on Hasan’s (1996) insufficiency in the generic structure for an advertisement. Yuen (2004, p.176) argues that “Hasan (1996) establishes 'Capture^Focus^Justification' as the generic structure for advertisements, but my research has produced a GSP which differs in terms of the degree of detail and the ability to capture the complexity of intersemiosis in advertisements”. The GSP is classified into two components: the visual and the linguistic (semiotic resources working

together in projecting meaning). The visual components consist of the Lead, the Display and the Emblem, while the linguistic entail Announcement Enhancer, Emblem, Tag and Call-and-visit information. With this system, print advertisement is considered as a single united commodity that is analysed by deconstructing its elements.

The Lead is the most salient image because it is the main focus of attention that attracts the viewers to the advertisement. It consists of lesser elements termed as the Locus of Attention (LoA), which is the most salient item or items in the Lead; and the Complementary Locus of Attention (Comp.LoA), that is, the background or other visuals, which are less salient than the LoA but complement the LoA. The second element, the Display, demonstrates the characteristics of the Lead, which may be Explicit/Implicit and Congruent /Incongruent. An explicit lead explains if the picture is about a tangible object, while an implicit lead details if the intangible product or service is given tangible form through another medium. In addition, the Lead is called Congruent if the product is not realised through symbolism and incongruent if the product is realised through symbolism. The third element in the visual image component is the Emblem, which is usually the company's logo.

The second aspect of GSP is the linguistic aspect, which is interpreted by several elements such as: Emblem, Announcement, Enhancer, Tag, and Call-and-Visit Information. Emblem in the linguistic component comprises the linguistic slogan, which may accompany the visual Emblem (the company's logo). Announcement is the most salient linguistic text in the advertisement, and based on the level of salience, Announcement consists of both the primary and Secondary Announcements, which are deployed to capture the readers' attention to the advertised product. Furthermore, the Enhancer is the part of the advertisement that explains further the Announcement, and it is usually in smaller fonts and the form of a paragraph. A tag is an additional phrase or clause to further complement the visual. Lastly, Call-and-Visit Information is usually evident and depicted in small prints that are non-salient and contain contact information as to where, how and when the products and services are available to consumers. This representation is thus captured by Yuen (2004, p.163) as:

Lead^ (Display) ^Emblem^ (Announcement)^ (Enhancer)^ (Tag)^ (Call-and-Visit Information)

Yuen (2004) adopts Halliday and Hasan's (1989) notations for generic structure in texts by making use of the symbols above to express the total range of obligatory and optional elements, where the caret sign “^” means “followed by” and the round brackets () means that the elements

inside them are optional. She maintains that the obligatory elements that always occur in print advertisement are the lead and the emblem, while others are optional.

Ideational Intersemiotic Complementarity

The centrality of Intersemiotic Complementarity is how visual and verbal modes co-occur in multimodal texts to complement each other semantically to produce a single textual phenomenon, which can be realised through ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings (Royce 1998, p. 26). The ideational intersemiotic meaning is the focus for this study, and it is actualised when both linguistic and visual modes are related lexico-semantically through intersemiotic sense relations: repetition- identical experiential meaning, synonymy- same or similar experiential meaning, antonymy- opposite experiential meaning, hyponymy- the relationship between a general class of something and its sub class, Meronymy -the relationship between part and whole, and collocation- expectancy or high probability to co-occur in a field or subject area.

The study employs Yuen's (2004) generic structure of printed advertisements and Royce's (1998) intersemiotic complementarity as theoretical underpinnings for the analysis of the data because of their ability to unravel the meanings communicated via the visual and linguistic semiotic resources embedded in the advertisement posters and their interrelationship. The graphological features that characterise the linguistic modes are also identified.

Methodology

The data for the study is qualitative in nature as it accounts for the description and interpretation of data according to use in context. Five randomly selected Nollywood movie posters are employed in the study. The posters were retrieved online and they comprise English-speaking medium Nollywood film advertisement posters produced between 2016 and 2024.

While the film posters examined in this study were accessed through online platforms, they were originally conceptualised and designed for dissemination in print formats, such as posters, billboards, flyers, DVD sleeves and promotional materials displayed in physical spaces. As such, they conform to the communicative conventions and multimodal features characteristics of printed advertisements. The decision to retrieve the posters digitally was driven by considerations of accessibility and archival availability; however, the mode of access does not compromise their classification as print media. Accordingly, the analysis remains consistent with Yuen's (2004) Generic structure potential framework, which is specifically concerned

with the structural and semiotic organisation of advertisements intended for print-based communication.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Generic Structure Potential of the Advertisement Posters

Datum 1

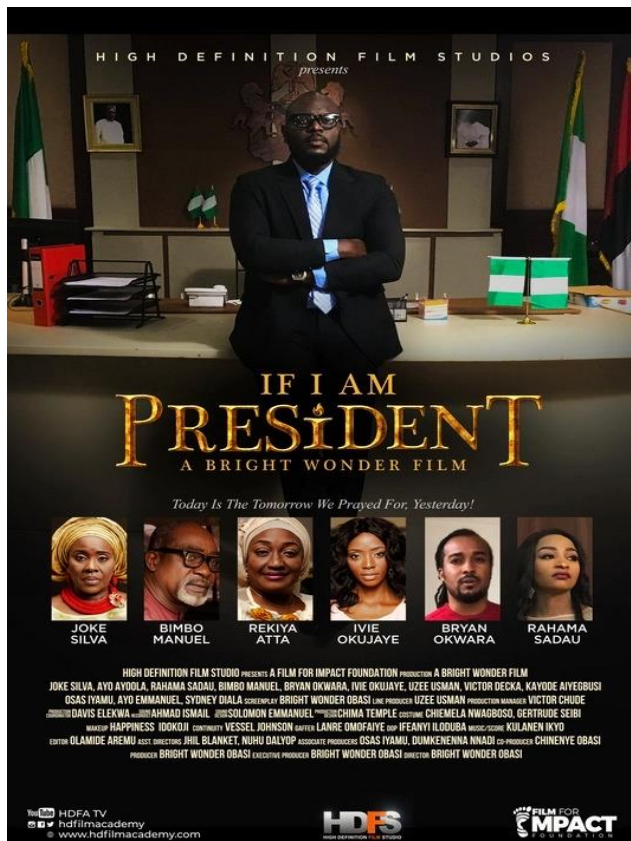


Figure 1: *If I am President* Film Poster

The poster above is an advertisement for a drama movie produced in 2018 by Bright Wonder Abasi, Don Omope, Zulu Oyibo and Ijeoma Agukoronye.

The poster delves into the political terrain of Nigeria. The LoA is a man who has a political ambition to be the president of a country. The target country is easily recognised through the visually projected flags/ Com. LoA is embedded in the rich and natural background. His young look contrasts with what is familiar or predominant in Nigerian politics in terms of filling important political positions, especially the seat of president. The subordinate clause / SA / title 'if I am president' is a device aimed at making viewers seek the complete part of the sentence. It also cohabits with the visualised Lead to bring about a change of age restriction and

corruption concerning Nigerian governance. Hence, the lead is a young adult who represents the word ‘today’ in the SA. He also wears a stern and determined look and his arms are folded across his chest. The facial expression communicates to change in the face of polity or a strong reaction to the perceived undesirable situation. Also, his cooperate attire implies the modernised sense of aura and change he aspires to bring to the presidential seat.

The eyelines of the male lead are connected with viewers to seek their validation to take up the change he is promising and experience positivity from his intended governance, as against their previous experiences. The Comp. LoA pictured in small frames occupy the bottom position and are also placed frontally, except the secondary lead on the left side of the poster, who is slightly positioned obliquely. Their frontal positioning seeks to reinforce the need for viewers’ engagement projected by the prominent lead and contributes to the storyline.

Poster 2



Figure 2: *Omo Ghetto: The Saga* film poster

‘Omo Ghetto’ is a comedy/action film produced in 2020 by Funke Akindele and JJC Skillz.

The visual interpretation of the image is that of a woman who seems to be replicated in two different forms. The resemblance is uncanny, which leaves viewers to speculate whether the leads are twins or just a person with a dual identity living in two distinct worlds/ playing two contrasting roles. The mystery will be solved when viewers see the film. The gaze of the leads in both the left and right positions is fixated on an unknown phenomenon. They appear to be lost in their worlds. Thus, their emotional state is unknown to viewers. The distinct appearance

of the leads is intriguing, as they appear as people from different social classes. On the left axis, the lead appears as a rogue, looking unkempt while puffing marijuana. In contrast, the right position depicts a sophisticated and classy woman. The PA 'Omo Ghetto' lends credence to the visual representation of the lead on the left axis as the term 'Omo ghetto' in Yoruba depicts a street trouble maker from the slum. The left image can thus be said to be explicitly congruent because she is foregrounded in a slum setting, also the textual SA/ tagline 'two worlds', different lives' connotes with the split image of two people with different lifestyles. These semiotic resources all work concurrently to explain the theme of the movie.

In essence, the leads are visualised as the ideal, where they form the nucleus of the poster, which implies that the movie focuses on them and emphasises their centrality in the meaning-making process. The leads are also accentuated through their size and sharpness as they are projected sharply against the admixture of backgrounds. The real facts about them are centralised as well as incorporated below the image. These real facts encapsulate the textual information consisting of the title, tagline, and enhancer in upper case lettering and vibrant mixed colours to promote cohesion. The combination of the ideal and real information in Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) terms is to amplify the message the image producer intends to communicate to the audience.

Poster 3



Figure 3: *Tiwa's Baggage* film poster

Figure 2 above is a drama movie produced in 2017 by Biodun Stephen. The leads in the poster are the image of a female's hands and the tattered baggage held in her hands. The image of the baggage is made salient to create a strong visual effect on the viewers. The legs of the lead are also made salient to enhance visual meaning, and they are the confluence of attention. The central idea or linguistic equivalence is embedded in the PA. These semiotic resources cohere ideationally to convey an intended message to the audience. Essentially, the lead is “figuratively an effervescence of meaning” (Yuen 2004, p.178). The meaning communicated through them could be interpreted in two ways or have two meaning potentials. In other words, the meaning could be physical denotative meaning of the semantic scope of the film plot, about a lady's (Tiwa) baggage or it could convey metaphorical sense, that is, the old and tattered baggage held by the visual lead, might be a visual metaphor implying that there are negative experiences from her past that endanger her present and probably her future. The salience of the image of the baggage may imply the abundance or weight of these negative experiences. The intended meaning of the visual composition will be made available to viewers when they see the movie.

Furthermore, the linguistic element of the secondary announcement supports the PA in informing the audience that the film is owned by the popular Biodun Stephen. The information is reiterated and explained further in the enhancement at the bottom of the poster that the movie was produced, directed and written by her. The tags constitute the cast at the top of the poster, while the linguistic emblem encapsulating ‘shutter speed project/ Rok studios’ further bestows the identity of the film advertisement and validates it.

The analysis of colour in the poster reveals that yellow is generously employed in the poster, especially in the textual elements. It also illuminates the greenery of the background in which the leads are foregrounded. Yellow is associated with freshness and happiness. It brings optimism to the negativity or pitiable experiences the baggage carrier may undergo, thereby informing the viewers that the film will have a happy ending. Also, the purple colour of Tiwa's skirt or gown symbolises mystery. Due to the partial representation of her on the poster, viewers are unable to observe every detail about her. Purple also signifies mystery to the thematic focus of the film, which is derived from the different interpretations arising from it.

Poster 4



Figure 4: *Battle on Buka Street* film Poster

‘Battle on Buka Street’ is a comedy movie produced in 2022 by Funke Akindele and Network and Film One Studios.

The poster displays seven leads who are the nucleus of attention. Six of the leads are dualised. The parties appear confrontational towards each other. Their facial expressions are of rage, anger and disdain towards their opponents, which suggests conflict between the two parties. Thus, their eyelids are connected, where the viewers are mere observers wanting to learn from their storyline and unravel the mystery behind the conflict. Centralised in the poster frame and positioned before the audience is an elderly male lead dressed in traditional Igbo attire. His central and frontal placements indicate that his character is significant in the film narrative as he serves as a balance that holds off the sides from all-out war, or serves as an intermediary between the two parties. His eyes are also directed at viewers outside of the picture frame to engage and demand that they immerse themselves in the storyline and assist him in solving the dispute.

There is a predominant use of red hue to indicate the intensity of the conflict. The cap of the elderly male lead is red, and the attire of the female lead in the foreground is also red. Similarly, the PA, ‘Battle On Buka Street’ reiterated in the background, as well as the red pots immersed on both ends of the PA. Red can also be discerned on the visible pair of earrings on the second female lead in the foreground.

The fire emanating beneath the pots on either side of the title is symbolic of anger, danger and aggression, which buttresses the thematic focus of the film. The textual information 'Battle On 'Buka Street' supports the pictorial cues and explains the activities of the leads about the film setting.

The image is also implicitly congruent as the words 'battle' and 'gbas gbos' are symbolic of the emotional states of the leads. The image of the Comp. LoA/ image of the pots is also symbolic as they relate to the word 'buka.' 'Buka' is a Nigerian term for roadside restaurants selling cooked foods at affordable prices. This congruent image explains that the film may be built on food or a theme that deals with cooking. The colour of the pots also implies that the food or the act of cooking may cause mayhem.

Poster 5



Figure 5: *Japa!* film poster

'Japa!' is a comedy film produced in 2024 by Inkblot.

The leads in the poster above are foregrounded against the decontextualised background as important semiotic cues. This Comp.LoA/near-empty and blurry background serve to create mystery in the curious minds of the audience. The leads are five numbers where the male lead clad in a blue shirt, black trousers and tie achieves more salience than the rest of the participants because of his central position and the projection of his entire figure except for one of his legs drawn backwards. His facial expression is one of awe and excitement towards achieving a

certain goal, which is in contrast with those of the other leads. Hence, the level of salience in correlation with his distinct facial gesture emphasises him as a more prominent character in the movie than other characters. It also indicates the extent of roles the leads play or their importance in the movie narrative.

The leads are also positioned frontally and their gaze is directed at the audience. These two visual semiotic cues enforce a connection between them and the viewers by directly addressing the viewers to actively engage with them and the advertisement.

The PA/ 'Japa!' highlights the thematic focus of the film. It is more prominent than other linguistic modes because of the thematic function it performs, as well as attracting viewers to the locution being made. The graphological function of the exclamation mark is to further accentuate the thematic essence and seriousness of the title about the storyline and characters. The title has semantic significance. The term '*japa*' is a Nigerian slang derived from the Yoruba language. it means 'run', 'escape' or 'flee'. The term has become synonymous with the increased rate of Nigerians seeking greener pastures outside the Nigerian shores due to the perpetual economic crisis. Thus, the film resonates with the contemporary issue of mass migration in Nigeria.

The display of the leads is congruent because the visual action of the leads echoes the movie title / PA. 'Japa.' Similarly, the almost empty background embellished with wavy designs in yellow and green indicates people in the act of running to correlate with the film's subject. A visual/verbal complementary relationship is thus enacted in the visual composition.

The green colour selected energises the poster in communicating with the Nigerian populace, thereby giving the viewers a sense of belonging and identity as well as projecting the significance of the film theme and, by extension, Nollywood movies.

Visual-Verbal Ideational Intersemiotic Relations in the Advertisement Posters.

The visual modes coordinate and complement the verbal semiotic resources to express the integration of the meaning-bearing potentials of the film advertisement posters. Repetition is used in the advertisement posters to emphasise the significance of the ideas conveyed in the advertisements. In Fig. 1: *If I am President*, and Fig. 5, *Japa!*, for example, the tags representing the names of each of the cast have a semantic proposition to the image of the leads. The essence of name tagging below and above the leads in the posters is to further reveal, emphasise, or place meanings to their identity. In Fig. 3, *Tiwa's Baggage*, visual-verbal

reiteration is realised through the word baggage/ PA and the visual image of the baggage. Also, the word 'Tiwa's' in the PA is repeated in a partly shown or subjective representation of the carrier of the baggage as being her possession, which connotes a burden or negativity experienced by her.

Synonymous relationships are employed in the advertisement posters to communicate effectively the themes of the advertisements. The related semantic proposition is reflected in Fig. 1, *if I am president*, where the image of the lead in the title is synonymous with the word 'president' in the title. It is also observed in Fig. 2, *Omo Ghetto*, where the image of the lead on the left relates to the title. The tagline / PA also have a synonymous relationship with the combined visual image in the poster. In Fig. 4, *Battle on Buka Street*, the terms 'battle' and 'gbas gbos' (a Nigerian slang for dispute or heated verbal exchange between individuals) are synonymous with the facial expression of the leads.

Metonymy relation is evident in Fig. 4, *Battle on Buka Street*, pots are one of the vital utensils found in 'bukas' used for cooking. Thus, the image of the pots about the linguistic 'buka' offers a visual verbal complementary relationship.

The tool of collocation is employed by the producers of the image to support the centrality of the poster. Collocation can also be identified in Fig. 1, *if I am president*, where the visualised flags/ Comp. LoA and the PA/ 'if I am president' are collocates. National Flags are important emblems displayed in official settings, especially in political offices such as the office of the president.

The Use of Graphological Features in the Advertisement Posters

Graphology is a purely linguistic term and one of the levels of linguistic analysis. However, efforts have been made by scholars such as Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), van Leeuwen (2005), and van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001) to incorporate graphological features in the study of multimodality as verbal semiotic resources are one of the different modes important in visual communication. Graphological features are based on lexical properties such as spelling, punctuation, typography, etc. When these graphological forms are violated, implied meanings are generated. In visual communication, image producers manipulate these grammatical features to communicate their intended meanings to the target audience or viewers. The graphological features characterising the primary announcement or centrality of the movie posters are considered for analysis.

The use of upper-case lettering is predominantly employed in the advertisement posters to lay emphasis on the semantics of the word and bring to the fore for the viewers, the locution of the image. For instance, in Fig. 2, the PA / *Omo ghetto*, imprinted in graphological combinations of bold letters and unusual fonts, which is a different graphological strategy to catch attention. The words are also accompanied by what looks like a thunder strike. This stylistic effect is not only for aesthetic purposes but to emphasise the movie title. Similarly, in Fig. 5, *Japa!*, the verbal anchorage is boldly written with an exclamation mark beneath the image of the leads to help focus viewers' attention to that particular section since it is not centralised. Also, the exclamation mark is used to depict the seriousness of the film's theme about the characters. Likewise, in Fig. 3, *Tiwa's baggage*, the lettering 'Tiwa's baggage' infused in yellow colour is similar in design to the image of the baggage to reiterate the significance of the idea.

In Fig. 1, *If I am President*, Fig. 4, *Battle on Buka street*, and Fig. 6, *The CEO*, the primary announcements are imprinted in upper case and bolded in white and yellow colours to emphasise that the poster advertisements centre on the various themes, thereby increasing the films' recall.

Findings

Yuen (2004) admits that Lead and Emblem are the only obligatory elements in printed advertisements; the analysis of the advertisement posters reveals that the announcement/film title is also an obligatory element. The linguistic texts/announcements in the posters are the verbal anchorages that signal the themes of the film advertised and draw viewers to the locution and other meaning-making parameters communicated in the posters. Also, the displays of most of the images in the posters are congruent, as they also represent the thematic focus of the film advertised. This is employed to further strengthen the visual-verbal relationship in the conveyance of meaning.

The study unravelled the significance of the semiotic resource of call-and-visit information in Nollywood advertisement posters in information retrieval for prospective film viewers. Nollywood image producers sometimes employ a multi-layered advertising strategy by tactically inscribing social media handles on film posters to direct prospective audiences to the source for more information through some available social networks. For instance, *If I am the president* contain YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and provide official web addresses of the movie/ production company to inform viewers that, available information is provided in the listed social media handles and websites. These social media icons also serve to further enhance the information provided by their linguistic counterparts. Other aspects of call and visit

information mostly occupy the bottom position of the poster advertisements and they contain information on the date and the venues where the films advertised will be available for viewing by prospective viewers

There is the presence of irregular patterning of the multimodal structure of the advertisement posters. This finding is supported by Yuen's (2004, pp. 174-176) submission that there are challenges in describing print media advertisements due to the regular alteration in advertisement design or disparity in design principles. The multimodes do not follow a uniform pattern, which is due to the intended requirements of the image designers or producers. For instance, the linguistic and visual emblems do not follow a uniform pattern. In some of the advertisement posters, they are independent communicative elements or units of information, while in others, they are subsumed in other semiotic elements, basically, the enhancer. For instance, in datum 1, *If I am president*, the linguistic emblem is further reiterated in the enhancer after being employed as an independent unit of communication.

The study reveals that visual semiotic resources are preponderant in the posters over the linguistic modes and the potency of the visual modes overwhelms their linguistic counterparts. For instance, some of the advertisement posters do not contain taglines or secondary announcements. Hence, less information is given by the verbal resources while more information is provided by the visual modes to arouse viewers' curiosity to see the movie advertised. This finding supports the heavy reliance on visual resources by the image producers in the encoding of messages in visual communication. However, the co-deployment of both the visual and linguistic resources, such as gaze, lettering, posture, colour, angle, icons, etc., is significant in communicating the intended intersemiotic meanings of the advertisers to the perception of the viewers and in turn convince them to patronise the movie advertised.

Kress (2010, p.79) maintains that a semiotic mode is a socially and culturally shaped resource for meaning making. In consonance, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p.35) posit that semiotic modes are shaped by both the intrinsic characteristics and potentialities of the medium and by the requirements, histories and values of societies and their cultures. This is true of most of the poster advertisements. In communicating persuasive meanings, the semiotic resources draw attention to peculiar cultural, political, economic, and social issues in the Nigerian environment.

The findings from the study reiterate in the existing literature the significance of colour in visual communication. Colour has not only been used for aesthetic purposes to appeal to the

emotions of the viewers, but it has been employed ideationally in the advertisements to symbolise people, places, things and ideas. The meanings communicated are sometimes specific and paramount to the Nigerian socio-cultural milieu. This finding is canonical with Afolabi's (2011, p. 52) submission that "colours are the building blocks of visual communication because they have symbolic meanings associated with them which could depend on the culture and daily experience of the target audience." Also, colour performs textual roles in advertisement posters to create coherence and framing between and among various multimodes elements embedded in the advertisements.

Conclusion

The findings from the study have revealed that visual modes are predominant and primary in the meaning-making process of Nollywood advertisement posters. Due to the tendency of visual modes to be easily read than linguistic modes, Nollywood image producers preponderantly employ them as major persuasive and communicative strategies to captivate the attention of the audience. The combination of both linguistic and visual modes of signification results in the expansion of meaning in the film advertisement posters. Furthermore, the immediate context of the prospective viewers is also an important tool used by the image producers in persuading the audience to achieve their intended goals. Thus, the semiotic resources deployed in the posters about the shared knowledge of the image producers and prospective viewers, as well as the Nigerian socio-cultural context, all work concurrently to positively affect the sales and marketing of the films.

References

Primary sources

- Akindele, F. & Makinnde, T. (Directors). (2022). *Battle on Buka Street*. (Film Poster). Network and Film One Studios. http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_on_Buka_Street
- Akindele, F. & Skillz, J.J.C. (Directors). (2020). *Omo Ghetto: The Saga*. (Film Poster). Scene One Productions. <https://whatkeptmeup.com/latest-nigerian-movies/movie-review-omo-ghetto-the-saga>
- Obasi, W. B. (Director). (2018). *If I am President* (Film Poster). High-Definition Studios. <https://cinemamashed.com/download-if-i-am-president-blu-ray-and-dvd/amp>
- Osaje, I. (Director). (2024). *Japa* (Film Poster). Inkblot Productions. <https://m.imdb.com/title/tt32175239>
- Stephen, B. (Director). (2017). *Tiwa's Baggage* (Film poster). Shutter Speed projects. <https://www.google.com/amp/s/nollywoodobserver.wordpress.com/2017/05/22/movie-review-tiwas-baggage/amp/>

Secondary Sources

- Afolabi, A. (2011). *Graphic communication in Nigeria*. Lagos, Nigeria: Pioneer Publishing.
- Anurudu, S., Igboanugo, A, & Onu, A. (2023). Multimodal discourse analysis of selected Nollywood posters. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary research and publications (IJMRAP)*. 5(11) 57-63.
- Baldry, A. P. (2000). *Multimodality and multimediality in the distance learning age*. Campobasso, Italy: Palladino Editore.
- Chen, Y. (2013). *A multimodal discourse analysis of movie posters*. 2nd annual international conference on language, literature and linguistics.
- Febiranti, Y. (2013). *Multimodal discourse analysis in Indonesian print advertisements*. The 7th International Seminar on Language Policy and Planning. What are the Issues?
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1978). *Language as social semiotic*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). *An introduction to functional grammar*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Ihekwoaba, A. & Ihekwoaba, I.L. (2024). Hollywood and Nollywood posters: A comparative analysis of design principles. *The Crab: Journal of Theatre and Media Arts*. 14 (1) 224-240.
- Kress, G. (2010). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. New York: Routledge.
- Kress, G. & van Leeuwen, T. (2002). Colour as semiotic mode: notes for a grammar of colour. *Visual communication*. 1(3), 343-369.
- Kress, G. & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. (2nd ed.). London/NY: Routledge.
- Liu, J. (2013). Visual images interpretive strategies in multimodal texts. *Journal of language teaching and research*, 4(6), 1259-1263.
- Martinec, R. (1996). *Rythym in multimodal texts*. London: The London institute.
- Norris, S. (2002). *A Theoretical framework for multimodal discourse analysis presented via the analysis of identity construction of two women living in Germany*, PhD dissertation, Georgetown University, UMI.
- Nugroho, A.D. (2009). *The Generic Structure of Print Advertisement of Elizabeth Arden's INTERVENE: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis*. Kata. 1, 70-84.
- Nurudeen, M. A. (2024). A Study of Multimodal Communicative Acts in Selected Nollywood Film Advertisement Posters. *Journal of Languages & Translation*, 04 (02), 7.
- Laboratory of information and communication technologies in the teaching of foreign Languages and translation, Hassiba Benbouali University of Chlef, Algeria.
- O'Halloran, K. L. (2008). Systemic functional multimodal discourse analysis (SF-MDA): Constructing ideational meaning using language and visual imagery. *Visual Communication*, 7(4), 443-475.
- O' Toole, M. (1994). *The language of displayed art*. London: Leicester University Press.
- Royce, T. (1998). Synergy on the page: Exploring inter-semiotic complementary in page-based Multimodal text. *JASFL occasional papers 1*, (1) 25-49.
- Shahid, M., Bokil, P., & Dharmalingam, K.U (2015). *Title design is Bollywood Film posters: a semiotic Analysis*. A paper presented at international conference on research into design. Indian Institute of science. Bangalore, India.
- van Leeuwen, T. (1999). *Speech, music, sound*. London: Macmillan.
- Wingstedt, J, Brandstorm, S. and Berg, J. (2010). Narrative Music, Visual and Meaning in Film in *Visual Communication* 9. (2) 193-210.

- Yuen, C.Y. (2004). The construction of ideational meaning in print advertisements. In: O'Halloran, K. (Ed.), *Multimodal discourse analysis: Systemic-functional perspectives*. (pp. 163–195). London: Continuum.

Ethical Analysis of Selected Igbo-English Proverbs in Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children Of The Eagle*

Ifeoma E. Nwashili, PhD.

*Crowther Graduate Theological Seminary, Igbein,
Abeokuta, Ogun State.*

ifynwashili3579@gmail.com

08023846630

and

Bolanle O. Sogunro, PhD.

*Department of English,
Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo.*

bosogunro@gmail.com

08033242021

Abstract

*The paper aims to identify and analyse proverbs of Igbo origin, their socio-semantic and ethical values in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle*. The transference of sociocultural and linguistic resources of other languages into English novels is a known practice among novelists from backgrounds where English plays a second language role. *Children of the Eagle* is one of such novels that can be identified by the influence of the author's linguistic background; thus, the study investigates socio-semantic and ethical values embedded in selected proverbs of Igbo origin in the novel. The study used a discursive method, employing J. R. Firth's Contextual Theory of Meaning to explore the literal, figurative and contextual layers of meaning and Igbo ethical values rooted in each of the selected proverbs. Findings show that the proverbs are all sociocultural and ethically sensitive. The study, therefore, concludes that no proverb of Igbo origin exists without socio-semantic and ethical values geared towards the enculturation of the upcoming generations into the sociocultural and ethical norms; and critical consciousness of the present generation and adults towards the creation and consolidation of a harmonious society. It is consequently recommended that proverbs of ethical values should more often be incorporated into the linguistic usage of Igbo-English novelists and the linguistic performance of Igbo adults for didactic purposes and awareness creation towards a better and united society.*

Keywords: *Igbo proverbs, ethical values, Igbo-English novels, Igbo origin, linguistic performance, and Children of the Eagle*

Introduction

Proverb is a linguistic phenomenon found in various languages of the world, with evidence of the people's sociocultural beliefs, for ethical conduct. They inherently have a feature of tradition employed by speakers as communication tools in most cultures and languages of the world. Proverbs are simple statements that are generally known and repeated within speech communities, reflecting values and truths based on common sense or common experience of a

people (Ekpang, Pam, and Ekwok 2020, p. 2). Proverbs occur almost everywhere in Africa, in apparent contrast with other areas of the world (Finnegan, 2012, p. 379).

This study investigates Igbo proverbs rendered in English, used as ethical strategies in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle* (henceforth CotE) to portray various Igbo ethical values for moral conduct and social consolidation. Proverbs in the Igbo sociocultural worldview are tools used to accomplish various sociocultural, ethical and linguistic tasks. Igbo language, being one of the Nigerian languages, plays vital linguistic and sociocultural roles in the nation; thus, proverbs of Igbo origin are tools for moral purposes.

Igbo people constitute one of the largest populations in Nigeria, and their language is one of the three major indigenous languages. As Anokwute (1972) pointed out, Igbo people constitute one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria; their primary states are: Anambra, Abia, Imo, Ebonyi, and Enugu. Due to their mobility, they constitute between 25% - 60% of the population in some other Nigerian States, such as Delta, Rivers, Lagos, Kano, to mention a few. Although Igbo people primarily inhabit the South-eastern part of Nigeria, they have, however, spread to every nook and cranny of Nigeria, Africa and indeed the globe, thriving, building and enriching themselves and their environment (p. 1). Ajani and Onah (2016, p. 137) acknowledged that the "Igbo are a highly migratory ethnic group."

Statement of the Problem

Proverbs of Igbo origin are prominently featured in many Igbo-English novels, serving as reflections of the people's sociocultural worldview and moral practices. Often, Writers from backgrounds where English is a second language incorporate elements of their native languages and cultures into their English-language fiction. This creative integration has led to the development of a distinctive literary style that resonates with both authors and readers.

The use of Igbo proverbs in these novels fulfils several functions: stylistic enhancement, cultural identity, cultural preservation, and the communication of sociocultural and ethical values. As such, these proverbs contribute significantly to the thematic and aesthetic texture of Igbo-English fiction, underscoring the need for more empirical investigations into their various roles and implications.

Scholarly attention has been drawn to this area. For instance, Asika (2012) analysed Uchenna Nwosu's *The Rejected Stone*, illustrating how proverbs are used to narrate an African story, emphasize indigenous narrative techniques. Esimaje (2017) examined John Munonye's *The Only Son*, highlighting how proverbs convey cultural elements within fictional contexts.

Similarly, Igono and Ogundu (2018) explored proverbs as instruments for addressing socio-economic issues, like economic recession.

However, while numerous empirical studies have focused on the use of Igbo proverbs in literature, few have directly addressed the ethical values embedded within these proverbs as used in Igbo-English novels. Given the rich moral and philosophical dimensions inherent in many Igbo proverbs, this study seeks to explore their ethical implications and didactic potential, contributing to a deeper understanding of their role in contemporary African literature.

Aim of the Study

The study aims to identify and discuss the ethical implications of Igbo-English proverbs in the understudied novel. The specific objectives are:

- to identify Igbo proverbs used as an ethical strategy in the under-studied novel
- to discuss their socio-semantic implications about the novel
- to classify and discuss their ethical implications in the novel.

Literature Review

Concept of Proverbs

Igbo-English novels, like other Nigerian and African novels, are rooted in oral renditions. As stated in Olaofe (2015, p. 10), “African belief systems, attitudes, modes of worship, traditional mores, communal expeditions, and cultural affinities were transmitted through oral traditional methods, like storytelling, sometimes using the ‘call-call-and-response’ narrative technique”. Proverb as a part of a communication device is an excellent strategy for interaction among members of a speech community; as a communication tool, it replicates values and portrays truth. Medier in Ehondor (2017, p. 4) defined proverb as “a short, generally known sentence of the folk, which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation”. This acknowledges that proverbs embody timeless communication strategies, conveying ethical implications.

Proverb users may not know how and when they were composed; most proverbs are anonymous but vital in various aspects of human existence: they function as a guide to life's problems, summarizes a situation, passes a judgment, or offers a course of action, a consolation in difficulties, a guide to choice making, expresses morality, for strengthening speech, influencing or manipulating other people, rationalizing shortcomings, questioning certain

behavioral patterns, satirizing social ills, and poking fun at ridiculous situations (Ehondor 2017, p. 7). This assertion summarises the roles of proverbs in various communication aspects. Proverbs are didactic and deliberately used to promote changes in society. They are sometimes used for entertainment and political campaign speeches. This study, therefore, investigates the ethical implications of selected Igbo proverbs in CotE.

Proverbs in Igbo Cultural Perspective

Various communities have their proverbs, which portray their culture. Okoye (2016, p. 55) states that “proverbs are rhetorical strategies employed by various communities in expressing their experiences in a condensed manner”. The meanings of proverbs are contextualised within the culture where they exist and can be deciphered by shared cultural experiences. From the Igbo cultural perspective, proverbs are used to cover a wide expanse of human practices, endeavours and events obtainable in the society. The scope is so wide that they could cover themes like gender, occupations, wealth, poverty, love, marriage, fatherhood, motherhood, morality, among others (Ogudu, 2018, p. 1). Ahiazunwa and Osinachi (2022, p. 2) opined, “Proverbs are found in every culture, but their frequency and usefulness are more pronounced in Africa, especially in Igbo land”. Esimaje (2017, p. 242) maintained that “While some (Igbo) proverbs serve to caution, some advise, and some are used to emphasise or reiterate a point”.

Proverbs are essential content of most Igbo-English novels. They make the novels artistic, stylistic and aesthetic. They contextualise the fiction to its background of production. As proverbs are regarded being vital in the speech of an average Igbo adult, so they are essential in novels by Igbo authors. Emenyonu (1978, p. 158) asserted, “The effective and persuasive speaker among the Igbo is usually one who correctly and effortlessly integrates proverbs, sayings and witticisms within the mainstream of his speech”. For Igbo speakers, proverbs are vital in dialogues; to comprehend proverbs calls for wisdom. One may be present at a gathering without understanding anything said, yet the meeting is conducted in his language. This reiterates the importance of skillfulness in proverbs as a speech strategy; likewise, Igbo proverbs in English fiction demand dexterity; their translation into English does not make for easy comprehension. The missing gap in these studies is adequate attention to context meaning. In proverbial language, it is often unclear how meanings should be interpreted. As a result, comprehension typically depends on either cultural familiarity or contextual clues. This study, therefore, undertakes to identify the socio-semantic implications of the ethical values of these proverbs to aid adequate comprehension.

Ethical Strategy

Ethical strategy is derived from the word "ethics", which, according to Mahapatra and Paliwal (2018, p. 4), in Latin is "ethic us" and in Greek is "ethikos" has come from the word ethos, meaning characters or manners". They went ahead to defined ethical strategy in line with Corporate World, as "frameworks and actions organizations use to ensure their activities are ethical, legal, and aligned with values, promoting a culture of integrity and responsible behavior". As stated by Madmarova, Rozykova, Abytova, Imasheva, Kadyrova, Murzakulova, Kydykeeva, Aitieva, Surkeeva & Abdullaeva

It is ethics that makes it possible to highlight the moral values of the people, which are passed on from generation to generation. Absolutely all ethical values are reflected through the language of the people, which conveys them in their proverbs, sayings, phraseological units, and catchphrases". This is to say that the proverbs constitute the ethical values of a people (2021, p. 1).

So, ethical strategy in this study refers to the cultural principles and procedures that govern what is regarded morally right and wrong, good and bad, or just and unjust in Igbo social conduct. It encompasses the study of moral values, such as fairness, justice, honesty, wisdom and integrity, among others; it helps individuals and societies decide how to act in ways that respect the dignity and rights of others. Proverbs as ethical strategies in this study are the linguistic frameworks and expressions of cultural values used by Igbo society to ensure levels of moral conduct among its people, to promote consciousness of ethical matters and encourage critical thinking about moral choices.

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on J. R. Firth's Contextual theory of meaning (CTM), developed through 1890–1960. Firth was a British linguist who is best known for his work on the contextual theory of meaning, which emphasises the importance of context in understanding the meaning of words and expressions. The theory was developed in opposition to the then-dominant structuralist approaches, which focused on formal and abstract structures of language without considering the context of meaning language is used for (Kaiwe, 2027, p. 1).

Context of meaning is chosen as an anchor for this study because it is apt in literary texts written in a second language, like Igbo-English texts and their proverbs. Zhu and Han (2010, p. 1) opined, "It is possible for people to read and understand a text, using some principles that are labelled as 'local interpretation'. The meaning of 'local' is inclusive of features within and

outside the text”. This assertion foregrounds not only the importance of context in interaction but also its efficacy in use as a theory. J. R. Firth’s notion of social contexts evolves the ‘context of situation’ as conspicuous in his theory (Firth, 1935, p. 37). According to Osuchukwu (2022, p. 1), “the complete meaning of a word is usually contextual. This means that beyond the literal or lexical meaning of every word is contextual meaning. The context in which a word is found and used determines and influences its meaning”. These assertions portray the fact that the meaning of an expression is determined by the context or situation in which it is uttered. Being that proverb as a witty saying and culture-bound, their meanings are beyond literal; they are rather determined by society and culture than the meanings of the constituent words. Thus, CTM is apt for this study.

The theory is built on these central ideas:

Meaning is ‘context-dependent’; meaning cannot be separated from its context. The meaning of an utterance is not fixed, but tied to the social context.

Context of Situation: Situation shapes meaning; the environment, social circumstances, and purpose of communication determine meaning; a word like "bank" could have multiple meanings (a financial institution, side of a river, storage).

The Role of Use: Meaning is determined by how words are used in specific communicative situations; a word is known by the company it keeps, the collocational patterns of words.

Function of Language in Communication: Language is fundamentally about communication; words are tools for expressing intentions, actions, and relationships. The function of language focuses on the conveyance of pragmatic intentions.

Holistic Understanding of Meaning: To fully understand a word or phrase, one must consider the entire context of its use. This includes the broader situation, the speaker's purpose, and the speaker’s intentions.

Importance of Culture and Social Context: The meanings of words and expressions are not universal but are socially and culturally specific; a word or phrase might be understood differently in different social groups based on shared norms, practices, and experiences.

Concluding these assumptions, Chapman & Routledge observe that Firth saw language as “a set of events which speakers uttered; a mode of action, a way of ‘doing things’, therefore, linguists should focus on speech events themselves” (2005, p. 80). While Olanrewaju

(2000, p. 43) sums up the assumption of the theory by looking at meaning as “... a serial contextualisation of our facts within contexts, each one being a function, an organ of a bigger context and all contexts finding a place in what may be called the context of culture”.

This study is based on the assumptions, which center on the ‘Function of Language in Communication, which has to do with the common ground on which language is used as a means of communication and meaning making; and the ‘importance of Culture and Social Context’, which relies on the role of culture and society in shaping meanings. Being that the meanings of proverbs can either be universally comprehended or socio-culturally specific, the study hinges on these two assumptions for the interpretation of the Igbo-English proverbs based on shared norms, practices, and experiences to analyse their ethical values.

This analytical process agrees with Esimaje’s assertion that, “most proverbs have at least two levels of meaning; literal and figurative, and the ability to comprehend both levels of meaning is productive. The meaning of an unfamiliar proverb can be constructed through the linguistic input, at the literal level. But at the figurative level, interpretation of an unfamiliar proverb is impossible except it roughly means the same thing as its component words” (2017, p. 223). Then there is the contextual level that has to do with the cultural implications, where meaning is interpreted based on sociocultural norms.

Methodology

Thirty-eight proverbs of Igbo origin were identified in *CotE*; twelve (12) were selected for discussion in this study. Each proverb was evaluated using three meaning levels: literal, figurative and contextual. The literal level discussed the surface meaning of each proverb using the meanings of individual word components. The figurative level revealed the metaphoric meaning of each proverb, not individual word meanings, but a deep meaning level. The literal and figurative meanings are denotative and connotative, respectively. At the contextual level, meaning is assigned to the Igbo proverbs in agreement with Firth’s contextual theory, which assumes that meaning is influenced by the context of the participants, their verbal and non-verbal actions and other relevant objects of the situation. The proverbs are numbered cases 1 to 12, as used in the novel; their pages and Igbo (source text) forms are presented for logicity, flow of thought and imagination

Discussion

Proverbs on Responsibility

In Igbo culture, responsibility (inwe-oke-n'oru) is a virtue. It involves being accountable for one's actions, fulfilling duties to family, community and the spiritual world, and taking care of what one has created: children, work, promises, or social roles. Responsibility is seen as man's civil duty that brings freedom in Igbo society and Africa (Onebunne and Alike, 2020, p. 124). Below are Igbo proverbs on ethics of responsibility.

Case 1

The narrator tells how the Eagle woman's children visited home and at breakfast, remember how they used to watch their mother prepare breakfast as a special meal, which they learnt and practised. "...Umuga people say that when **mother goat eats grass, her young watches her mouth**" (p.52).

Source Text

Nné éwù na-átà áhìhĩa, nwa ya na-èlé ya ánya n'ònu

Literal

The young goat closely observes the mother as she eats grass.

Figurative

Children learn by watching their parents or elders; they tend to imitate what they see.

Contextual

Igbo culture in this proverb portrays parents and elders' responsibility to behave well before younger ones.

Case 2

Ogonna narrates how her husband abandons his duty as a husband and a father, unlike her father, who was always responsible for such roles. "Umuga people say that **it is only the grasshopper produces children and abandons them to the grass.**" (p.309)

Source text

Náni ùkpàlà na-ámụ ụmụ hàpụ ha n'òhĩa

Literal

Grasshoppers lay eggs, have offspring and abandon them in the grass.

Figurative

Parents are expected to show care and responsibility for their children.

Contextual

Igbo culture disapproves of parents who neglect their children or refuse to care for them; raising children is a sacred responsibility of parents, extended family and community.

Case 3

Obioma narrates her past mistakes that led her to become pregnant while in secondary school. The proverb shows that she was responsible for her calamity: “In these platitudes, greed, stubbornness, inordinate pleasure, and premarital sex were roundly condemned... **It is the child that plays with fire that gets his fingers burnt.**” (p. 255)

Source Text

Nwa jí ọkụ egwu egwu kà-ókú na-ére

Literal

Any child who plays with fire gets injured.

Figurative

Individuals are responsible for their actions, especially when they act against advice.

Contextual

In Igbo culture, when you ignore elders' guidance, act recklessly or stubbornly, you bear the consequences alone.

From the discussions above, responsibility is a virtue that every Igbo person must possess. This ethical system emphasises duties individuals owe themselves, their families, their community and their ancestors (OSSAI 2020, p. 2440)

Proverbs on Patience (Ndidi)

Patience (ndidi) in Igbo cultural ethics is a core moral value that touches every part of life: family, community, success, conflict, and even spiritual beliefs. The Igbo culture has proverbs that portray patience as an ethical value, such as discussed below:

Case 4

Ogonna tells Nnenna of her experiences with her husband, who neglected his manly duties. She encourages herself to be patient using the proverb. “If a bad marriage is my lot, then I

should school my mind to do all that is necessary... **The harassed bedbug consoled her children with the comforting words that whatever is hot will be cold.**” (p. 84)

Source Text

Chìnchì sịrì ụmụ ya nọọ jí, na ihè dị oku gēmèsịa jó óyị.

Literal

Heat cools down with time.

Figurative

Life troubles are never permanent; one should not give up easily.

Contextual

It reflects a cultural mindset that sees life’s troubles as temporary and encourages people to bear suffering with courage and calmness.

Case 5

The Master of Ceremonies on the Obuofo day tells people to make noises about food to keep faith and hope alive, because there will be food for them. **“People do not die from hunger when there is hope that their hunger will be assuage.”** (p. 335)

Source Text

Ágụ à naghị agùgbu àfò nwere nchekùbé

Literal

People can endure hunger as long as they believe that food is coming.

Figurative

When one is in distress, the mind stays strong if it believes in a solution.

Contextual

The proverb teaches that mental and emotional strength drawn from patience and hope helps people survive tough times.

Case 6

Eagle woman advises her daughters not to get married during the Nigeria-Biafra war because no one knows what the outcome will be. She wants them to be patient and hopeful. “Everything is so uncertain, **“tomorrow is pregnant and no one knows what it will give birth to.”** (p.302)

Source Text

Échi dì ìmè, ò dighị onye màrà ihe ó gà-àmụ

Literal

The next day's expectations are uncertain.

Figurative

The future is unknown, no matter how promising things may look.

Contextual

One might start a venture, a relationship, or a political move with high hopes, but only time will reveal the outcome.

In Igbo culture, patience (ndidi) is a highly regarded ethical value. It reflects wisdom, self-control, hope, and emotional maturity. The Igbo believe that good things take time, and rushing often leads to mistakes or misfortune.

Proverbs on Self-Control (ìchịkwa onwe)

Self-control (ìchịkwa onwe) represents the ability to restrain one's desires, emotions, impulses, and actions to maintain social harmony, personal integrity, and spiritual balance. It is a core ethical value deeply embedded in Igbo traditional thought and moral philosophy (Iroegbu 1994). This is expressed in some Igbo proverbs as seen below

Case 7

Eagle Woman warns her daughter, Nnenna, against things she should not write in the family book she is to write. "It is only a fool who tells the world the whole truth about himself... **it is not everything the eyes see that the mouth talk about**". (p.58)

Source Text

Ó bughị ihè niile ánya hụrụ ka ọnụ na-ékpùtà

Literal

The mouth does not speak of everything the eyes see.

Figurative

People are expected to be discreet with what they notice

Contextual

This emphasises the value of discretion, wisdom, and self-control; just because one witnessed something doesn't mean they must voice it. Some things are better left unsaid.

Case 8

Eagle woman reprimands her daughter, Ogonna, who wants to get engaged to a Biafran soldier during the war and marry him after the war. "Hmm. After the war you said... who can say how many will survive the war... **is it not better for a person to watch what is watching the person?**" (p. 302)

Source Text

Ò kaghị mma ka mmádù lèèrù ànyá n'ìhè na-èlè ya?

Literal

Is it not preferable for one to look out for things that look out for them?

Figurative

People should give attention to confrontational matters.

Contextual

This proverb is deeply rooted in Igbo culture on self-awareness, vigilance, and self-control; knowing when to act, when to speak, and when to restrain oneself.

Case 9

Eagle woman reprimands her daughter, Nnenna, to be mindful of what to write in the family book. **The ears hear things and the nose smells things, but the mouth does not talk about all of them.** (page 58)

Source Text

Ntị na-ànyị ìhè niile, ímị na-ékùrù ìhè niile, mà ọnyị à naghị ékwùtéchà ha niile

Literal

Although our senses constantly gather information (hearing, smelling, observing), the mouth remains discrete.

Figurative

Not all knowledge should be shared; being loquacious can bring trouble, break trust, or escalate conflict.

Contextual

Igbo culture teaches the importance of discretion, wisdom, and most importantly, self-control, a core ethical value among the Igbo.

The proverbs discussed under self-control showcase one of Igbo cultural ethics on the expectation of personal response, especially in speech and conduct when dealing with challenging situations.

Proverbs on Wisdom (amamihe)

Wisdom (amamihe) is one of the core ethical values in Igbo philosophy and worldview. It goes far beyond just intelligence or cleverness; it is the foundation of right living, good judgment, and harmonious social conduct. The importance of wisdom, an Igbo ethical value, is seen in proverbs (Isidienu n.d., p. 3).

Case 10

Ogonna wonders concerning the family book Nnenna is about to write.” Will she expose the grey and painful areas of our family history? **The mouth in its wisdom does not give the legs away by voicing the secrets that the eye sees.”** (p. 89)

Source Text

Ọnụ nwere amamihe anaghị ekwúchá ebe ụkwú gara nke anya hụrụ

Literal

The mouth should be wise enough to stay silent about things the eyes observe, to protect the legs from troubles.

Figurative

Knowing when to speak and when to stay silent is a mark of wisdom.

Contextual

In Igbo culture, proverbs of wisdom encapsulate control and often mind social behaviour, discretion, survival and the right use of words to avoid problems.

Case 11

Nnenna advises her sister not to hold firm on a toxic marriage, that there might be better opportunities. “Nnenna understands that there are facts of life that only an individual has to discover for himself/herself... **it is after a woman has tasted two marriages that she is in a position to say which is better.”** (p.125)

Source Text

Nwányi lụọ di abụọ ọ maara nke ka mma

Literal

After experiencing two marriages, a woman knows which one was better.

Figurative

One can truly evaluate or compare two situations after experiencing both.

Contextual

It portrays Igbo culture where women are encouraged to keep their marriages. It is a subtle reminder for women to appreciate what they have and a caution to weigh decisions wisely.

Case 12

Eagle Woman narrates to her daughters an experience that almost ruined her marriage when they were living in the town; as a total stranger, she had to apply wisdom to save her marriage. “But my Chi was too strong for them... **A person who visits a town does not know where abomination was committed.**” (p.155)

Source Text

Onyé ọbịà amaghị ebe emèrùrù àlà.

Literal

An alien in a town cannot identify places where forbidden things occurred.

Figurative

It is unwise to judge people, situations, or customs without understanding their history.

Contextual

In Igbo culture, some truths are not spoken openly. Elders, priests, and those who have lived through events carry the memory of past "abominations" (forbidden or shameful acts). A visitor lacks that depth of insight. Wisdom respects that gap.

The dissuasions on proverbs of wisdom portray Igbo culture as a way to pass across and recognise wisdom. In essence, wisdom in Igbo ethics is about living thoughtfully and responsibly. The twelve cases of proverbs discussed above portray four Igbo ethical values conspicuous in *CotE*. Although the proverbs were translated into English in the novel, their Igbo origin is never in doubt.

Summary of Findings

From the three stated objectives above, the following findings are made.

In line with the first objective, thirty-eight proverbs of Igbo origin were identified out of forty-five proverbs used in the novel. These proverbs are used to portray various Igbo ethical roles among the characters in the novel. The novelist used them to depict the fact that every Igbo proverb is geared towards moral values.

In line with the second objective, the proverbs are recognised to be socio-semantically inferred. There are three levels of meaning inferred from the proverbs: literal, meaning of words that make up the proverb; figurative, deeper or metaphorical meaning; and contextual, which is culture-specific. At the contextual level, meanings are assigned according to the factors of context, the participants, and their verbal and non-verbal actions, and contribute to the meanings. These levels of meaning enable even non-Igbo speakers to understand the proverbs.

In line with the last objective, there are four classifications of Igbo ethical values depicted by the selected proverbs: responsibility, patience, self-control and wisdom. Under each of these classes, three of the proverbs were discussed. Findings show that all the Igbo proverbs used in the novel portray various Igbo ethical values drawn from Igbo socio-cultural and religious world views. Proverbs are seen as tools for correcting various social issues and stability of moral lifestyle in Igbo society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As a window to Igbo ethical values, selected Igbo-English proverbs from the studied novel are discussed under their literal, figurative, and contextual meanings; in the light of the Igbo socio-cultural world view and beliefs that gave rise to them. This revealed the rich sociocultural meaning placed on the proverbs. It is therefore concluded that Igbo proverbs are associated with rich ethical values with which children are brought up as well-behaved and patriotic people in the society, and adults are also encouraged to be responsible and productive members of their society. Based on these, it is recommended that:

Modern parents should understand the ethical implications of Igbo proverbs and use them for their children's upbringing.

Younger generations should begin to pay attention to proverbs, learn and use them for their ethical benefits.

Adults should communicate more in proverbs to make their messages authentic and discussions enriched with cultural values.

References

- Ahiazunwa, S. C. and Osinachi, C. I. (2022). A comparative study of English and Igbo proverbs with reference to their world views: *International Journal of African Society, Cultures and Traditions*, Vol 8, No.1,
- Anokwute, A. (1972). *Igbos, a People Thriving Amidst Adversity: Who are the Igbos?* Retrieved, 15th. October, 2023, from <https://www.academia.edu/35944675/>
- Asika, I. E. (2012). Telling the African Side of the Story: Proverb as a Crucial Element in Uchenna Nwosu's *The Rejected Stone*. *Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities / Vol. 13* No. 1. PP. 14 - 33
- Chapman, S. & Routledge, P. (2005). *Key thinkers in linguistics and the philosophy of language*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, Pp. 80-86.
- Ehondor, B. (2017). The concept of proverbs as a theoretical category in communication in Africa. An MSc. Term Paper. Retrieved 14th. October 2023, from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321698840/link/5a2b9de045851552ae7aa4e3/>
- Ekpang, J., Pam, J., and Ekwok, L. (2020). Proverbs as rhetorical tools in ESL contexts. *Journal of Languages, Linguistics and Literary Studies (JOLLS)* Vol. 9. No. 5.
- Emenyonu, E. N. (1978). *The Rise of the Igbo Novel*. Ibadan: Oxford University P.
- Esimaje, A. U. (2017). Proverbs in Context: A Study of John Munonye's *The Only Son*. Retrieved, 12th. June, 2023, from <https://www.unn.edu.ng/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/>
- Finnegan, R. (2012). *Oral Literature in Africa*. Cambridge, UK: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0025>
- Igono, J. & Ogundu, U. O (2018). Translation of Selected Igbo Proverbs and Idiomatic Expressions: *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and Translation*. Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 1-8. Doi: 10.11648/j.ijalt.20180401.11
- Iroegbu, P. (1994). *Enwisdomization and African Philosophy*. Owerri: International University Press.
- Isidien, I. (n. d). Philosophy of Igbo Proverbs: The Logic, Ethics and Esthetics in Igbo Culture. Retrieved, 11th. May, 2025 from <https://scispace.com/pdf/d2h28ii2w3.pdf>
- Kaiwei, Y. (2017). A comparison between two leading linguistic figures: Bloomfield and Firth. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*. Volume 27. DOI:[10.2991/icmess-17.2017.108](https://doi.org/10.2991/icmess-17.2017.108)
- Madmarova, G., Rozykova, M., Abytova, G., Imasheva, G., Kadyrova, G., Murzakulova, K., Kydykeeva, A., Aitieva, S., Surkeeva, D. & Abdullaeva, Z. (2021). Reflection of people's ethical ideas in proverbs and sayings. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, **11**, 440-447. doi: [10.4236/ojml.2021.113033](https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2021.113033).
- Mahapatra, S. & Paliwal, M. (2018). *Ethical Strategies in the Corporate World*. Retrieved, 9th. April, 2025 from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322233908>
- Olaofe, I. A. (2015). *An introduction to literature and literary criticism*. Lagos: National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)
- Olanrewaju, D. O. (2000). Introductory semantics. In Adeyemi O. Babajide (Ed.) *Studies in English Language*: (pp. 43 -59). Ibadan: Enicrownfit Publishers.
- Onebunne, J. I., & Alike, M. N. (). Igwebuike, individual freedom and responsibility in African ethics. *An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 6 No.9, ISSN: 2488-9210 (P) 2504-9038 (E).
- Zhu, J. and Han, L. (2010). The Application of Context Theory in English Teaching of Reading. *English Language Teaching*. Vol. 3 No. 1. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1081492.pdf>

The Dynamics of Tradition and Complexity in Ahmed Yerima's *Ajidewe*

Akinwumi Olutola Olafisayo

*Federal University Oye-Ekiti,
Ekiti State, Nigeria.*

Iroegbu Obinna Inns

*Federal University Oye-Ekiti,
Ekiti State, Nigeria.*

and

Odor Marycynthia Ijeoma

*Federal University Oye-Ekiti,
Ekiti State, Nigeria.*

Abstract

Ahmed Yerima's Ajidewe delve into the complexities of tradition and its motivating factors in Nigerian societies. The play explores the idea of cultural heritage and how it affects the lives of individuals within their immediate communities. Through the use of various literary techniques, Yerima highlights the intricacies involved in preserving tradition, which can sometimes be challenging and even oppressive. This paper will examine the motivations behind the traditions depicted in Yerima's Ajidewe and explore how it impacts the characters and their actions. Cultural criticism and cultural materialism theories are the foundations of the theory. Traditions are not faultless. These traditions' complexity, meanwhile, has not received enough research. Unquestionably, some traditions have the potential to be considered barbaric because they violate people's rights and occasionally sacrifice human lives for their culture. Whether a life is lost or not, it's vital to realise that a lot is occurring when tradition is being upheld. It also challenges prevailing cultural narratives and looks at complex facts and assumptions buried in people's traditions. It emphasises what a given culture considers to be traditional or valuable qualities.

Keywords: *motivating factors, Nigerian societies, cultural heritage, literary techniques, cultural criticism.*

Introduction

Every community, group, or thing has developed with certain identities or ways of living, which are frequently referred to as culture. For culture to be genuinely a comprehensive way of life, it must adhere to a predetermined standard or code of behaviour that is ingrained in the customs, traditions, values, and norms of the society. This distinguishes African societies and is a highly valued feature because of its significant contributions to improving individuals and communities. That is, there is an acceptable code of behaviour every member of the community is expected to exhibit; the requirement in traditional cultures is conduct that fosters the growth

and development of the society. So, African societies pass traditions and practices down orally from one generation to the next (Green, 1997). This distinguishes one group of people from the others and makes them unique. Every group of people has its distinctive customs. Any deviation or waywardness is always punished by isolating the offender, and in the most severe circumstances, it results in the death penalty.

A people's beliefs, settlement patterns, greetings, language, artistic history, and behavioural patterns are all included in their traditions and customs. The belief that most African nations' traditions are intrinsically sacred, as opposed to secular, and that various religious forms and symbols surround them is one of their defining characteristics. This explains why most Nigerians, whether they reside in urban areas or the diaspora, go back to their homes to connect with their communities, especially around traditional holidays.

Tradition and custom have various definitions, just like many other generic concepts, and academics do not generally agree on which definition is the most accurate. The idea encompasses several interconnected notions, with the overarching notion being that tradition refers to practices, objects, or beliefs that were carried out or believed in the past, had their origins there, and were then passed down through time by being taught by one generation to the next (Green 1997). Swidler et al (2015) assert that tradition can also refer to prehistoric ideas or practices that have existed for ages but whose origins are forgotten or enigmatic. Traditions were initially transmitted verbally, without the necessity for a written system. Alliteration and rhyme are two poetic elements that can help in this process. The stories that have been saved in this way are also referred to as tradition or as a component of an oral tradition. Nonetheless, even these customs are thought to have started (or been "created" by humans) at some point.

Traditions are frequently assumed to be long-standing, unchangeable, and extremely significant, even if they may occasionally be considerably less "natural" than is assumed. For a practice, belief, or thing to be considered traditional, it is assumed that at least two transmissions must occur over three generations (Gideons, 2003). Traditions can be modified to meet the demands of the time, and the modifications can become accepted as an intrinsic part of the original tradition.

Similar to (Gideons, 2003), Green (1997) stressed that some traditions were consciously constructed for a variety of purposes, typically to emphasise or enhance the relevance of a particular institution.

Literature Review

Several scholars have examined literature relevant to the concept of traditions and its intricacies. Guerra, L. A. (2015) examines the ideas of Alasdair MacIntyre, Richard Rorty, and Gianni Vattimo, three prominent philosophers, in an article on the concept of tradition. Although each philosopher has a different perspective on the matter, the author claims that all three emphasise how important tradition is for guiding our perception of the present. A helpful summary of the main discussions and arguments on this subject is provided in the article. Furthermore, Ritschl, A. (2016) explores the concept of living tradition, drawing on New Testament theology and Christian philosophy. According to the author, tradition is responsive to changing circumstances and is not static but rather dynamic. The book thoroughly investigates the dynamics and antecedents of tradition in the Christian setting.

In an article, Rahman, M. M. (2013), examines the relationship between the Sufi tradition and modernity. The author asserts that rather than being in opposition to modernity, the Sufi tradition offers a way to harmonise contemporary with tradition. This article thoroughly investigates the Sufi tradition using various primary and secondary sources. The influence of the Soviet Union on religious tradition and practice in the area is examined in Swidler, L. E., & Mojzes, P. (Eds.). (2015). The editors contend that despite efforts to repress religion, the Soviet Union fostered religious traditions by requiring them to adjust and change in response to the country's shifting environment. The book offers a distinctive viewpoint on how tradition influences social and political structures.

Tradition as a Driving Force: Reviewing Literature on Yoruba Culture and Beliefs

The breadth of Akintoye's work is its greatest asset. The author dives deeply into Yoruba history, providing a wealth of information for the reader. The narrative is further enhanced and enriched by the use of sources and oral traditions. In the end, the book considerably advances our knowledge of Yoruba civilisation and culture.

There are several shortcomings in Akintoye's work, nevertheless. The book's chapters are lengthy and cover a lot of information, making them complicated to understand fully. Although the author considers that foreign influences significantly impacted Yoruba history, there isn't much discussion of how these influences affected Yoruba culture and society. The work of Akintoye demonstrates significant background information that is crucial for the current research. Many of the customs that are shown in Yerima's plays have their roots and importance clarified by the author's thorough study of Yoruba culture. Anyone interested in Yoruba culture

and the history of West Africa should study Akintoye's "A History of the Yoruba People." Although it may have certain flaws, the work's thoroughness and contribution to the literature on Yoruba civilisation make it an invaluable tool for both scholars and students.

Furthermore, Adewale and Odejinmi (2013) explore the Yoruba cosmology and traditional beliefs, highlighting their significance in shaping cultural practices, moral values, and social order. The authors employ a philosophical lens to analyse the cultural tenets, highlight their underlying principles, and show how they shape the Yoruba way of life. They cite numerous Yoruba intellectuals, including Wande Abimbola, who has significantly advanced the study of Yoruba religion and culture. The paper's thorough examination of Yoruba culture, which looks at numerous parts of the culture in depth, is one of its strong points. The authors highlight the interaction between the spiritual and physical worlds to create a broader knowledge of Yoruba cosmology. Additionally, they look at the ethical principles that guide Yoruba society, including respect, generosity, and communalism. The writers demonstrate how these ideals are represented in the language, proverbs, and music of the Yoruba people. Another strength of the paper is the authors' ability to present the Yoruba culture through a philosophical lens. They emphasise the fundamental ideas behind numerous customs and beliefs, demonstrating how they add to the cohesion of Yoruba culture as a whole.

Toyin Falola's essay titled "Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies" (1998) also thoroughly analyses the origins and circumstances surrounding violence in Nigeria. The complicated interaction between religious politics and secular ideas is examined in this essay, along with how it has influenced the rise of violence in Nigeria throughout time. Falola uses a historical and analytical methodology for the investigation. To offer an exhaustive investigation of the several causes that have resulted in the rise in violence in Nigeria, he investigates both primary and secondary sources, including official records, the media, and academic publications. The paper's strength is its thorough evaluation of the contextual and historical aspects of the recent surge in violence in Nigeria. Falola looks at how colonialism, the Nigerian Civil War, the rise of Islamic extremism, economic disparity, corruption, and other factors have affected Nigerian society. Through his investigation, Falola gives readers a comprehensive knowledge of the intricate variables that have contributed to the escalation of violence in Nigeria through his investigation. The paper does, however, have significant drawbacks. The fact that the study nearly solely discusses the killing in northern Nigeria is one of its biggest shortcomings. Even though the Niger Delta has gone through some

of the most horrific violence in Nigeria, the report fails to adequately discuss the severe bloodshed that also took place there.

The essay by Awolalu, "Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites," offers a thorough investigation of Yoruba traditional religious beliefs and rituals about sacrifices. Reading the paper's analysis on the role of corruption and religious politics in Nigerian society may help readers better understand some of the motivations behind the characters' actions and viewpoints. One strength of Awolalu's paper is its comprehensive and detailed analysis of Yoruba sacrificial rites. The many sacrifices, their symbolic significance, and the varied roles played by the participants are all thoroughly explained by him. Awolalu also highlights the relevance of these rites as indicators of identity and community by situating them within the larger social, cultural, and historical settings of Yoruba society. The paper's emphasis on the theoretical and conceptual rather than the actual performance of Yoruba sacrificial ceremonies is one of its limitations, too. While Awolalu gives some hints as to how sacrifices are carried out in actual practice, he does not give a thorough description of the ceremonies themselves.

Nonetheless, the paper remains relevant and significant to contemporary studies of African traditional religions and their impact on literature and culture. In exploring the intricacies of Yoruba beliefs and practices related to sacrifices, Awolalu provides a framework for understanding the cultural and symbolic significance of these aspects of tradition. This framework may be applied to the analysis of works of literature, such as Ahmed Yerima's *Akudaaya* and *Ajidewe*, which draw heavily on Yoruba culture and religious practices. The paper by Falola (1998) explores the intricate Yoruba religious creation narratives. The methodology employed in this paper is qualitative research. The author utilises a thematic analysis approach to explore the Yoruba religious creation narratives. The methodology involves the selection of Yoruba creation stories and analysing them to identify recurring themes, motifs, and patterns.

Falola (1998) introduced the Yoruba religion and its belief system. The paper examines the Yoruba creation stories and their different interpretations. The author analyses the Yoruba religious worldviews by identifying the different roles that the divinities play in the creation story. The paper examines the Yoruba creation story in comparison with the biblical account of creation. With a focus on the opposing viewpoints of the two religious traditions, the author notes the similarities and discrepancies between the two creation accounts. As these stories continue to influence Yoruba people's beliefs, values, and practices now, Falola (1998) shows

how these stories are still important today. The author's capacity to offer an in-depth analysis of the Yoruba creation stories is one of this essay's merits. Falola (1998) utilises a comparative approach and highlights the unique features and differences between the Yoruba creation stories and the biblical account of creation. In this extensive and in-depth paper, the author critically analyses the thematic substance of the Yoruba creation tale. One of the paper's weaknesses is its primary focus on the Yoruba creation tale and a lack of a broader perspective on other African creation stories. The origin myths of other African societies and how they compare and contrast with those of Yoruba culture could have been the subject of a more thorough analysis. Additionally, the paper does not identify the different interpretations of Yoruba creation stories by different scholars and religious practitioners.

The paper's relevance to the current study is that it provides insights into the Yoruba religious worldviews, beliefs, and practices. The traditional beliefs and practices of the Yoruba people have significantly influenced their literature, including plays such as *Ajidewe*. The paper's analysis of the Yoruba creation story provides a broader understanding of the worldview that informs Yerima's work.

Intricacies as Motivated by Tradition in *Ajidewe*

This paper explores the intricacies presented in the selected text, *Ajidewe* and reflects present-day Nigerian society. The paper aims to gain insight into Nigerian society's complex dynamics and challenges by examining these intricacies. Specifically, we will analyse how the characters in *Ajidewe* navigate and challenge the intricacies present in present-day Nigerian society. The analysis to be carried out and will reveal the intricacies in *Ajidewe* that shed light on the complex facets of contemporary Nigerian society by closely examining the text. Various factors, including power relations, social standards, and cultural practices, shape individuals' and groups' lives. We can better grasp the nuances and complexity of modern Nigerian society by critically evaluating these subtleties.

Furthermore, this analysis allows us to explore how the characters in *Ajidewe* navigate and respond to these intricacies. We can learn more about the difficulties individuals encounter and the methods they use to negotiate the complexities of contemporary Nigerian society by looking at their behaviours, decisions, and interactions. In the end, this chapter seeks to advance knowledge of the complexities of contemporary Nigerian society as depicted in *Ajidewe*. Understanding these complexities will help us better understand the difficulties, chances, and possibilities for progress in the context of modern Nigeria.

Motivated Intricacies in *Ajidewe*

Motivated intricacies in tradition refer to the underlying reasons and complexities that drive individuals or communities to adhere to and perpetuate traditional practices, customs, or beliefs. These nuances might differ across many cultures, groups, and circumstances; thus, comprehending them necessitates a thorough investigation of the causes and elements that contribute to the maintenance and continuance of tradition.

In this book, Bruce L. Benson (2011) studies how tradition shapes social order and explains why people cling to traditional practices and standards. He argues that tradition serves as a mechanism for coordinating human behaviour and maintaining social stability. Benson's work provides valuable insights into the motivations that drive individuals and communities to uphold tradition. He highlights the importance of social norms and customary practices in fostering cooperation, resolving conflicts, and preserving cultural identity. By analysing various case studies and historical examples, Benson demonstrates how tradition can serve as a powerful force in shaping human behaviour and societal structures.

A scenario presented in *Ajidewe*, with Shamu expressing concerns about the sacrifice of innocent lives to prolong Kabiyesi's life, reflects the intricacies of tradition within the play. Shamu's statement highlights the complexities and moral dilemmas that arise from traditional practices in the play, *Ajidewe*.

Shamu: No. We are not children. We know what it means to say that Kabiyesi does not want to die. Another innocent soul must die in his place. Why? How many innocent lives must we take to prolong the life of Kabiyesi? The more we take, the longer he lives. Soon we shall have no one else to give, then he will turn on our children, then later on us. One moment, they announce Kabiyesi's death; the next moment, they say he is alive and well. In the eyes of the villagers, we who should protect them, not cage them up like fowls and chickens in a basket cage, where they can be picked up at Kabiyesi's will... (*Ajidewe*, 110)

The belief that sacrificing innocent lives can prolong Kabiyesi's life showcases the intertwining of spiritual beliefs and societal expectations. It portrays the weight placed on the preservation of the ruler's life and the lengths to which people are willing to go to ensure his survival.

The mention of innocent souls being sacrificed raises questions about the ethics and morality of such practices. It challenges the notion of sacrificing one life to save another and raises concerns about the value placed on individual lives within the community. This reflects the

tensions between tradition and human rights, as the sacrifice of innocent lives conflicts with contemporary notions of justice and equality. Shamu's questioning of the number of innocent lives that must be taken to prolong Kabiyesi's life highlights the potential consequences of such practices. It causes worry about the community's resources being depleted and the harm that might be done to its members. This picture captures the complications of tradition, where the community's welfare and safety may be jeopardised in the name of maintaining the ruler's life.

The mention of the villagers being caged up like fowls and chickens in a basket cage, subject to Kabiyesi's will, emphasises the power dynamics and control exerted by the ruler. It portrays the limitations and restrictions placed on the villagers, who should ideally be protected by their leaders. This portrayal reflects the complexities of tradition, where the authority of the ruler can sometimes lead to the oppression and subjugation of the community. Furthermore, Shamu expressing concerns about the potential consequences of Kabiyesi's actions reflects the intricacies of tradition. Shamu's statement reflects the complexities and uncertainties of destiny within the context of tradition in *Ajidewe*. The mention of destiny coming in a bowl of head, muddled, joggled, and unravelled with time highlights the belief in the unpredictable nature of fate. It portrays the idea that one's destiny unfolds gradually over time and cannot be easily controlled or manipulated.

Shamu: I wish we could pick and choose Kabiyesi, destiny comes in a bowl of head, muddled...joggled.... unravelled only with time. By the time you spend half of eighty years, we will all be gone. Including Abore. Kabiyesi remember what happened to Oba Ikudeti in this same palace.... his judgement was here and in the land of the dead. For one hundred years, he laid in this palace, neither dead nor living, as punishment from Iku himself. May your story not be a similar one (*Ajidewe*, 118)

The mention of spending half of eighty years and the potential loss of the community members, including Abore, emphasises the transient nature of life and the passing of generations. It reflects the cyclical nature of existence and the inevitability of change. This portrayal reflects the complexities of tradition, where the passing of time brings both continuity and transformation within the community.

Shamu's reference to Oba Ikudeti's punishment in the same palace serves as a cautionary tale. It highlights the potential consequences of Kabiyesi's actions and the possibility of facing judgment and punishment from the spiritual realm. This portrayal reflects the belief in the

influence of supernatural forces and the idea that actions have consequences, even beyond the physical realm. The wish for Kabiyesi's story not to be a similar one to Oba Ikudeti's reflects the desire for a different outcome and a hope for a more favourable destiny. It portrays the complexities of tradition, where individuals navigate the potential pitfalls and challenges that come with their roles and responsibilities within the community.

Additionally, the character Kabiyesi questions why Olodumare (the supreme deity in Yoruba mythology) allows human beings to kill themselves and animals to eat each other, but does not permit Kabiyesi to take his son, even by a simple mistake. He says: Kabiyesi: But Olodumare permits human beings to kill themselves, animals eat themselves. Why can I not take my son, even by a simple mistake? (*Ajidewe*, 113). The play *Ajidewe* explores the complexities of Yoruba tradition and culture, highlighting the clash between traditional beliefs and modernity. Kabiyesi's question reflects the deep-rooted belief in the Yoruba tradition that everything that happens in the world is governed by Olodumare's will. This belief system is an integral part of Yoruba culture and shapes the characters' actions and decisions throughout the play.

Kabiyesi's frustration stems from the apparent inconsistency in Olodumare's actions. He questions why Olodumare allows certain acts of violence and harm to occur, such as humans killing themselves and animals preying on each other, but does not permit him to take his son, even if it was unintentional. This dilemma highlights the moral and ethical complexities within the Yoruba tradition. The situation also represents the principles of cultural materialism, a theoretical system that investigates the connection between culture and material circumstances. In this instance, Kabiyesi's query brings up the problem of how societal material realities affect cultural ideas and practices.

Kabiyesi's desire to take his son, even by mistake, suggests a conflict between traditional values and personal desires. It illustrates the conflict between a person's agency and the limitations placed on them by cultural standards. As people negotiate their duties within the Yoruba culture while simultaneously juggling their individual aims and desires, this conflict is a reflection of the larger societal conflict between tradition and modernity.

Furthermore, the scenario highlights the complexities of moral reasoning within the Yoruba tradition. Kabiyesi questions the moral justification behind Olodumare's actions, seeking to understand the underlying principles that govern the divine will. This reflects the Yoruba belief in the importance of moral reasoning and the constant negotiation between individual agency and divine authority.

Intricacies in present-day Nigerian society as portrayed in *Ajidewe*

The complexities of contemporary Nigerian society as depicted in literary works include the intricate and multifaceted facets of the nation's social, political, and cultural terrain. Nigerian literature is an effective tool for examining and critiquing many aspects of Nigerian society and for illuminating the struggles, aspirations, and experiences of its citizens. A variety of topics and challenges pertinent to modern-day Nigeria are frequently covered in Nigerian literature. The effects of colonialism and the war for independence, nation-building difficulties, political corruption, racial and religious tensions, gender injustice, economic inequities, and the experiences of ordinary Nigerians are among the topics that are explored by writers. These themes reflect the intricate tapestry of Nigerian society and provide a platform for critical engagement and social commentary.

Moreover, Nigerian writers employ various literary techniques and narrative strategies to capture the intricacies of their society. They may draw on oral storytelling traditions, incorporate local languages and dialects, and experiment with different narrative structures and styles. These choices not only reflect the diversity and richness of Nigerian culture but also contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities of present-day Nigeria, as explained by Richard Bourne. Shamu's statement about Kabiyesi joining his ancestors and the ancestors being tired of waiting reflects the belief in ancestral reverence and the importance of ancestral connections within Nigerian society. Ancestral veneration is a significant aspect of Nigerian culture, where ancestors are believed to play a role in guiding and influencing the lives of their descendants. This portrayal reflects the continued importance of ancestral traditions and beliefs in present-day Nigeria.

Shamu: No. Kabiyesi must join his fathers who have been waiting forever. Otun say something that will make Kabiyesi know that the ancestors are tired of waiting for him in the land beyond. Even the living wants a change.

Otun: what can I say? Kabiyesi is king over life and death, now he has chosen life. we have no choice in this matter. we must agree. (*Ajidewe*, 109)

The mention of the living wanting a change suggests a desire for transformation and progress within the community. This resonates with the aspirations for change and development that exist within present-day Nigeria. It reflects the recognition of the need for societal advancements and the desire to move beyond stagnant or oppressive systems. Otun's acknowledgement of Kabiyesi's power over life and death and the necessity of agreeing with

his choice reflect the hierarchical structures and authority that exist within Nigerian society. It reflects the complexities of power dynamics and the influence of traditional leaders in decision-making processes. This portrayal reflects the ongoing discussions and challenges around governance, leadership, and the balance of power within present-day Nigeria.

Furthermore, Yerima uses Adifala to reflect the intricacies of tradition and how they can resonate with certain aspects of present-day Nigerian society. Yerima portrays this in the excerpt below;

Adifala: Deadly Consequences Kabiyesi. Ifa wants us to be more careful. many will die, some may even go mad with their minds twisted, Kabiyesi Olodumare is set to wash the dirty pots clean.

Kabiyesi: What is new in that? Olodumare always gives man too much Freedom to rewrite his destiny, then just when one is begging to soak himself in the new pleasures of life. He becomes angry and tries to wash the plate clean. let him, I am not worried. are you? if Olodumare now wants to be a dishwasher, let him. The Osun River has so much water. men use their pots, and they get dirty, they must be washed. And yet life does not stop there, does it? Men must die for the world to grow. My father had to go, so that I can sit on his throne. Do you understand me my people? (*Ajidewe*, 116)

Firstly, the mention of the Osun River and the need to wash dirty pots reflects the importance of cleanliness and purification in Nigerian culture. In modern Nigeria, rituals involving water, such as bathing and cleansing, are widespread and cleanliness is highly prized. This illustrates the continuing importance of conventional notions and methods of spiritual and physical purification.

A second point raised by the adage "Men must die for the world to grow" is the cyclical nature of life and death. This demonstrates the idea that generations are linked and that life is continuous. There is an understanding of the value of respecting ancestors and their role in directing and affecting the lives of their offspring in modern-day Nigeria. This portrayal reflects the continued importance of ancestral traditions and beliefs in present-day Nigeria.

In addition, the reference to the character's father needing to leave for them to take his throne emphasises succession and the transfer of power from one generation to the next. The problem of succession and leadership changes is a key element of societal and political dynamics in

modern Nigeria. This portrayal reflects the complexities of power dynamics and the influence of traditional leaders in decision-making processes. It also reflects the ongoing discussions and challenges around governance, leadership, and the balance of power within present-day Nigeria.

Moreover, the statement made by Kabiyesi highlights several themes that are relevant to contemporary Nigeria. Kabiyesi's proclamation of his kingship and the assertion that nothing can be denied to him reflect the power dynamics and hierarchical structures that exist within Nigerian society. It exhibits the power of conventional leaders and the faith in their legitimacy and decision-making skills. Traditional chieftains continue to exercise considerable power and participate in administration and decision-making in modern-day Nigeria.

Kabiyesi: This very minute, I am king. He who says what can I do, will see what I can do before his very eyes. I am king, and nothing can be denied me or my person. I have said what I want and I must get it. life is sweet and I must live it. Whether mere mortals or even the deities forbid my desire (*Ajidewe*, 116)

The statement also reflects the desire for personal fulfilment and the pursuit of one's desires, even in the face of opposition. This is in line with the modern Nigerian society's individualistic ambitions and pursuit of pleasure and success. It expresses the desire to lead a fulfilling life and the conviction in the value of self-determination.

Furthermore, mentioning mortals and deities forbidding Kabiyesi's desire highlights the tension between tradition and personal agency. It reflects the complexities of navigating societal expectations and personal desires within the context of tradition. In modern Nigeria, people frequently struggle to balance upholding cultural traditions and achieving their objectives. Traditional chieftains continue to exercise considerable power and participate in administration and decision-making in modern-day Nigeria.

Iya Mopo: He cannot die that easily. He tied his life to too many threads of different gods. Oba Durigbade. I hope you know that he is an Abiku? My mother treated his case when he was young. seven times he was born and seven times did he die. They had to beg him by making him wear a crown for the third year, until he decided to stay. Now that he has tasted life, like all greedy men, he does not want to die. we are fed up with him (*Ajidewe*, 135)

The mention of Kabiyesi's desire to stay alive after tasting life reflects the human desire for longevity and the fear of death. This resonates with the aspirations for a long and fulfilling life that exist within present-day Nigeria. It reflects the universal human desire to cling to life and the reluctance to face mortality. The community's frustration towards Kabiyesi's refusal to die reflects the tensions that can arise within traditional systems. It portrays the challenges and conflicts that can emerge when traditional leaders hold onto power beyond what is deemed acceptable or beneficial for the community. This reflects elements of cultural criticism, as it questions the actions and motivations of those in positions of authority.

Furthermore, the statement about being fed up with Kabiyesi reflects the dissatisfaction and disillusionment that can arise when leaders fail to meet the expectations of their community. It reflects the desire for accountable leadership and the need for leaders to prioritise the well-being and interests of the community. This criticism of Kabiyesi's greed and refusal to die reflects a critique of power dynamics and the potential abuses that can occur within traditional systems.

Additionally, Asabi questions whether the person they are discussing is the daughter of the Iyalode, a prominent female leader in the community. This suggests that lineage and social status are essential to traditional Nigerian society. The mention of the Iyalode indicates the influence of matriarchal figures and the significance of family ties.

Asabi: Is that not the Iyalode's daughter?

Kabiyesi: Yes. you came to see me, not her.

Asabi: I thought she is betrothed to Aremo

Kabiyesi: She is betrothed to a man, is she not? I am one, am I not?

Tilewa: Is there no shame here? Father taking over the wife to be of his son? (*Ajidewe*, 152)

Kabiyesi confirms that the person in question is indeed the Iyalode's daughter, emphasizing that Asabi has come to see him, not her. This exchange highlights the hierarchical structure of Nigerian society, where the authority of the Kabiyesi (king) takes precedence over other individuals, regardless of their social standing. Asabi then expresses her belief that the Iyalode's daughter is betrothed to Aremo, who is likely a prince or a high-ranking individual. This demonstrates the importance of arranged marriages and the preservation of social status

through strategic alliances. Traditional Nigerian society places great value on maintaining family honour and ensuring the continuity of lineage.

Kabiyesi responds by asserting that the Iyalode's daughter is indeed betrothed to a man, implying that he is that man. This statement reveals a power dynamic where the Kabiyesi exercises his authority to claim the bride-to-be for himself, disregarding the previous arrangement with Aremo. In the scenario, another character named Tilewa voices her disgust at the behaviour, challenging the father's lack of guilt in taking over his own son's future wife. This behaviour is a reflection of the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society, where men are frequently in positions of authority and can make choices that have an impact on the lives of women. This criticism highlights the contrast between conventional principles and current social standards is highlighted by this criticism. It suggests that cultural practices, such as arranged marriages and the dominance of male figures, may clash with modern ideas of individual autonomy and gender equality. The scenario in *Ajidewe* reflects the present-day Nigerian society by portraying the complexities of tradition and the tensions that arise when traditional practices clash with evolving societal values. It highlights the influence of lineage, social status, and gender roles in Nigerian culture. The dialogue also serves as a critique of these cultural practices, illustrating the tenets of cultural criticism by questioning the ethics and implications of such traditions.

Conclusion

This paper emphasises the importance of recognising the diverse cultural heritage and identities within African societies. African writers navigate the complexities of multiple cultural traditions, both African and non-African, and challenge dominant Western narratives. They create narratives that reflect African cultural heritage, incorporating storytelling forms, language, and oral traditions. This demonstrates the depth and variety of African literature as well as its capacity to present a range of perspectives on the complex aspects of African identity.

The study's findings also shed insight into the power relationships and social support systems that exist in African communities. The analysis reveals the significance of community guidance, support, and solidarity in navigating the complexities of tradition. It also highlights the role of spiritual beliefs and ancestral traditions in shaping individual lives and societal norms. The research underscores the importance of critically examining traditional practices, promoting gender equality, and fostering empathy and solidarity within African societies.

Works Cited

- Adewale, A. A., and A. O. Odejinmi. "Yoruba Culture and Tradition: A Philosophical Appraisal." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, vol. 2, no. 9, 2013, pp. 26-30.
- Akintoye, S. A History of the Yoruba People. Amalion Publishing, 2010.
- Awolalu, Joseph Omosade. Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites. Africa World Press, 1979.
- Benson, Bruce L. The Power of Tradition: Spontaneous Order, Social Norms, and Customary Law. Routledge, 2011.
- Falola, Toyin. Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies. University of Rochester Press, 1998.
- Gautam, P. K. "Affirmation of Cultural Traditions: A Folklore Study of Milk Cruz's Anna in the Tropics." Master's thesis, 2007.
- Gideons, Andrew. Runaway World: How Globalization Is Reshaping Our Lives. Routledge, 2003.
- Green, Thomas A. Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music, and Art. ABC-CLIO, 1997.
- Rahman, Munibur. "'The Eternal Present': Sufi Tradition and Modernity." *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2013, pp. 189-215.
- Ritschl, Albrecht. Living Tradition: The Origins and Dynamics of Tradition in the New Testament and Christian Theology. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 364, Mohr Siebeck, 2016.
- Swidler, Leonard E., and Paul Mojzes, editors. The Study of Religion and the Legacy of the Soviet Union. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- Yerima, Ahmed. *Akudaaya and Ajidewe*. Seventh Element Publishing, 2022.

The Vibrant Intensity of Nigerian Music

Ajayi, Omobonike Deborah

*Department of Performing Arts and Music,
Faculty of Humanities,
Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, Oyo State.
ajayiomobonike@yahoo.com 07059089068*

Abstract

Music is an integral part of human experience that enriches every stage of life, reflecting and shaping human lives from birth to death and this is accompanied by appropriate musical instruments. Music has a universal language that is often used to express some activities in religious, ritual, educational, political and social settings. However, Nigerian music reflects the country's traditions, customs, norms, language and this is rooted in diverse cultural traditions with the fusion of contemporary elements. This paper, therefore, seeks to express the concept of music in the Nigerian cultural system, exploring the interjection between music and dance, expressing the role of musical instruments as well as their exponents and how the music has sustained and preserved the rich cultural heritage of Nigerian music. The ethnographic method is employed to collect the data through a descriptive approach, and internet and library resources are also consulted. The research work, therefore, concludes that Nigerian musical instrument reflects social and cultural practices towards sustaining the growth and development of Nigerian music.

Keywords: *culture, contemporary, Nigerian music, folk songs.*

Introduction

Music is a significant part of cultural heritage in which individuals or communities express joy, strength, oneness and unity. Music is explored during festivals and ceremonies, which provides an excellent means of expression, interaction and community with one another. Nigerian music is proliferated by many music genres and musicians such as traditional folk music, invocations, chants, popular music, art music and theatre music. The Nigerian exponents include the performers, musicians, singers, composers, drummers, dirges, and town criers; they serve as heroes, having a viable, sustainable development of musical practice in Nigeria (Vidal 2008). Music as an integral part of Nigerian culture is performed in connection with different aspects of life such as birth, death, initiation, coronations, funerals and other social occasions. Music is seen as an arrangement of rhythmic patterns in a way that is pleasing to; therefore, the universality of music as a language is observed in every cultural practice and by different groups of people (Okafor, 2005).

The various people and cultures of Nigeria express the musical performance in different forms and methods, integrating with life at various stages of human existence. It is a connection line between cultural value and political life, a vital medium of communication that contributes to the maintenance and sustainability of enriching an experience through active engagement (listening, dancing and performing measures). Music, dance and drama have their origin in the activities of the earliest man, such as singing, dancing, imitation and re-enactment. In Nigerian music, creative arts are incomplete without music through the use of vocal or instrumental form. Nigeria is made up of different ethnic groups with a vast amount of cultural heritage that represents the total and the past, present and future.

The Concept of Music in Nigerian Culture

The tradition of music in Nigerian culture is often transmitted orally from one generation to another. Before the introduction of foreign music in Nigeria, there was an antecedent tradition of indigenous recreational music played by age grades, various guilds of drummers and singers, professional groups and association of singers who entertain community (Okafor, 2004) express that music is undoubtedly old and deeply rooted in the history of man, music radiates other forms and is more effective as a means of expression. Traditional Nigerian music is a vibrant and diverse expression of the country's rich cultural heritage, deeply tied to the traditions and values of its various ethnic groups. The music serves as an archival resource, evolving and rooted in its indigenous system by playing an essential role in storytelling, ceremonies, and spiritual practices. The creation of the world came with the accompaniment of motion and sound and that is why music fosters the satisfaction of life and death. Some professional itinerant musicians, entertainers and amusing members of communities use vocal and instrumental means to perform genres such as esa, ijala, iyere, waka apala, sekere, bata, dundun, agogo, dadakuada, igbin, and bembé.

Traditional music is a living culture that constitutes the staple idiom of the vast majority of Nigerians. There were age-grades, dance music bands, native blues, game songs, folk tales, moonlight plays, folk-opera bands, court musicians, dirges, before the advent of popular dance bands. There were musical instruments made with native materials and structures such as wooden drums, box-resonated guitar (agidigbo), kakaki (elongated metal trumpet), oja, alghita, kaho, goge, xylophones, calabashes, gourd-rattles and legendary drums. Music in Nigeria derives its origin and versatility from the oral traditional or folklore of the different ethnic groups and that is why indigenous musical notation is transmitted mainly through an oral process. Each ethnic group has unique musical traditions. For instance, the Yoruba are

celebrated for their intricate drumming, often accompanying religious or festive events. The Igbo incorporate folk tales and use instruments like the *udu*, a pot drum. The Hausa are known for their praise-singing and the iconic *kakaki*, a long metal trumpet.

Musical ceremonies are performed for the deities such as Sango (god of thunder and lightning), Ogun (god of iron), Obatala (god of creation), Oya, Ifa (god of oracle) and many other gods /goddesses. Various rituals, kinship activities and ceremonies associated with divinities require music for effective functioning. The advent of colonialism marked the emergence of writings and performance, theatrical plays, and archival structure of the instruments were researched by anthropologists, linguists, historians and ethnomusicologists. Different genres of Yoruba music have specific roles within the society, ranging from regulating, sustaining and preserving various institutions of the society. Through music, society can control certain groups as well as celebrate some festivals, which are either annual or monthly at an interval. Music prescribed ethical and moral standards, especially among young adults, through folk tales and game songs. They are constantly reminded of their moral obligations and duties through proverbial songs, occasional songs, festival songs and popular songs. The institution of kingship and various rituals and ceremonies are associated with divinities, which require music for their proper functioning. Contemporary Nigerian music has achieved global acclaim, showcasing a variety of genres such as Afrobeats, Afro-juju, Highlife, Fuji, and Afrobeat—the latter being pioneered by the iconic Fela Kuti. Today, artists like Burna Boy, Wizkid, and Tiwa Savage are at the forefront, driving Nigerian music to international prominence and captivating audiences worldwide as well as creating a platform for addressing social issues like corruption, inequality, oppression and criticism. Traditional Nigerian music goes beyond mere entertainment, serving as an essential part of rituals, royal ceremonies, weddings, and festivals. It acts as a powerful tool for preserving history, facilitating communication, and strengthening communal bonds.

Folk Song

Folk song is the musical expression of the people within a given culture, performed and accepted by the members of the society. The songs, ideas, melody and rhythms continue unchanged as it is highly connected with African culture and reflect the total habits of the ways of life of members of the community. Traditional norms and values, which are taught through the process of didactic tales, games, moral songs and games songs, contribute to the making of such a cultured individual at the adulthood stage. An average African man is fostered and raised in these acts of folk traditions of storytelling and cultural songs (Ajayi, 2020). Folk songs are the unknown authorship and ancient traditional songs that form part of our cultural system and

heritage within society by accepting their value, which is being transmitted from one generation to another (Okunade, 2010). Community folk songs, such as festival songs, coronation songs, are being performed in a community arena where every member will have easy access to participation.

The context of the song reflects the community's beliefs and practices. The composers of folk songs are not known, but are simply associated with African traditions through the process of oral transmission from one generation to another. It serves as a corporate communal experience supporting ritual, festival, cultural and recreational activities. Folk music is a communal property of a given culture in which the performers and the audience are active participants. The accompanying folk music making and other festivals are a communion in which the spirits and ancestors are involved participants. It is used as a festival, social commentator, therapy, and worship, used as a mirror of a culture having its cultural roots within the society it belongs. The forms of folk music include lullabies, folk tales. Folklores, oracular vessels, children's game songs, dirges, legends/myths, praise poetry, funeral songs/ritual chanting. Some types of folk music are *waka*, *apala*, *gelede*, *dundun*, *sakara*, *bembe*, *atilogwu* to mention but a few. The practitioners of this music include: *Odolaye Aremu*, *Aderonmu Kokoro* (the blind minstrel), Dan Maraya Jos, Ezigbo Oioigbo, Hassan Wayam, *Dauda Epoakara*, *Ayinla Omowura*, *Alabi Ogundepo*, *Aduke Anifowose*, among others.

Relevance of Folk Songs in Nigerian Culture

Folk songs are an integral and functional part of life in Nigerian society. The text of the songs reflects the culture of the people and serves as an effective means of communication. Folk songs reflect the total habits and ways of life of the members of a particular society. The songs are indigenous music of any community, which contextually makes use of the authentic native agents and concepts. Songs are composed on various subjects such as cultural, political, educational, philosophical, moral, historical, social control, religious beliefs, and entertainment. The symbolic expressions of these folksongs serve as a medium of joy, assurance, desire, gratitude, guidance, love, courage, delight, warning and prayers. Folk songs guide the behaviour of the members of the society and act as an agent of self-discipline and social control. Individuals who engaged in social vices or some malicious behaviours are corrected through folksongs. Traditional Yoruba music functions as a medium for cultural expression, social commentary and identity formation. Omojola (2012).

Folk Musical Instruments

There are rich folk and traditional musical instruments in different parts of Nigeria. The construction, distribution, tuning and playing techniques are largely influenced by the environment, occupation and natural resources. Folksongs enforce conformity to social norms and values, bringing a positive change in the moral activities of school children. It also plays a significant role in the education of school children. Folk musical instruments can be understood in the following ways:

1. Through identification
2. Through the classification/grouping
3. Through description

Through Identification

- By sight
- By sound
- By Feeling/Touching
- By Name

Through the Classification/Grouping

- Membranophone Instruments
- Aerophone Instruments
- Chordophone Instruments
- Idiophone Instruments

Through the Description

- **Membranophone Instruments:** (membrane means skin). They produce sound through the vibration of the membrane. They are known as skin vibrating instruments. They are made from solid logs of wood or the large gourd/calabash. Some are double-ended, portable and non-portable drums, pitched and non-pitched, low, middle and high pitch. Some drums are played with stick, straight and round sticks with or without knob at the end while some are played with hands or both. They are covered with animal skin and

made of materials ranging from wood, pot, calabash, metal, in different shapes and sizes.

Examples are; *Dundun Bata*, *Gangan*, *Omele-ako*. *Omele-abo*, *Gudugudu Akuba*, *Adamo*, *Tambari*, *Ipese*, *Igbin*, etc

- **Aerophone Instruments:** These are African wind instruments; vibration occurs when wind is blown into the hollow parts of the instruments. The instruments produce sound through the vibration of a column of air blown into them. They can be side/end blown (vertical/transverse position). They may be open-ended or stopped. Examples are: kakaki, udu, etc
- **Chordophone Instruments:** They produce sound through the vibration of the strings. They are string vibrating instruments. The vibration can occur when the strings are plucked or bowed. They are bows and lutes made from the stalks of millet. The strings are run over a resonator that is made up of calash or wood. They are accompanied instruments, suitable for use as solo instruments. They accompany solo singing or recitations of poetry, praise singing and narrative songs. Examples are: garaya, molo, gunmi, senufo, zither, goje, etc.
- **Idiophone Instruments:** These are self-sounding instruments. The body of the instrument is beaten, shaken, scraped or scrapped to produce sound, some are used as signals for attracting attention, assembling or creating an atmosphere (especially during religious rites and ceremonies). They are also used for transmitting messages or communication to emphasise the movements of a dancer or a character in traditional drama.

Examples are: rattles, bells, hand-piano/xylophone, etc, gourd rattles(*sekere*), shantu, thumb-piano(*agidigbo*)

Conclusion

There are various categories of songs in the Nigerian society that are functional, reflecting norms, customs and values such as rituals, festivals, occupational and social controls. Music gives the freedom to express ideas, thoughts, and morals within a particular cultural system. Music, dance and drama provide a means for sustaining the development of Nigerian cultural practices. Music has power for improving special-temporal reason, thus promoting the cognitive ability to observe in detail, pictorial identification and recognition of musical

potentiality. Traditional Nigerian music goes beyond mere entertainment, serving as an essential part of rituals, royal ceremonies, weddings, and festivals. It acts as a powerful tool for preserving history, facilitating communication, and strengthening communal bonds. Despite ethnicity, Nigerian music still fosters a sense of national identity by creating a cultural bond that resonates within Nigeria across backgrounds.

References

- Ajayi, O. D. (2020): Functions and Forms of pre-natal songs among the Oyo Yoruba People: *International Journal of the Age of Reasoning*, 1(2) 103-105
- Akpabot, S. (1998): Form, Function and Style in African music, Macmillan Nigeria Publishers Limited, Ibadan. Page 75
- Bolaji, D. (2013): Yoruba Folksongs and its Aphorism; A Study of Selected Folksongs: *The Crab: Journal of Theatre and Media Arts*. NO 8-page 10111
- Ogunbowale, M. (2003): Creativity, Power and Resistance in Nigerian Reggae. 96-102
- Okafor, R.C. (1998): Music in Nigerian Society, Enugu: New Generation Books
- Omojola, B. (2012): Yoruba Music in the Twentieth Century: Identity, Agency and Performance Practice. University of Rochester Press. 16-23
- Vidal, A.O. (2008): Music Education in Nigeria, Entering the 21st century with a Pragmatic Philosophy, *Journal of the Association of Nigeria*. Pp 1-9

Understanding Metaphor as an Embodiment Simulation of Agitation in Selected Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) Camps in Zamfara State

Lateef Iyanda Kugbayi

Zamfara State University, Zamfara State.

kugbayilateef@yahoo.com +2347032985052

Abstract

Conceptualising struggles for equitable treatment through metaphors is not usually processed from a single mental experience. Individuals agitating for the treatment are usually motivated by their communicative capacities and perceptions of their locations, experiences and needs. Against that backdrop, this study has investigated the role of metaphor as an embodiment simulation of agitation among internally displaced persons (IDPs) in selected camps in Zamfara State, Nigeria. Amidst a humanitarian crisis driven by violence and natural disasters, over 678,000 individuals are displaced in the state. These individuals are facing living conditions challenges that have increased their stress and anxiety. Using semi-structured interviews to gather metaphorical expressions that underlie experiences of agitation from the responses of the IDPs in the state, the research, employing Bergen's (2015) Embodiment Simulation Approach, analyses the metaphorical expressions to reveal the embedded cognitive and emotional processes in them. The study finds that the analysed metaphorical expressions embody the IDPs' feelings of fear, loss and hope, thereby illustrating the complex interplay between their lives' realities and neural perceptions of the realities. Thus, this study has contributed to embodied cognition and metaphor studies and proffered practical procedures for humanitarian responses in IDP contexts. Conclusively, the procedures foregrounded by the research can promote better future interventions and more sustainable and empathetic humanitarian efforts if they are upheld by government agencies, NGOs and health professionals in their effort to bring succour to the displaced persons in Zamfara State, Nigeria and around the world.

Keywords: Metaphor, Embodiment Simulation Approach, Agitative Communication, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Humanitarian Crisis

Introduction

The ongoing humanitarian crisis, mostly caused by natural occurrences and the invasion of towns and villages by criminal elements, in Nigeria has resulted in the displacement of millions of individuals. That has led to the establishment of numerous Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps across the country. Among the states that have been greatly challenged in this regard is Zamfara State. According to the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Displaced Persons (2021), there are 4,244,332 displaced persons in different IDP camps across the states in Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. 678,000 of these persons are found in Bukkuyum, Anka, Kaura Namoda, Maradun, Tsafe, Kwatarkwashi and Birnin Magaji IDP camps in Zamfara State. These camps provide temporary shelter and support to those who have been forced to leave their homes due to conflict, violence or natural disasters.

Living conditions in IDP camps are often challenging and usually characterised by overcrowding, limited resources and a lack of basic amenities. These conditions contribute to a state of agitation among the camp residents, who experience heightened levels of stress, anxiety and frustration. Understanding and addressing this agitation is crucial for promoting the well-being and mental health of the IDP population. Metaphor, as a powerful linguistic and cognitive tool, plays a significant role in how individuals perceive and make sense of their experiences. Metaphorical expressions often emerge as a way to communicate complex emotions, thoughts and experiences that may be difficult to articulate directly. Metaphors can provide insights into the embodied experiences of individuals, reflecting their cognitive and emotional states.

This research, therefore, aims to investigate the role of metaphor as an embodiment simulation of agitation in selected IDP camps in Zamfara State. By examining the metaphors used by the displaced individuals to describe their experiences, the study seeks to uncover the underlying cognitive and emotional processes that form the basis of the displaced persons' agitation. Understanding how metaphorical expressions reflect and shape the experiences of agitation in IDP camps can have several implications. It can contribute to a deeper understanding of the psychological and emotional well-being of IDP populations, informing the development of targeted interventions and support services. It can also offer insights into the communication strategies employed by camp residents, through the facilitation of effective communication and interaction among the residents, aid workers and camp administrators. By exploring the relationship between metaphor, embodiment and agitation in IDP camps, this research seeks to bridge the knowledge gap and contribute to the growing field of embodied cognition and metaphor studies. The findings of this study can inform both theoretical frameworks and practical applications, ultimately improving the well-being and resilience of individuals living in IDP camps in Zamfara State and Nigeria at large.

Statement of Problem

Government agencies, NGOs and health professionals often lack awareness and understanding of the metaphorical expressions used by IDPs to articulate their agitations. These expressions, deeply rooted in the IDPs' experiences and cultural backgrounds, provide valuable insights into the persons' emotional and cognitive states. The lack of recognition and interpretation of these metaphors hampers the development of interventions that effectively address the underlying causes and concerns of the IDPs. There is therefore a disconnect between the metaphors used by IDPs and the understanding of government agencies, NGOs and health professionals,

thereby leading to miscommunication and misinterpretation of the agitations expressed. The misinterpretation may result in inadequate or inappropriate interventions, as the true nature and depth of the IDPs' agitations are not fully comprehended. The communication gap may further exacerbate the challenges faced in providing targeted and effective support services for the displaced individuals. Hence, addressing the gap is crucial for understanding the cognitive and emotional processes underlying agitation within IDP camps in Zamfara State and in developing effective interventions and support services for the displaced. By investigating how metaphorical expressions embody and simulate agitation, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the unique experiences of agitation in the various IDP camps in the state and contribute to the development of targeted interventions and support services for the IDP population. It will contribute to more effective and sustainable humanitarian responses in Zamfara State's IDP camps and other similar contexts locally and globally.

Hence, this research aims to investigate the role of metaphor as an embodiment simulation of agitation in selected IDP camps in Zamfara State. It will examine the metaphors used by the displaced individuals to describe their experiences and uncover the underlying cognitive and emotional processes related to agitation. The goal is to facilitate the understanding of the cognitive and emotional processes underlying agitation within IDP camps in Zamfara State to develop effective interventions and support services that will help government agencies, NGOs and health professionals in their interactions with the displaced. The specific objectives of the study are, therefore, to:

- i. identify and analyse the metaphors that the displaced persons in IDP camps in Zamfara State use to describe their experiences in their agitation;
- ii. explore the cognitive and emotional processes underlying the metaphorical expressions related to agitation in the IDPs camp context; and
- iii. explain how metaphorical expressions contribute to the embodiment and simulation of the agitation of displaced persons across IDP camps in the state.

Unarguably, researching agitative campaign discourse, metaphorical embodiment and neural-related processes is not a novel enterprise. For example, from an agitative campaign perspective, Osaghae (1995), and Malachy and Nwobi (2014), focusing on Nigerian context, reviewed *the Ogoni Uprising: Oil Politics, Minority Agitation and Failure of the Nigerian State* and *Integration Policies as Structures of Disintegration: The Political Economic of Nationhood and Resource Control in Nigeria* respectively. Their works are basically on the effects of agitations on the socio-economic and political systems of the Nigerian state. In the same vein, Bergen (2015) evaluates the functional roles of embodied and neural processes to

the meaningful encoding of thoughts through metaphors, while van Dijk (1993) examines the relationships that exist among discourse, power, dominance, social inequality and the processes involved in maintaining the relationships from a critical discourse analysis standpoint. Meanwhile, this current study is a slight departure from the cited works as it investigates the role of metaphor as an embodiment simulation of agitation in selected IDP camps in Zamfara State by examining the metaphors used by the displaced individuals to describe their experiences and uncover the underlying cognitive and emotional processes related to agitation. Understanding the cognitive and emotional processes underlying agitation within IDPs in the state will help to develop effective interventions and support services for the displaced persons.

An Overview of Agitative Communication

Eesuola (2017:4) describes an agitator as someone who communicates “his excitement to those about him. He idealises the magnitude of the desirable social changes which are capable of being produced by a specific line of social action . . . the agitator is one who exaggerates the difference between one rather desirable policy and another.” As Osaghae (1995) has earlier opined, demands for more equitable and privileged treatment by those that form minority communities of the larger populace, such as occupants of IDPs camps, as well as struggles by them and other minorities to redress power imbalances, which make them subordinate to the majority group, essentially rise. No doubt, the situation the IDPs find themselves in categorises them among marginalised citizens, as they experience Alemazung’s (2010:66) view that “groups who feel marginalised often develop feelings for revenge and hatred against those who enjoy socio-economic well-being.” Unarguably, many a tool abounds to achieve this struggle. However, a continual agitative discourse seems to be the most accessible means this set of people resort to in this regard, since it affords them the power to conceptualise their thoughts and feelings of revenge and hatred, which are usually motivated by imbalances, in language through metaphors.

To reach that end, a great deal of metaphors is woven into the agitative discourses based on individual Zamfara State’s IDPs’ social realities. However, the conceptualised struggles for equitable treatment or against dominance in metaphors are somewhat not processed from the same mental experiences, since the agitators, in their communicative capacities, have their perceptions often mediated variously by their spatial locations, experiences and needs. In essence, this study considers it a worthwhile exercise to systematically study the embodied metaphors in selected agitative discourses of IDPs in Zamfara State to facilitate the understanding of the cognitive and emotional processes underlying agitation within IDP camps

in the state to develop effective interventions and support services that will help government agencies, NGOs and health professionals in their interactions with the displaced persons.

Metaphor: An Embodiment Simulation Approach

Metaphor is a fundamental cognitive process through which abstract or complex ideas are understood and communicated by mapping them onto more concrete or familiar concepts. This is corroborated by Hawkes (1979:1), stating that “Metaphor is traditionally taken to be the most fundamental form of figurative language” etymologically, Hawkes (1979:1) adds that the word metaphor originates from a Greek word “metaphora” – a derivation of “meta” and “pherein,” meaning “over” and “to carry” respectively. This morphological breakdown suggests that “metaphor is constructed on the principles of analogy and seems to be concerned primarily with the comparison of similarities between two or more objects” Ortony, Reynolds and Arter (1978:5). Lakoff and Johnson (1980), pioneering the conceptual metaphor theory, propose that metaphorical expressions are not merely linguistic devices but reflect fundamental cognitive processes. Thus, metaphors allow individuals to make sense of their experiences by mapping them onto tangible and embodied concepts to facilitate the communication of subjective experiences that may otherwise be difficult to express directly. The act of making sense of experiences is regarded as activating the parts of the human brain that are responsible for the perception and descriptions of emotions (Cuccio and Fontana 2017). The use of the neural capacity, in which a corresponding action, perception or emotion is absent, is called *Embodied Simulation* (Gallese and Sinigaglia 2011). In essence, Cuccio and Fontana (2017: 77) believe that language is embodied in at least two different dimensions. On the inside, language is embodied by the mechanism of Embodied Simulation. From the outside, language is embodied using co-speech gestures. Furthermore, the embodied nature of language has been particularly investigated in metaphor studies. Bodily-based metaphors seem to be particularly apt at exploiting the bodily foundation of language in these two dimensions.

This implies that, although linguistic explanations of metaphors usually project the understanding of the concept from a conceptual, abstract and disembodied perspective, looking at it from a neural perception foregrounds the view that human bodily experience contributes to the understanding of metaphors through the Embodied Simulation mechanism. Affirming this position, Deng, Yang, and Wan (2021) state that metaphor, being a fundamental method for processing thoughts and complex social issues by drawing from interlocutors’ background knowledge, which is structured in unrelated semantic domain, for the purpose communication and cognition, particularly that different metaphors can express, reflect and influence specific

ways by which humans make sense in different aspects of lives. Within the field of communication studies, metaphor and embodiment have been explored in different contexts of social interactions. Therefore, metaphorical expressions have been found to play a significant role in conveying emotional experiences, such as anger, joy and sadness, by evoking embodied simulations of those emotions (Gibbs, 2019). The use of metaphors, consequently, allows individuals to communicate and share their emotional states, thereby bridging the gap between internal experiences and external communication. From the foregoing, metaphors can influence how emotions are perceived and understood by others, shaping social interactions and interpersonal relationships (Semino & Steen, 2008). In the context of agitation, metaphor, through its embodiment features, is a reference point for the processing of cognitive and emotional experiences of heightened distress and restlessness of individuals living in IDP camps. Evaluating metaphorical expressions related to agitation can, therefore, reveal how the individuals in IDP camps conceptualise and communicate their experiences. The model of Embodiment Simulation is consequently adopted as the theoretical framework for this study.

Methodology

Data Collection Method

For data collection, the study adopts in-depth, semi-structured interviews with selected internally displaced persons representing individuals from the various IDP camps in Zamfara State. The persons were Abubakar Hamza (Mixed-farmer, Aged 51, Mareri Area, Gusau LG, 2nd September, 2024), Mohammed Sani Shediya (Farmer, Aged 47, Anguwan Dallatu, Gusau LGA, 21st September, 2024), Sani Garba (Farmer, Age 47, Mareri, Tudun Wada Gusau LGA, 21st September, 2024), Halliru Ummaru (Farmer, Aged 44, Tsafe LG, 23rd September, 2024), Salisu Nura (Farmer, Aged 50, Bungudu LG, 25th September, 2024), Muhammad Audu (Farmer, Aged 58, Damba, Gusau LG, 25th September, 2024), Salisu Badamasi (Farmer, Aged 31, Damba, Gusau LG, 26th September, 2024), Muhammad Abubakar Nura (Farmer, Aged 42, Anka LG, 29th September, 2024) and Auwalu Sani Dan-Ali (Farmer, Aged 52, Investment House, Gusau LG, 1st October, 2024). The interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview procedure that allowed flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences and express their agitations in their own words. The interview guide consequently consisted of open-ended questions aimed at understanding the participants' thoughts, emotions and the metaphors they employ. The responses from the interviews were transcribed. Subsequently, metaphorical expressions that reflect agitation in them are identified. The data analysed are

purposely selected to represent related views from the generally identified metaphorical expressions.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The analytical procedure for this study is based on Bergen's (2015) Embodiment Simulation Approach to the interpretation of metaphor. This approach emphasises the embodied nature of metaphorical expressions. It posits that the understanding of metaphors involves the simulation of sensorimotor experiences related to the metaphorical concept. According to Bergen, metaphors are not just linguistic expressions but also involve the activation of embodied simulation processes that simulate the experiential basis of the metaphorical concept. Hence, the study transcribes the participants' metaphorical expressions of agitation in the interviews. It also categorises the metaphorical expressions extracted into thematic clusters based on shared conceptual domains to identify common patterns and variations. The embodied simulation processes are consequently analysed based on the principles of the Embodiment Simulation Approach.

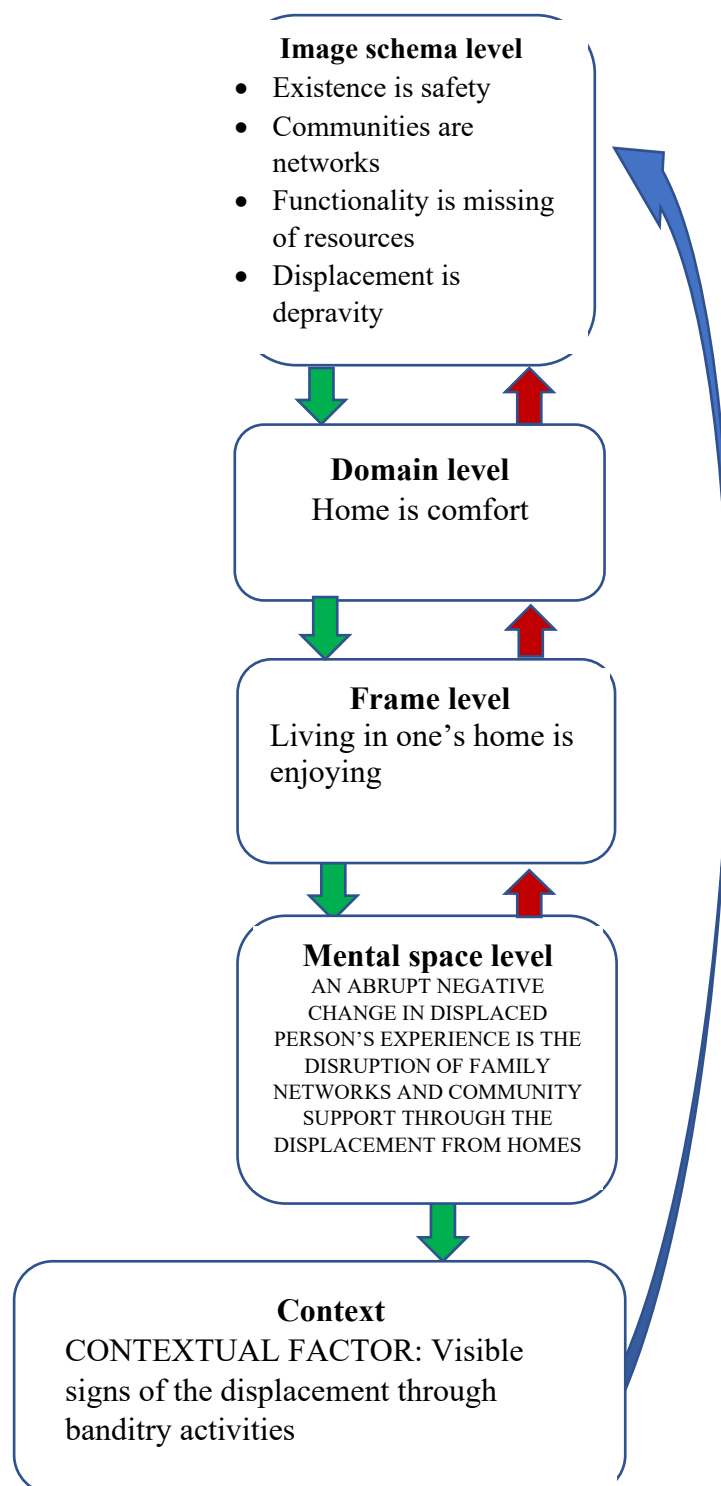
Consequently, the analysis of the data is done on four levels. First, the contextual factor that influences the use of the metaphor is identified through the presentation of the discourse in which the metaphor is embedded. Next, relevant image schema metaphors related to the context of use are activated to establish the foundation for understanding the structure of the metaphor. On the third level of the analysis, the broader domain of the metaphor, which covers the experience described in the discourse, is identified by framing the metaphor within the IDPs' cosmology. This is necessary to delimit the perspective of use on the choice of the metaphor. In the final stage, a specific mental space level that reveals the real-life impact of the metaphor on the IDPs is created. Holistically, the process foregrounds the dynamic relationship between the contextual factor and the emerging metaphorical meaning of how the IDPs' worldview and bodily experience concretise the persons' mental perception and description of emotions through the analysed metaphor.

Instance 1: *We have been forced to flee our homes and community due to banditry activities and often experienced the following trauma and stress: loss of livelihood and income sources, separation from family and community members, as well as loved ones. We also limited access to basic necessities like food, water, shelter, healthcare and education. These are leading to economic instability and causing emotional stress. The displacement has disrupted our social networks and community support, leaving us feeling isolated.*

Metaphor from the IDPs' Experience: HOME IS COMFORT

The Deconstruction of the Embedded Metaphor Embodiment Simulation

The perceptual property of the physical situation of being in an IDP's camp plays a major role in the embodiment of the interviewee's experience: "limited access to basic necessities like food, water, shelter, healthcare and education." This prompts the choice of "we have been forced to flee our homes and community," which in turn assumes or invokes the primary metaphors of EXISTENCE IS SAFETY and PERSISTING IS STRIPING OF RESOURCES. Simultaneously, since the topic of the interview is the displaced person's experience, the HOME and COMFORT domains are evoked, resulting in the conceptual metaphor HOME IS COMFORT. An aspect of this metaphor is the correspondence between being in one's home and enjoying, that is, the metaphor LIVING IN ONE'S HOME IS ENJOYING (with enjoying being an experiential aspect of comfort, while comfort is a more inclusive category than enjoyment). The idea, at this point of discourse, concerns how the displaced person's experience has suddenly changed for the worse, a very specific metaphor is evoked – that of a FORCING TO FLEE HOME. As expressed by the verb *force*, the metaphor is demonstrated in the following contextually primed **schematicity hierarchy**.



Hence, the perceptual property of what the displaced person experienced and described (displacement from home) functions as a contextual factor that activates the image schema metaphors EXISTENCE IS SAFETY, COMMUNITIES ARE NETWORKS and FUNCTIONALITY IS MISSING OF RESOURCES. The lack of functionality (of home) is brought about by the ejection from home, an obstacle to continued enjoyment, which is the

further image schema (primary) metaphor: DISPLACEMENT IS DEPRIVITY. The analysis consequently foregrounds a position that takes the enjoying frame and expresses the contextual meaning of “an abrupt negative change in the displaced person’s experience” through the mental space level metaphor: AN ABRUPT NEGATIVE CHANGE IN DISPLACED PERSON’S EXPERIENCE IS THE DISRUPTION OF FAMILY NETWORKS AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT THROUGH THE DISPLACEMENT FROM HOMES. By implication, the embodied metaphors simulated in the response demonstrate a degenerating transmission of life from conditions of safety, relaxation, tranquillity, warmth, economic stability and communal living into a life depravity, insecurity, poverty and dehumanisation. They experienced the turn of events with a sense of urgency and lack of choice, emphasising the trauma of displacement.

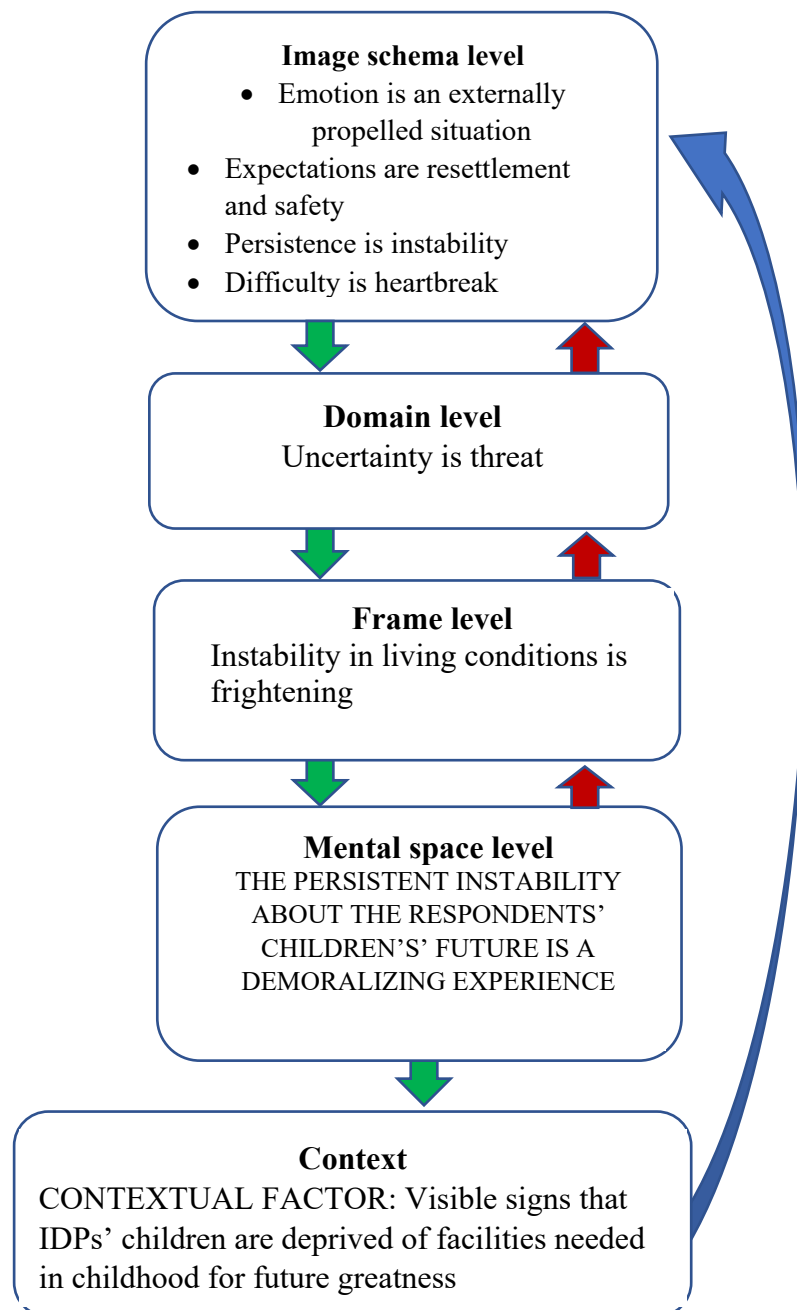
Instance 2: *Seeing our children grow up in a camp, missing out on a normal childhood, can be heartbreaking to us. Struggling to maintain dignity and privacy in overcrowded and inadequate living conditions can be demoralising our feelings. Hearing rumours or uncertainty about their future, including potential repatriation or resettlement, also caused anxiety and uncertainty in our lives/There is uncertainty about our situation and potential threats to our safety because it can cause fear and anxiety to each other in the camp.*

Metaphor from the IDPs’ Experience: UNCERTAINTY IS THREAT

The Deconstruction of the Embedded Metaphor Embodiment Simulation

The perception of the childhood experience of the respondents’ children in the IDP camps contributes greatly to how the experience is embodied when they (the respondents) describe feelings that evoke emotions of “Seeing our children grow up in a camp, missing out on a normal childhood.” This prompts the choice of “Hearing... uncertainty about their future... caused anxiety/There is uncertainty about our situation and potential threats to our safety.” The choice invokes the primary metaphors of EMOTION IS EXTERNALLY PROPELLED SITUATION and PERSISTENCE IS DESPIRATION. In addition, since the thesis of the review is the respondents’ experiences that evoke strong emotion, the UNCERTAINTY and THREAT domains emerge, resulting in the conceptual metaphor UNCERTAINTY IS THREAT. The metaphor has a correspondence between instability in the respondents’ living conditions and frightening. Hence, the metaphor INSTABILITY IN LIVING CONDITIONS IS FRIGHTENING (with frightening being an experiential aspect of threat, while threat is a more inclusive category than fright) emerges. From the perspective of the immediate idea of

the discourse, the metaphor embodies the extent of the respondents' demoralising feelings of "Seeing our children grow up in a camp, missing out on a normal childhood" to evoke a very specific metaphor – HEARTBREAKING. As expressed by the verb *demoralise*, the metaphor is demonstrated in the following contextually primed **schematicity hierarchy**.



From the above, the conceptual nature of what the respondents experienced and described (in seeing their children grow up in IDP camps) demonstrates the contextual factor that activates the image schema metaphors EMOTION IS EXTERNALLY PROPELLED SITUATION, EXPECTATIONS ARE RESETTLEMENT AND SAFETY and PERSISTENCE IS INSTABILITY. The persistence of instability is a result of keeping "seeing our children grow

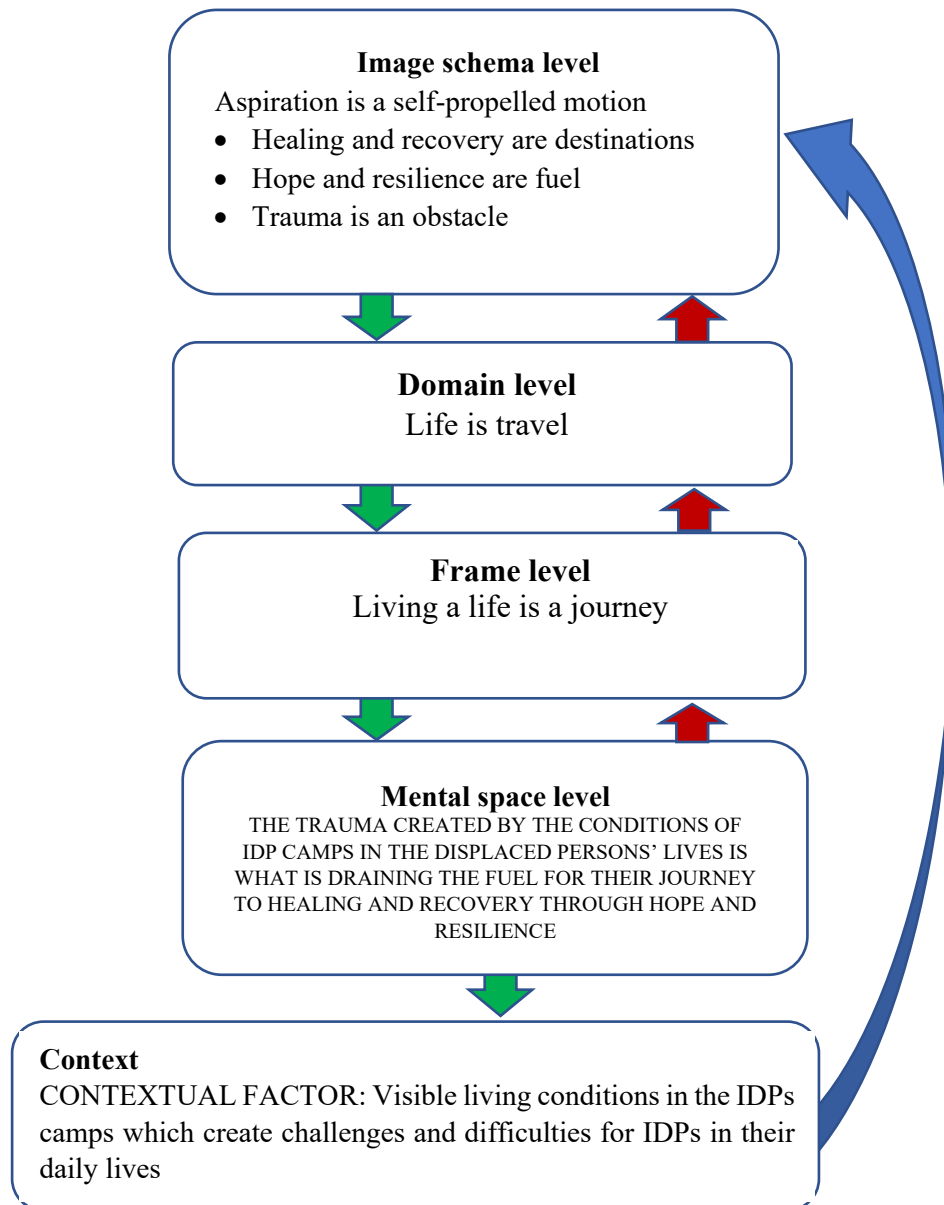
up in a camp, missing out on a normal childhood,” which is further image schema (primary) metaphor: DIFFICULTY IS HEARTBREAK. Therefore, the embodied metaphors, as simulated in the displaced persons’ response, portrays a degenerating movement from an unstable living condition, that is, abnormal juvenile status in IDPs camps, into a demoralising, heartbreaking and hopeless world, especially when the affected individuals are surrounded by visible signs that IDPs’ children are continually deprived of facilities needed in childhood to achieve future greatness.

Instance 3: *We aspire..., ensuring well-being and health. Despite trauma, we hold onto hope and resilience, fuelling our journey towards healing and recovery/Our conditions in the camp influence our hopes for the future, while the challenges and difficulties we face in our daily lives. These include good expectations from the government and both national and international organisations, by meeting our social needs in the camp and elsewhere.*

Metaphor from the IDPs’ Experience: LIFE IS A JOURNEY

The Deconstruction of the Embedded Metaphor Embodiment Simulation

The perceptual property of the physical situation has a great deal of effect on the metaphorical conceptualisation of the displaced persons’ lives: the challenging living conditions of the IDPs camp, particularly the “challenges and difficulties we face in our daily lives.” This brings about the use of the verb *aspire*, which creates the primary metaphors of ASPIRATION IS SELF-PROPELLED MOTION and HOPE AND RESILIENCE ARE FUEL. In the same vein, since the theme of the interview has to do with the displaced persons’ lives, the LIFE and TRAVEL domains are evoked, resulting in the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS TRAVEL. From one of the aspects in which domains of the metaphor can be mapped into, the correspondence between leading one’s life and journeying is established, to create the metaphor LIVING A LIFE IS JOURNEYING (where journeying is the activity aspect of travel, with travel being a more inclusive idea of the discourse on how the challenges and difficulties in IDPs camp can affect the displaced persons’ lives. Consequently, a very specific metaphor is evoked – that of ASPIRING OVER TRAUMA OF HEALING AND RECOVERY JOURNEY, as expressed by the verb *aspire* and demonstrated in the following contextually primed **schematicity hierarchy**.



The schematicity hierarchy represents the conceptual nature of what the respondents described while demonstrating their determination to achieve healing and recovery, despite the traumatising circumstances against their hopes for the future. The contextual factor demonstrated in the discourse, therefore, activates the image schema metaphors **ASPIRATION IS SELF-PROPELLED MOTION**, **HEALING AND RECOVERY** and **HOPE AND RESILIENCE** are **FUEL**. The need to hold onto hope and resilience is motivated by the prevalent trauma against the journey towards healing and discovery. This further creates an image schema (primary) metaphor: **TRAUMA IS OBSTACLE**. Hence, the analysis underlines the contextual meaning of the IDPS' daily-life challenges and difficulties that culminated to

trauma through the highly specific mental space level metaphor: THE TRAUMA CREATED BY THE CONDITIONS OF IDPS CAMPS IN THE IDPS' LIVES IS THE PERSONS' FUEL FOR THEIR JOURNEY TO HEALING AND RECOVERY THROUGH HOPE AND RESILIENCE.

Findings

This study has investigated the role of metaphor as an embodiment simulation of agitation in selected IDP camps in Zamfara State. It has examined the metaphors used by the displaced individuals in the camps across the state by describing the displaced persons' experiences and uncovering the underlying cognitive and emotional processes related to agitation in the metaphorical expressions that the persons employed to embody the experiences. The analysis of the selected metaphors in the expressions has, therefore, facilitated the understanding of the cognitive and emotional processes underlying agitation within IDP camps in Zamfara State in a way that promotes effective interventions and support services that will help government agencies, NGOs and health professionals in providing succour for the displaced persons. Consequently, the study has made the following findings.

- i. The displaced persons in IDPs camps in Zamfara State described their experiences in their agitation through metaphors such as **home is comfort**, that is, **living in one's home is enjoying**, (to demonstrate that it is not their wish to leave their homes, where safety, economic stability and communality are guaranteed, for the camps but they have to surrender to fate, depravity and dehumanisation, since the circumstances that led to their eviction from "home" is beyond their control); **uncertainty is threat**, that is, **instability in living conditions is frightening**, (to express the fear that IDPs' life might cost the children in the camps a fulfilling future due to the pervading unstable living condition, abnormal juvenile life style and lack of facilities necessary for promising adulthood in the camp); and **life is a journey**, that is, **living a life is a journey**, (to establish that displacement to IDPs camps is an obstruction to the IDPs' journey of life in the forms of drawbacks to personal/life ambitions, hopes and aspirations).
- ii. The cognitive and emotional processes underlying the metaphorical expressions related to the IDPs camp context in the analysis are **visible signs of the displacement through spates of banditry activities, visible signs that IDPs' children are deprived of facilities needed for future greatness and visible living conditions in the IDPs camps which create challenges and difficulties for the IDPs in their daily lives.**

- iii. Metaphorical expressions contribute to the embodiment and simulation of the agitation of displaced persons across IDP camps in Zamfara State in the following ways:
 - a. An abrupt negative change in displaced persons' experiences is a disruption of family networks and communal support through the displacement from homes.
 - b. The persistent instability about IDPs' children's future is a demoralising experience for the IDPs.
 - c. The trauma created by the conditions of the IDPs camps in the displaced persons' lives is what is draining the fuel of hope and resilience for the persons' journey to healing and recovery from the aftermath of displacement.

Conclusion

This paper explores the role of metaphor in expressing the agitation experienced by internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Zamfara State. The study presents metaphors as crucial linguistic tools that help individuals articulate complex emotions related to their experiences. The study, therefore, investigates how metaphors reflect and shape the cognitive and emotional states of the displaced individuals to promote targeted interventions and support services for the individuals. After analysing the metaphors extracted from the responses of selected IDPs in semi-structured interviews which were conducted for them, using Bergen's Embodiment Simulation Approach, the study finds that the analysed metaphorical expressions embody the IDPs' feelings of fear, loss and hope, thereby illustrating the complex interplay between their lives' realities and neural perceptions of the realities. Understanding this complex interplay is, consequently, necessary for developing effective interventions that address the actual needs of the IDPs. In essence, government agencies, NGOs and health professionals should recognise those realities in their preparation for the persons' aid and interventions. By bridging the communication gap in humanitarian programmes, the study has enlightened stakeholders on how efforts to process thoughts and complex social issues related to IDPs' experience and cognition can help them tailor their support services for the well-being and resilience of displaced individuals. Thus, this study has contributed to embodied cognition and metaphor studies and proffered practical procedures for humanitarian responses in IDP contexts. Conclusively, the procedures foregrounded can promote better future interventions and more sustainable and empathetic humanitarian efforts if they are upheld by government agencies, NGOs and health professionals in their effort to bring succour to the displaced persons in Zamfara State, Nigeria and around the world.

References

- Alemazung, J. A. (2010) "Post-Colonialism: An Analysis of International Factors and Actors Marring African Socio-Economic and Political Development." *J. Pan-African Study*. 3(10): 54 – 68.
- Bergen, B. (2015). *Embodiment, Simulation and Meaning*. (1st Ed). The Routledge Handbook of Semantics. Routledge: Routledge.
- Cuccio, V. and Fontana, S. (2017) "Embodied Simulation and Metaphorical Gestures." In F. Ervas, E. Gola, M. G. Rossi (Edited) *Metaphor in Communication, Science and Education*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH.
- Deng, Y., Yang, J. and Wan, W. (2021) "Embodied Metaphor in Communication about Lived Experiences of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Wuhan, China." *PLoS ONE* 16(12): e0261968. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0261968>
- Gibbs, R.W. (1994). *The Politics of Mind: Figurative Thought, Language and Understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gallese, V. & Sinigaglia (2011) "What Is so Special about Embodied Simulation?" *Trends in Cognitive Science* 15(11). 512–519.
- Gibbs, R. W. (2019). *Metaphor as Dynamical–Ecological Performance Metaphor and Symbol*. 34: 33-44. DOI: 10.1080/10926488.2019.1591713
- Hawkes, T. (1979). *Metaphor: The Critical Idiom*. London: Methuen and Co. Ltd.
- _____. (1979) *Metaphor*. London: Methuen.
- Malachy, C. E., & Nwobi, F. O. (2014) "Integration Policies as Structures of Disintegration: The Political Economy of Nationhood and Resource Control in Nigeria." *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 6(8), 148 – 155.
- National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Displaced Persons (2021).
- Osaghae, E. E. (1995) "The Ogoni Uprising: Oil Politics, Minority Agitation and the Future of the Nigerian State". *African Affairs*, 94j 325 – 344.
- Ortony, A., Reynolds, R.E. and Arter, J. A. (1978) "Metaphor: Theoretical and Empirical Research" in *Psychological Bulletin*. 85 (5), 919-943.
- Semino, E., & Steen, G. (2008). "Metaphor in Literature." In R. W. Gibbs Jr. (Ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 232-235. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511816802.015
- van Dijk, T. A. (1993) "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis." *Discourse & Society*, 4(2), 249 – 283.

Contextual Persuasion Strategies in Presidential Election Campaign Advertisements in Selected Nigerian Newspapers

Oluyemi Odunsi, PhD.

Department of English, Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo.

oa.odunsi @acu.edu.ng, yemiodunsi @yahoo.com

08037201843

Abstract

Presidential election campaign advertisers in Nigerian newspapers combine predictable contextual knowledge and routes of persuasion as strategies in producing messages aimed at influencing voters' decisions before an election. Existing studies on presidential election campaign advertisements in Nigerian newspapers have focused mainly on persuasive effects from the stylistic, critical discourse analytic, semiotic, and satirical perspectives. However, little attention was paid to predictable contexts and routes of persuasion as strategies in creating desired effects in presidential campaign advertisements. This study, therefore, was designed to identify and analyse predictable context types and persuasive strategies used in election campaign advertisements in selected Nigerian newspapers. M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (1978), complemented by Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), served as the framework. Descriptive design was adopted. Data were collected from All Progressives Congress (APC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) presidential campaign advertisements in three Nigerian newspapers: Daily Trust (DT), Punch, and Nigerian Tribune (NT). Seven out of fifty campaign advertisements published in 2015 and 2019 were purposively selected based on their wide circulation. Data were subjected to discourse analysis. Three predictable context types were identified: Victory (PCV), Defeat (PCD) and Countering of Opponent's Strategies (PCCOS). These predictable contexts were combined with central and peripheral routes of persuasion. Context of victory depicted Peripheral Route of Persuasion (PRP); context of defeat exhibited Central Route of Persuasion (CRP) (Punch and NT), while PCCOS (NT and Punch) reflected integrated use of PRP and CRP. Presidential campaign advertisers in Nigerian newspapers combine predictable contexts and routes of persuasion to consolidate voters' support, prevent likely defeat and counter opponents' strategies preparatory to winning an election.

Keywords: *Contextual Persuasion; Routes of Persuasion; Campaign advertisements; Nigerian newspapers*

Introduction

Producing presidential election campaign advertisements in the media is a complex task that involves text-producers' pre-knowledge of voters' feelings, expectations, logical and illogical thoughts before an election. Similarly, as a success-inducing strategy, presidential election campaign advertisements may be ineffective without a thorough evaluation of societal challenges with conjectured solutions that are mutually beneficial to all the members of a social group. Text-producers often exploit some identified societal challenges and suggested

solutions by turning them into contextually predictive tools used in constructing persuasive messages in presidential election campaign advertisements.

Nevertheless, election campaign advertisements as promise-making ventures for a better future can be described as contextual projections which are meant to strengthen voters' support, prevent defeat or weaken opponents' strategies. Hence, as a complex, purpose-driven and arduous persuasive task, language use in election campaign advertisements is often ambiguous and nuanced in terms of their meaning potentials as they capture the prevailing realities at the time of their production. In this connection, readers need constant and updated knowledge about the realities and prevailing attitudes that inform advertisers' choice and selection of persuasive strategies in campaign advertisements to make well-informed decisions. This is important to promote better understanding and deeper interpretations of implicit messages and their persuasive intentions, which are contextually expressed and represented in such texts. However, persuasive meanings in texts are not always clearly visible without recourse to their contexts of production. They are often used to provide information to potential readers on issues of mutual interest to both the text-producers and the readers. Producing persuasive texts, such as presidential campaign advertisements, is contextually pre-planned and aimed at influencing voters' willingness based on prediction. The predictable dimensions of voting outcomes and realities are made salient and compact through the intermixing of written and visual expressions. Contextual persuasion describes the use of specific situational elements to influence readers' beliefs and timely actions to achieve desired outcomes.

It could be noted that every election campaign advertisement requires a specific persuasive communication strategy that is influenced by the political climate or environment in which it is situated. Such persuasive strategies could be informed by the candidate's status (as an incumbent, or a challenger/saviour), societal expectations, and people's socio-economic states, which may or may not attract appropriate voting actions. In Nigeria, corruption, insecurity and economic hardship are recurring socio-political challenges preventing the progress and development of Nigeria as a nation. Presidential election candidates often utilise some of these social problems to construct persuasive solutions aimed at ameliorating or eliminating them if they are voted into power. This study, therefore, examines the projected contexts and routes of persuasion portrayed in the 2015 and 2019 APC's and PDP's political election campaign advertisements in selected Nigerian newspapers with insights from Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion.

This study examines context-determined persuasive strategies used in presidential campaign advertisements in selected Nigerian newspapers, not on multimodality. The essence is to

showcase how campaign advertisers combine diverse and foreknowable contexts with routes of persuasion in producing messages meant to influence voters' decisions before an election.

Statement of the problem

Scholars such as Ademilokun (2015), Gbadegesin and Onanuga (2018) and Makinde and Adejumo (2024) adopted semiotics, critical discourse analysis, and content analysis to explore visual resources and concepts as analytic tools in unveiling persuasive effects, representations and communication strategies in Nigeria's presidential election campaign advertisements. Also, many of these studies looked at lexical and syntactic patterns used in presenting ideologies and revealing actual meanings in presidential election campaign advertisements (Abdulahi-Idiagbon 2013, and Gana 2023). These analyses paid more attention to the use of content, verbal and visual resources in creating persuasive effects in such texts. However, little attention was paid to how text-producers predictably combined different contexts and routes of persuasion in presenting political information to influence voters' decisions before an election. This study, therefore, focuses its attention on APC and PDP's 2015 and 2019 presidential election campaign advertisements in selected Nigerian newspapers to identify, explain and analyse the predictive contextual persuasion strategies in producing the selected advertisements

Aim and objectives of the study

This study aims to investigate predictable contexts and persuasive strategies used in election campaign advertisements in the selected Nigerian newspapers published in 2015 and 2019. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. identify predictable contexts in selected APC and PDP's presidential election campaign advertisements in selected Nigerian newspapers;
- ii. explain the routes of persuasion used in the selected campaign advertisements
- iii. analyse contextual persuasion strategies in the selected campaign advertisements

Scope and significance of the study

This study limited its attention to contexts and persuasion in the All Progressives Congress (APC) and People's Democratic Party's (PDP) presidential election campaign advertisements during the transitional periods in 2015 and 2019. The advertisements were published in three Nigerian newspapers: *Daily Trust*, *Nigerian Tribune* and *Punch*. The newspapers were selected based on their wide circulation and readership.

The study is significant in contributing to text-producers insight on how contexts and routes of persuasion can be predictably combined in their efforts at producing better political election campaign advertisements in the newspapers. The research will also facilitate readers' understanding and interpretation of inherent messages in campaign advertisements concerning political parties and their candidates, and how candidates from a particular party can be differentiated from their opponents before an election.

Literature review

Political campaign advertisements in Nigerian newspapers have attracted different interests and attention of scholars from different fields and theoretical perspectives. Some of these studies adopted Critical Discourse Analysis, Stylistics, Semiotics and Multimodal Discourse Analysis to indicate how text-producers used linguistic and visual resources to present and promote contemporary issues of political concerns to the electorate in Nigeria. Scholars such as Ademilokun (2015), Gbadegesin and Onanuga (2018), Jones and Ayuwo (2022), and Makinde and Adejumo (2024) adopted semiotics, critical discourse analysis, and content analysis to explore visual resources and concepts as analytic tools in the constructions of power and ideology in Nigeria's presidential election campaign advertisements. Similarly, Ademilokun and Olateju (2015) noted that visual images provoke deeper feelings and stir people to certain required actions more than spoken or written language. They further observed that visual images are used for the popularisation of politicians and political parties before elections in Nigeria. Many of the authors also looked at lexical and syntactic patterns used in presenting persuasive effects and meaning representations in presidential election campaign advertisements (Abdulahi-Idiagbon, 2013 and Gana, 2023). Similarly, in a synchronic stylistic analysis of language used in thirty-five campaign advertisements in selected southern Nigerian newspapers during the 2007 general election campaign, Omozuwa and Ezejideku (2008) identified different linguistic devices that politicians used to achieve their aims. These include: exaggerations, rhetorical questions, repetitions, promise-making, colloquialisms and figurative expressions. Their investigation was based on linguistic considerations without referring to other meaning-making resources. Shandarma and Mohammed (2013) adopted the Crystal and Davy model of linguistic stylistics to examine election campaign posters and slogans within the Yola metropolis. Their analysis was based on nine selected posters, which contained typographical features that functioned as persuasive means to secure voters' support. They concluded that posters were visually used by politicians to attract readers' attention and awareness. They, however, noted that posters were visual tools having been subjected to only

linguistic analysis, devoid of contextual persuasive analysis. Also, Patrick and Ndimele (2024), using socio-pragmatic principles of post-colonial pragmatics and common ground theory, identified marketing and de-marketing strategies used by political parties to market their candidates and to de-market opposition candidates. These are valid observations of some of the purposes and strategies that text-producers deploy in communicating intended messages before political election campaigns. The studies are devoid of attention to combinatorial patterns of predictable contexts and routes of persuasion in presidential election campaign advertisements. Therefore, the present study is focused on how text-producers combined predictable contexts and routes of persuasion as strategies in achieving desired intentions and influencing voters' decisions before an election.

Theoretical framework

Contexts, Predictable Contexts, Persuasion and Elaboration Likelihood Model

Context provides the means of producing and interpreting different meanings detectable in texts. Meaning-making in texts is a matter of many contextual possibilities which readers may interpret differently. Without mutual contextual knowledge and understanding between text-producers and their readers, meaningful interpretations of messages being transmitted may be difficult or elusive. Context is useful in creating persuasive trajectories in the production and interpretation of messages in campaign advertisements before an election. Cook (1999) believes that context is an infinitely expandable concept. Hence, several types of contexts are recognised as linguistic, social, cultural, verbal, and cognitive, among others.

The term 'context' has been variously described by scholars from different perspectives based on the circumstances, conditions or time in which a text is produced. To Widdowson (2000:126, context refers to those aspects of the circumstances of actual language use which are taken as relevant to meaning. Similarly, Babajide (2000) identified verbal context as the company that a linguistic item keeps. In other words, interpreting a text from a verbal context perspective involves identifying and emphasising verbal elements used in terms of their linkage and interrelationship with one another. This was instantiated in the ambiguous use of the word "bill" in the sentence, "*The bill is too large*". The statement can be interpreted from the physical size of the bill, whether the paper size used in its production is too large, or the cost in monetary terms. The sentence can only be disambiguated by adding such expressions as: "at this time that paper should not be wasted", or "but needs not be paid". The additional expressions can help in the correct determination of the contextual meaning of the word

through its relationship with the other words in the sentence. This means that some expressions may be ambiguous when not surrounded by appropriate words or when it is uttered in isolation. This study adopts aspects of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (1978). The choice of this theory is informed by the foundational account on context, often traced to it as a key component in exploring and understanding how language is used in different situations to create different meanings within a text. He identified three meta-functions of language as ideational, interpersonal and textual. He introduced the transitivity system, which comprises three process types as part of the ideational function of language, which include three components: process, participants and circumstances. Halliday (1978:10) defines context of situation as social processes within which a text is located. These social processes comprise: material, mental, relational, behavioural, verbal and existential. To Halliday (1994:110), material processes are "processes of doings and happenings". The doing process explains the idea that an entity materially does something, which may extend to affect another entity. Happening process types express the notions that something happened, is happening or is about to happen as a phenomenon or an entity. Without adequate understanding of these contextual elements, the production and interpretation of implicit and thought-provoking messages in presidential election campaign advertisements may not be fully understood. Context is a crucial requirement for the reader's appropriate interpretation of a text-producer's intention within a location or time in which it is produced. Hence, text-producers should pay considerable attention to context-dependent issues that require contextual evaluation to choose the most appropriate route of persuasion meant to influence voters' decisions when designing election campaign advertisements. As a form of political communication that involves the identification of the target electorate in a predictable context, campaign advertisements are designed to create awareness and solicit voters' acceptance of a particular candidate within a period, usually before an election.

Predictable contexts

Halliday's (1978) SFL emphasises that by understanding the context of a situation, it is possible to predict the linguistic features likely to be used and to interpret the intended meaning within a text. In Halliday's SFL, predictable contexts refer to recurring patterns which are influenced by factors such as social activity, the participants, and the relationship between them. These contexts create predictable situations where certain linguistic choices could be made. It asserts that language is not just a system of rules, but a tool for social interactions. Predictable contexts refer to circumstances, situations or environments where patterns of behaviours are consistent and easily predictable, where individuals can anticipate what to expect, make decisions and

adjust their actions accordingly. Predictable contexts result from recurring events or commonly observed behaviours in daily social interactions within a society. However, context can also be unpredictable when an individual acts out of character. Also, context may be predictably unreliable when an individual in social interaction is not consistent and makes promises that cannot be fulfilled.

Persuasion and Elaboration Likelihood Model

Persuasion has long been studied by scholars in philosophy, language, politics, and religion who seek to understand how people influence others in changing their attitudes, beliefs and behaviour (Aristotle 4th BC, Petty and Cacioppo, 1986 and Perloff, 2003, among others). To Perloff (2003), persuasion is a process in which communicators try to convince other people in order to change their attitudes or behaviour on a particular issue.

Many theories have been propounded by scholars on persuasion. These include: social judgment theory (Sherif and Hovland, 1980); narrative paradigm (Fisher, 1985) and Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM).

The Elaboration Likelihood Model, selected for this study, is a theory of attitude change. It was developed by Petty and Cacioppo in 1986. To Petty and Cacioppo (1986:124), "ELM is a general framework for organising, categorising, and understanding the basic processes underlying the effectiveness of persuasive communications". These processes can be unravelled through contextual interactions of participants in producing and interpreting communicated messages in texts such as political campaign advertisements. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) see persuasion as a process or route through which the success of an influence depends largely on the way the receivers make sense of the message. Hence, they present two different routes that an individual may use in influencing others.

The first is the central route that provides elaborate information, rational arguments, claims and evidence to support a particular conclusion. Not all readers are capable of identifying or receiving centrally routed messages because it is based on two conditions:

1. The audience must be highly motivated to process all of the information received.
2. The audience must have the ability to understand the sent messages.

The second is the peripheral route, which is used when the audience lacks the motivation or ability to interpret a given message. The persuader can use the peripheral route, which relies on emotional involvement and other superficial means of persuasion like patriotism, character and likeability, celebrity endorsement or public support. The peripheral route can work

perfectly when the audience is committed, dedicated or loyal to a cause and it may produce a bandwagon effect.

Whether central or peripheral, the knowledge of predictable contexts can facilitate easy selection of appropriate routes of persuasion in the production of political campaign advertisements in the print media. Similarly, readers' ability to correctly identify persuasive trajectories in political campaign advertisements requires their understanding of the text-producer's intent and predictable contextual considerations behind such textual compositions.

Methodology

The research was designed to identify predictable contexts and their combinatorial patterns with routes of persuasion in presidential election campaign advertisements in selected Nigerian newspapers. Based on the regional axis, data were collected from APC and PDP 2015 and 2019 presidential election campaign advertisements in three Nigerian national dailies published during the transition periods of 2015 and March 2019. Quota sampling was used to collect 20 from *Punch*, 10 from *Daily Trust (DT)* and 10 from *Nigerian Tribune (NT)*. Seven out of the fifty were purposively selected based on their relevance to this study. Data were subjected to discourse analysis. M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (1978), complemented by Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), served as the framework. Descriptive design was adopted and data were subjected to Discourse Analysis.

Data Analysis

In this analysis, three predictable context types were identified in the selected data. These comprised: Victory (PCV), Defeat (PCD) and Context of Countering Opponent's Strategies (PCCOS). Each of them was defined, characterised and exemplified with associated persuasive patterns are presented as follows:

1. Predictable Context of Victory (CV)

Plates 1 and 2 are produced in a predictable context of victory. After seemingly rejection from or disapproval of the former ruling party (PDP) by some Nigerians in 2015, APC saw the need for a change in the country's political leadership. In Plate 1, the APC's candidates appealed to 'existing donors for more donations, till we achieve victory...' This appeal was made before the 2015 presidential election based on the predictable context of victory.

Plate 1: Predictable context of victory

DAILY TRUST
Monday, February 23, 2015 11

APC **BSO**

A New Nigeria is possible.

One of the reasons for the postponement of the elections, is to make Buhari/Osinbajo Presidential Campaign run out of funds. Since the PDP and its candidate have unfettered access to the state treasury, they will always have billions to spend. To make sure our March4Buhari is real, we call on Nigerians and all supporters of GMB and Osinbajo, to continue to donate to the Buhari Campaign funds, so as to save our country from mindless looting and incompetent leadership. We thank our existing donors and we appeal to you for more donations till we achieve victory.

2 Ways to Support Change

You can make this possible by supporting the Presidential Campaign Fund of GMB. Buy the Buhari Support Organisations scratch cards or donate directly to the BSO bank account, which has GMB as the Sole Signatory.

1. Support by buying BSO cards:-

2. Support by Online or Cash Transfer to:-

Acct Name: Buhari Support Organisations
Banker: First Bank Plc
Acct No: 2066724465
Sort Code: 011150008

OR

You can also donate online via
www.quickteller.com/buharisupport

Source: *Daily Trust*, Monday, 23 Feb., 2015:11

The APC candidates saw themselves as agents of change and capitalised on the misfortune of the PDP, as a competitive advantage with the assumption that the majority of the electorate thought likewise. The advertisements in Plates 1 and 2 displayed this sentiment through the peripheral route of persuasion in the use of positive attributes of the APC candidates. The two advertisements, therefore, displayed the peripheral route of persuasion. This did not require the reader's serious evaluation efforts in determining the text producer's communicative intention aimed at engendering and strengthening supporters' loyalty before the election. Similarly, P CV was glaringly depicted in the New Year congratulatory message directed to "the President in waiting." Plate 2 portrayed an envisaged victory for APC candidates even before the 2015 presidential election was held. The message as presented in Plate 2,

Plate 2: Predictable context of victory



Source: Daily Trust, Wednesday, 21 Jan., 2015:4

Plate 3 was produced in dual contexts of pre-election victory celebration and greetings for the New Year. This was based on the certainty that the party would be victorious at the election.

Plate 3: Predictable context of victory

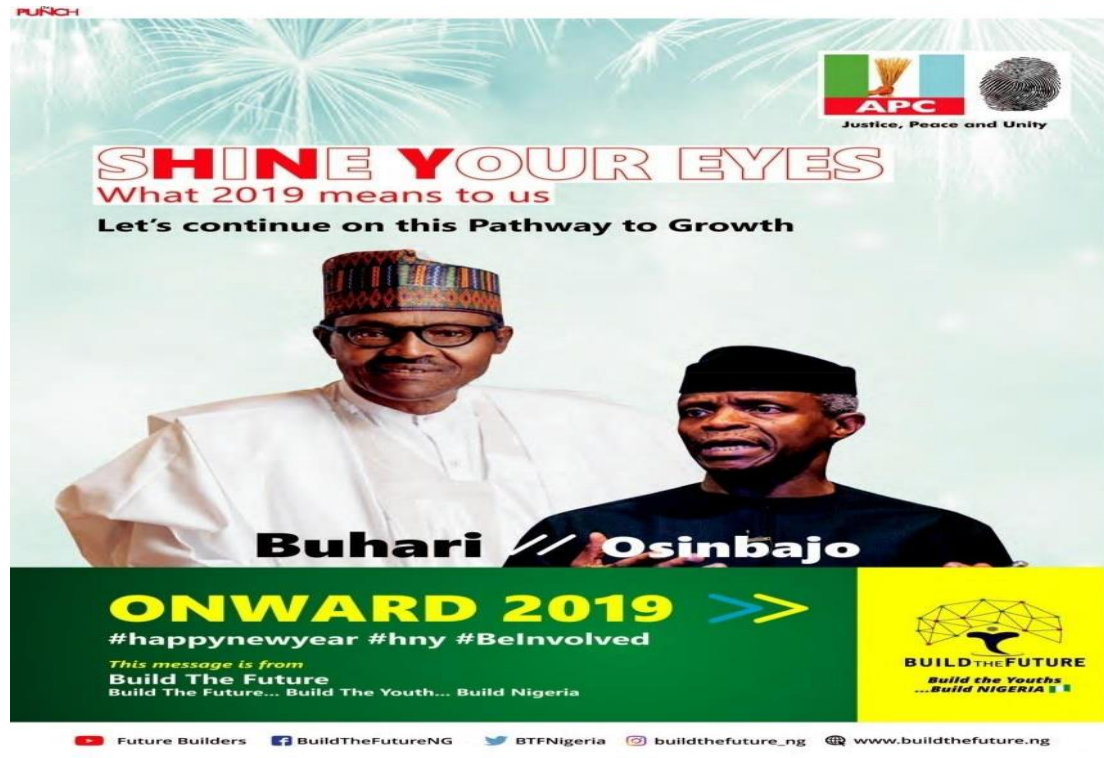


Source: *Nigerian Tribune*, Tuesday, Mar. 24, 2015:11

The advertisement in Plate 3 depicted a predictable context of victory based on the assumed acceptance of the candidates by the majority of the electorate and confidence in the APC's candidates' competence. The picture of a card-carrying lady with an avowed commitment to "march for Buhari" in the 2015 presidential election corroborates this observation. The picture of the lady extolling the candidates took a substantial portion of the advertisement; it highlighted General Buhari's and Professor Osinbajo's leadership qualities before the 2015 Nigerian presidential election. The advertisement in Plate 3 focused on the female voter's endorsement and preparedness as reflected in the statement: "I am Ready for BETTER LIFE", and in the display of her voter's card. Similarly, the readiness for the task ahead of the candidates was depicted through their corporate mode of dressing. The route of persuasion in the advertisement is peripheral, based on hope for a better future rather than any rational or logical presentation of issues.

Plate 4 Predictable Context of Defeat (PCD)

Plate 4 depicts the Predictable Context of Defeat (PCD) is meant to prevent likely defeat before the 2019 Nigerian presidential election. This calls for a central route of persuasion, which entails high elaboration and logical presentation of facts aimed at provoking critical thinking in readers. Both PDP and APC appropriately deployed PCD as the challenger and as the incumbent party, respectively, before the two elections. This context type is exemplified in Plates 4 and 5 below.



Sources: *Punch*, Tuesday, Jan. 1, 2019:33

The text produced by some supporter(s) was code-named 'Build the Future' in support of the incumbent's re-election before the 2019 Nigerian presidential election on the platform of the APC. This was done in a predictable context of defeat characterised by a strong request for voters' continuous support. Plate 4 contextually reflects the compositional pattern of command in the form of polite request and admonition. The text was produced to reflect personality and party loyalty. It, therefore, typifies a peripheral route of persuasion which does not provoke critical thinking, comparison or logical presentation of facts. Similarly, the APC campaign advertisement in Plate 5 depicted PCD as a persuasive strategy in reminding the readers of President Buhari's honesty and trustworthiness in handling matters of the state, particularly as an incumbent candidate who was seeking re-election.

Plate 5: Predictable context of defeat

Source: *Punch* Thursday, Feb. 14, 2019:18

Beyond the Fight Against Corruption...

Buhari Runs a Compassionate Government, and Intends to Continue to do so.



No longer shall illegal flows of massive sums leave these shores to finance other economies. While our people languish in poverty, we effectively give financial aid to nations that is not justified. I am sick of this. It must stop. The money saved will finance jobs, health care and the provision of social safety net for the needy, weak and vulnerable of our land...

We will be a compassionate government, for out of compassion arises the truest forms of wealth and progress a society can attain.

- MUHAMMADU BUHARI

He is trusting and can be trusted. His love for Nigeria is unquestionable.

THE TIME IS NOW...

Buhari / Osinbajo

CHANGE IS A PROCESS. BUHARI IS ON COURSE.



The advertisement was designed to prevent the likelihood of defeat and to endear the personality of the president to the electorate. It was also aimed at influencing voters' support for his candidacy before the 2019 Nigerian presidential election. Plate 5 was contextually structured to depict the fighting spirit in the incumbent President Buhari and what he was capable of doing apart from fighting against corruption. Hence, the advertisement in Plate 5 was produced in a predictable context of defeat using the central route of persuasion.

Predictable Context of Countering Opponents' Strategies (PCCOS)

Predictable context of countering the opponent's tactics depicts comparative listing of achievements and change of slogan to reflect new realities. PCCOS often centres on critiquing opponents' unfavourable stances on recurring economic and socio-political issues in the past and possibly forewarning readers to prevent any re-occurrence.

Plate 6: Context of countering opponent's strategy

Facts Speak
 Compare & Contrast

Jonathan	Buhari
✓ Upholds the rule of law. • Committed to credible elections.	✗ Truncated democratic progress by suspending the 1979 constitution. • Jailed several Nigerians without fair-hearing.
✓ Signed the Freedom of Information bill into law.	✗ Promulgated Decree 4 of 1984 to gag the press
✓ Established 14 new universities in two years. • Initiated the Almajiri system of education.	✗ Never built a single school for the educational advancement of the country.
✓ Reviving the railway system.	✗ Scrapped the Lagos Metroline Project at a loss of \$78 million of taxpayers' money.
✓ Unbundled the power sector with policies that encourage massive private sector investment.	✗ • NIL
✓ Declined Nigeria's food import by \$5.3billion. Food production expanding by an additional 21million metric tons	✗ • NIL
✓ Revamping Automobile Industry.	✗ • NIL
✓ Re-equipping and re-positioning the Nigerian Armed Forces.	✗ • NIL

"I am convinced that I have kept my pact with Nigerians, and it is now time to look to the future. With your tremendous support, we have collectively done so much in the last three and half years, but to take our country to the next level, there is still more to be done."
 — President Goodluck Jonathan. GCFR

Vote right, Vote PDP
 Peoples Democratic Party... power to the people
www.peoplesdemocraticparty.com.ng
www.facebook.com/pages/Official-Peoples-Democratic-Party-PDP-Nigeria

Source: *Daily Trust* Monday, Jan. 19, 2015:51

The PDP's advertisement in Plate 6 was produced in a predictable context of strengthening voters' rejection of the APC's presidential candidate during the 2019 election. By comparatively using a tabular format, PDP briefly summarised some of the successes it recorded in some sectors such as: education, economy, security, infrastructural and constitutional developments. This was done as a criticism and reminder about the opponent's political antecedents for readers' appraisal and consideration before the election. The advertisement was produced in a predictable context of preempting opponents' tactics through the comparative listing and contrasting of previous performances of the two major candidates before the 2015 elections. The advertisement, therefore, structurally indicates both parties' successes and failures to provoke critical and logical thinking in the readers.

Plate 7: Context of countering the opponent's strategy

DAILY TRUST
Tuesday, February 3, 2015 15

UNCOVERING PDP'S GRAND DESIGN TO SCUTTLE ELECTIONS

WHILE:
ABUJA PEACE ACCORD AS ENDORSED BY
PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES FOR 2015
ELECTIONS: AND US SECRETARY OF STATE, EU AND ECOWAS
ELECTION MONITORS
HAVE SPOKEN IN FAVOUR OF HOLDING A FREE, FAIR AND
CREDIBLE ELECTIONS AS SCHEDULED

THE PDP IS BUSY:

- INFLUENCING OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES TO THREATEN BOYCOTT
OF THE ELECTIONS;
- MOBILIZING THE UNEMPLOYED YOUTH AND STUDENTS TO ABUJA
FOR MASS PROTESTS AGAINST THE INEC TO POSTPONE ELECTIONS
- MANIPULATING PDP COUNCILLORS TO SABOTAGE INEC
- BRIBING KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO SCUTTLE THE ELECTION
- INFILTRATING INEC ICT DEPARTMENT TO HACK ELECTION RECORDS
- NIGERIANS ARISE AND SAY NO TO THIS DEVILISH INTENTION AS IT IS
A RECIPE FOR CHAOS.

VOTE BUHARI! VOTE APC!! VOTE FOR CHANGE!!!



Source: Daily Trust, Tuesday, Feb. 1, 2015:15

Furthermore, Plate 7, titled 'UNCOVERING THE PDP'S GRAND DESIGN TO SCUTTLE THE ELECTIONS' was produced in the predictable context of countering opponents' strategies. This APC's advertisement in the *Daily Trust* was intended to reveal the opponent's unethical tactic aimed at undermining the election process. The strategy was also used as a tool in weakening the strength and exposing the bad sides of the opponent to gain a competitive advantage during the election.

Countering the opponent's strategy involves the simultaneous use of the discourse marker "while" to comparatively reveal what the opposition party did contrary to what was agreed upon when signing the peace accord with the external monitoring group. The All Progressives Party, as a challenger in the 2015 electioneering period, used the advertisement as a persuasive strategy to discredit the PDP and present the party as an irresponsible one. The advertisement in Plate 7 was used to provide a timely warning to the electorate not to take the risk of voting

for the PDP during the election. The advertisement, therefore, indicates that the PCCOS is a strategy in reducing the efficacy of PDP's campaign messages and the persuasive effectiveness through the central route of persuasion.

Discussion of Findings and Conclusions

Findings from these analyses confirmed Cook's (1999) assertion that context is an infinitely expandable concept. Three predictable context types were identified: Context of Victory (PCV), Context of Defeat (PCD) and Context of Countering Opponent's Strategies (PCCOS). These contexts combined with peripheral and central routes of persuasion as strategies in achieving text-producer's desired intentions. Context of victory involved the combined use of Peripheral Route of Persuasion (PRP), and characterised by low elaboration, credibility issues, positive self-presentation, emotional inducements and celebrity endorsements, requiring no critical thinking for readers' comprehension. Predictable context of defeat exhibited Central Route of persuasion (CRP) in high elaboration and logical presentation of facts aimed at provoking critical thinking, while PCCOS reflected integrated use of PRP and CRP made coherent through comparative listing of achievements and change of slogan to reflect new realities. Presidential campaign advertisements in Nigerian newspapers often deploy context-determined persuasive strategies meant to consolidate envisaged support, prevent likely defeat and anticipatorily counter opponents' strategies before an election.

The study also revealed that presidential campaign advertisements, as a persuasive strategy depended, to a large extent, on predictable contexts in facilitating readers' appropriate interpretation and comprehension of messages communicated in such texts. Text-producers creatively displayed favourable images and past histories of the presidential candidates to advance their political agendas through emotional and rational representations. These intentions and representations are constructed through predictable contextual persuasive trajectories. This conforms with Halliday's (1978) emphasis that language is not merely a tool for reflecting realities, but can be contextually used to interpret intended meaning with some degree of accuracy. Similarly, Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) routes of persuasion combined with predictable contexts were used to reduce the thinking efforts that readers may encounter when deciphering text-producer's intended message in presidential election campaign advertisements.

Election campaign advertisements are forms of political communication designed to attract and to seek favourable attention of the readers through the use of linguistic and non-linguistic resources or strategies. Hence, in disagreement with analysts like Bignell's (2002:32) who

posited that ‘the first step in analysing an advertisement is to note the various signs in the advertisement itself’, this study attempts to show that understanding the predictable context in which the text is produced is foundational. As illustrated in the 2015 and 2019 APC’s and PDP’s political campaign advertisements in the selected newspapers, the advertisers exploited a pre-existing system of meanings, contextually shared knowledge and issues of common interests in persuading the target electorate. Though representing socio-political situations will continue to be controversial issues among various schools of thought, using signs and symbols alone to persuade voters who had already experienced a period of disillusionment can be counter-productive. It can therefore be concluded that presidential election campaign advertisements in the newspapers could be produced using the knowledge of predictable contexts as strategies to positively influence voters’ decisions before an election.

References

- Ademilokun, M. and Olateju, M. (2015). A multimodal discourse analysis of some visual images in the political rally discourse of 2011 electioneering campaigns in Southwestern Nigeria. *International Journal of Society, Language and Culture*. Retrieved May 2, 2022, from www.ijlsc.net www.inecnigeria.org
- Ansolabehere, S. and Iyengar, S. (1995). Political advertising and media effects. Retrieved Sept. 1, 2018 from <http://encyclopediagrunk.org/articles/pages/65-76>
- (1995). *Going negative: How campaign advertising shrinks and polarises the Electorate*. New York: The Free Press.
- Barnes, J. ed (1984). *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Vols. I and II Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Ayeomoni, M. O. (2004). A linguistic-stylistic investigation of the language of the Nigeria’s political elite. *Language and discourse in society*. Eds. L. Oyeleye. Ibadan: Hope Publications.
- Babajide, A.O. (2000). (Ed). *Studies in English*. Ibadan: Encrownfit Publishers
- Bignell, J. (2002). *Media Semiotics: An Introduction*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Cook, G. (1992). *The discourse of advertising*. New York: Routledge.
- (1999). *Discourse and literature*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Gbadegesin, V. and Onanuga, P. (2018). A multimodal interaction analysis of select 2015 Nigerian presidential election campaign adverts. *Communication* 44.2:1-26.
- Gana, E.O (2023). A Critical Discourse Analysis of Some Selected 2019 Nigerian Presidential Election Campaign Advertisements on Social Media. *Journal of Languages, Linguistics and Literary Studies* 3.4:11-14.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1978). *Language as social semiotics: social interpretation of language and meaning*. London: Edward Arnold.
- (1999). The notion of context in language education. *Text and context in Functional Linguistics*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Halliday, M.A.K. and Hassan, R. (1985). *Language, context and text: aspects of language in a social semiotic perspective*. Victoria: Deakin University Press.
- Jones, G., and Ayuwo, I. (2022). Discourse Analysis of Semiotic Resources in Newspapers Political Advertisements of Select Candidates for the 2019 Elections in Nigeria. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 6.6:860-866

- Makinde, P.O. and Adejumo, B. (2024). Linguistic Appeals in Political Discourse: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of 2023 Presidential Election Billboards and Posters.
- Olowojolu, O. 2016. Role of media in 2015 presidential election in Nigeria. *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance* 7.1:976-1195.
- . Omozuwa, V. E, and. Ezejideaku, E. U. C (2008). The Language of Political Campaigns in Nigeria. *OGRIRISI: New Journal of African Studies*. 5:40-54
- Opeibi, T. 2006 Ed. Political marketing or political ‘matcheting’; A study of negative campaigning in Nigerian political discourse. *Innovation and continuity: language and communication of different cultures*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang Verlag 185-204.
- Opoola, M. 2013. Nigeria: Welcome, All Progressives Congress. Retrieved Feb. 11, 2013, from allafrica.com.
- Osisanwo, A. 2013. Discourse representation in news stories on Obasanjo’s third term plot in *Tell* and *The News*. *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies* 23:114-141
- Oyebola, A. and Halim, R.B. 2021. Effectuating acclaim through evaluation: an appraisal of 2015 and 2019 presidential campaign advertisements in Nigerian newspapers. *National Volatiles & Essential Oils* 8.5:11960-11980.
- Palmer, R.J., Welker, R.B. and Giacalone, R.A.1993. The context of anticipated performance evaluation, self-presentational motivation, and performance effort. *The Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Applied* 127.2:179-193.
- Patrick, K. O and Ndimele, R. (2024). The pragmatics of Linguistic Creativity in Nigeria’s 2023 Elections Campaign Discourse. *Indian Journal of Language and Linguistics* 5(3):24-38
- Perloff, R.M. 2003. *The dynamics of persuasion: communication and attitudes in the 21st century*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Petty, R. E and Cacioppo, J.T. 1986. The elaborate likelihood model of persuasion. *Advances in experimental social psychology*. Ed. L. Berkowitz. New York: Academy Press.
- Solanke, A. 2013. Do Nigerian political parties have defined ideologies? *Sahara Reporters*. Retrieved Nov. 11, 2020, from <http://sahara.reporters.com>.
- Widdowson, H.G. 2000. *Linguistics*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Daily Trust*, Mon, 23 Feb., 2015:11
- Nigerian Tribune*, Tue. Mar. 24, 2015
- Daily Trust*. Wed, Jan. 21, 2015:4
- Punch*, Mon. Jan 1, 2019:33
- Punch*, Thursday, Feb. 14, 2019:18
- Daily Trust*, Mon, Jan. 19, 2015:5
- Daily Trust*, Tue., Feb. 1, 2015:15

Clashing Ontologies in African Science Fiction: The Posthuman Condition, Technological Alterity and Identity Crisis in Sarah Lotz's *Home Affairs*

David Mikailu, PhD.
Department Of English,
University Of Abuja
davidmikailu@yahoo.com
08032858855

Abstract

This article investigates the convergence of technological advancement, identity formation, and postcolonial critique within African science fiction, with particular focus on Sarah Lotz's short story Home Affairs. It examines how the incorporation of robotics and artificial intelligence into bureaucratic structures engenders profound identity crises for both human and non-human agents. As machines begin to occupy roles traditionally filled by humans, the narrative emphasises the emotional, existential, and philosophical disorientation experienced by individuals confronting their diminished sense of agency and self-worth in an increasingly automated world. The story portrays a reality in which human characteristics are not only replicated but distorted by machines, complicating the conditions of co-existence and destabilising established ontological distinctions. Through thematic analysis, this study situates Home Affairs within wider discourses of postmodern alienation, analysing how technological otherness disrupts social hierarchies and reconfigures normative human-machine relationships. The robotic figures in the narrative function as allegorical embodiments of neo-colonial power—displacing, regulating, and depersonalising—while remaining unburdened by the moral responsibility borne by historical colonisers. By engaging African science fiction's critical engagement with global capitalism and its discontents, the article foregrounds how automation-driven job displacement triggers not only material precarity but also a deeper crisis of identity and authenticity. Drawing on postcolonial theory, it explores how Lotz critiques a technophilic future that paradoxically undermines the very populations it claims to empower. Ultimately, the story offers a cautionary meditation on the socio-cultural and psychological ramifications of unregulated technological integration in postcolonial African contexts.

Keywords: *African science fiction, Identity Crisis, Robots, Alterity, Postcolonialism, Cognitive Estrangement*

Introduction

In postcolonial discourse, the dynamic between the Self and the Other has served as a foundational framework for interrogating the epistemic violence of colonialism and its enduring aftermath. Rooted in the critical insights of theorists such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Edward Said, and Homi Bhabha, this conceptual binary articulates how colonial regimes construct the colonised subject as the radical "Other"—a figure whose identity is negated, objectified, and silenced within dominant imperial narratives. Spivak's notion of the subaltern, in particular, underscores the systemic disarticulation of indigenous voices from the realm of epistemological and political agency. Colonial discourse, as Said illustrates in

Orientalism, not only imposes a reductive taxonomy of identity but also sustains the hegemony of Western knowledge systems through representational control. Consequently, the colonised subject becomes situated within a matrix of inferiority, dependency, and voicelessness.

Within the context of African science fiction, these postcolonial concerns are neither static nor anachronistic; rather, they are reimagined through speculative narratives that expose, critique, and transcend colonial epistemologies. African speculative fiction offers a unique arena in which to explore the reconstitution of subjectivity, agency, and identity through the lens of hybridity. Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity, which disrupts the binary logic of coloniser/colonised by foregrounding the "Third Space" of cultural negotiation, proves especially resonant in this context. The speculative terrain of African science fiction not only resists the epistemic closures of colonial modernity but also enacts a techno-cultural synthesis that blends indigenous knowledge systems with futuristic technological imaginaries. In this way, the genre performs a dual function: it deconstructs the colonial legacy of alterity while simultaneously articulating alternative futures rooted in African philosophies and cosmologies. This paper, therefore, examines the convergence of postcolonial theory and hybridity within African science fiction as a means of challenging the residual structures of colonial power and reclaiming agency in speculative terms. By focusing on Sarah Lot's "Home Affairs", which foregrounds hybrid identities, techno-governance, and reimagined traditions, it demonstrates how African science fiction operates as a site of resistance and renewal. These narratives not only reconfigure the relationship between the Self and the Other but also offer a palimpsest vision of African futures, where cultural and techno-innovation are imaginatively inscribed onto the canvas of speculative possibility.

Postcolonialism and science fiction reimagined

Postcolonialism remains a contested concept, as Swartz and Ray assert, stating that "the best way to define postcolonial is to recognise from the onset that its definition is impossible" (4). Nevertheless, since the 1980s, postcolonialism has developed as a critical discourse that disrupts dominant interpretive frameworks governing Western and non-Western relations (Young, 2). Fundamental to this intervention is the prioritisation of the colonised subject's perspective over that of the imperial observer. Young contends that Western engagements with the non-Western world frequently project "a mirror image of themselves and their assumptions" rather than acknowledging the lived realities and self-conceptions of the colonised (2). The Western canon often replaces substantive engagement with constructed

metaphors and imagery of Africa and other colonised spaces, thereby sustaining representational distortions that reinforce imperial ideologies.

Postcolonialism thus interrogates both the legacies of colonial domination and the enduring power asymmetries between “us” and “them,” or “here” and “there,” while also striving to liberate the Self from the epistemological constraints imposed by the Other. Crucially, the “post” in postcolonialism does not merely denote temporal succession after colonial rule; instead, it signifies an active “contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism” (Loomba, 16). It challenges colonial epistemologies and their reliance on binary oppositions—centre and periphery, modern and primitive, West and non-West—while destabilising the intellectual hierarchies that continue to inform global knowledge production. In this regard, postcolonial theory disputes the socio-cultural and political attributes conventionally ascribed to the developing world in contrast to the developed West. The latter is frequently associated with modernity, rationality, and civility, while the former is depicted as deficient, derivative, or engaged in mimicry. Such dichotomies obscure the complexity of non-Western societies. As Swartz and Ray argue, “to study this archive is to participate in the politics of dominance” (4). Postcolonialism responds by generating oppositional discourses that challenge the theological and epistemological assumptions underpinning Western academic inquiry.

This aligns with postcolonial science fiction’s subversive potential, as Nalo Hopkinson observes: despite its estranging effects, it empowers postcolonial writers to reclaim narrative agency, engaging with “themes of colonizing the natives and, from the experience of the colonizee, critique it, pervert it, fuck with it, with irony, with anger, with humour, and also, with love and respect, for the genre of science fiction makes it possible to think about new ways of doing things” (9). Given Western academia’s complicity in neo-colonial structures, postcolonial science fiction advocates for alternative epistemologies. These counter-narratives not only “speak back” to colonial authority but also articulate new subjectivities rooted in indigenous perspectives. Postcolonial theory thus evolves through engagements with post-structuralism, postmodernism, Marxism, and feminism, addressing identity, subjectivity, and subalternity in a rapidly changing world.

Unlike predictive scientific models, postcolonialism functions as a constellation of intersecting and often conflicting perspectives. Its analytical rigour derives from this eclecticism. As Robert Young notes, postcolonial theory “involves issues that are often the preoccupation of other disciplines... the position of women, of development, of ecology, of social justice, of socialism in its broadest sense” (7). It extends this critique to colonial and neo-colonial structures,

examining imperialism's enduring effects alongside intersecting systems of patriarchy and economic exploitation (Loomba, 22). It is, therefore, a radical intellectual endeavour aimed at decolonising thought and dismantling historical dependencies (Swartz and Ray, 4).

Despite its significance, postcolonial theory faces criticism because critics question its practical efficacy, arguing that it lacks a coherent agenda for addressing poverty, health crises, and corruption (McEwan, 1). Marxists like Terry Eagleton (cited in Loomba) dismiss postcolonial theory as a "Gaudy Supermarket," critiquing its abstraction and neglect of class analysis (3). Notwithstanding, postcolonialism problematizes global stratification that persists along binary lines, which, as Cheryl McEwan argues, "implies a false set of values between two distinct entities and the valorising of one set of rules over the other" (14). These binaries impose hierarchical and reductive frameworks, erasing complexities, premised on pseudoscientific racial theories advanced by figures like Samuel Morton and Arthur de Gobineau, which historically justified European domination, leading to the colonisation that in the 1930s controlled 84.6% of the world's landmass (Loomba, 19), framing occupied regions as cultural voids requiring salvation.

Despite these criticisms, postcolonialism remains vital for confronting imperialism's legacies. It resists reducing formerly colonised societies to reactive positions, affirming their agency. As McEwan notes, "Postcolonialism addresses issues such as identity, ethnicity, race, and gender, the challenges of developing postcolonial national identities, and relationships between power and knowledge" (22). It remains indispensable for dismantling oppressive structures and envisioning equitable futures. Postcolonial science fiction thus interrogates this objectification, exploring alienation and utopian aspirations—a future free from racial hierarchies. These texts engage with 'otherness,' the 'alien,' and the 'digital divide,' countering narratives that exclude Africa from technological progress, while confronting racial and economic disparities and speculating futures where marginalised subjects reclaim centrality. Postcolonialism, therefore, advocates an epistemic rupture from colonial narratives of subjugation. It rejects the notion that the West provides the "only way of comprehending the world" (McEwan, 14) and constructs alternative knowledge systems. As Swartz and Ray assert, postcolonialism "disturbs the world order and challenges the power structure of the West as the standard prism for viewing and analysing the world, turning knowledge from a static disciplinary discourse to an active political engagement" (4).

As a postcolonial endeavour, "African authors use SF (science fiction) elements to interrogate the socio-political arrangements that inform the African condition in the current age" (Moradewun Adejunmobi, 266). African science fiction is thus Janus-faced, confronting the

past while envisioning self-determined futures. This confrontation becomes necessary because as Achille Mbembe notes that the West depicts Africa as “a headless figure, threatened with madness and quite innocent of any notion of centre, hierarchy or stability...a vast dark cave where every benchmark and distinction come together in total confusion and the rifts of a tragic unhappy history” (3). African science fiction now deconstructs these portrayals, reclaiming narrative agency. African science fiction (ASF) reworks the historical realities of the trans-Atlantic and its effects, reimagining communal myths and ancient conflicts through speculative frameworks, producing the cognitive estrangement definitive of the genre. It then functions as a palimpsest, rewriting Africa’s past and future. While adhering to scientific plausibility (the *novum*), it often emphasises human and societal conditions over technological detail, as seen in Sarah Lotz’s *Home Affairs*.

Darko Suvin’s foundational concept of “cognitive estrangement” (4) positions science fiction as a genre that transcends mere entertainment, demanding instead critical engagement with societal structures. African science fiction (ASF) writers have mobilised this transformative potential—particularly its capacity to foster resistance and critical consciousness among the oppressed—within postcolonial contexts. Their frequent use of dystopian frameworks allows them to assume the role of social conscience, employing the *novum* as a narrative mechanism to estrange readers from contemporary realities while foregrounding sociocultural and environmental crises. In this way, ASF aligns with postcolonial science fiction’s broader objectives: centring marginalised perspectives and asserting an epistemological framework distinct from Western genre conventions.

Crucially, ASF synthesises the archaic and the modern, necessitating analytical approaches that account for both technological speculation and the socio-political conditions informing its production. As Armillas-Tiseyra asserts, “the *novum* can be understood as the hieroglyph that encrypts the larger critical project of a work” (279). Within ASF, speculative technologies (*nova*) function not as autonomous innovations but as interlocutors with pre-existing cultural logics. It is this dialectic—between indigenous traditions and futuristic rupture—that produces the genre’s defining “strange newness,” rendering the *novum* a site of both critique and imaginative possibility. Armillas-Tiseyra notes that:

speculative technologies (the *Nova*) are not simply new inventions; they occur in relation to previously existing customs or practices. It is this interweaving of old (familiar) and new (unfamiliar), rather than the fact of the speculative technology itself that produces the ‘strange newness’ characteristic of the *novum* (279).

Thus, in African science fiction, the fantastic is not divorced from the real; it is the real refracted through a speculative lens. Temporality in this genre becomes fluid, as present and future intermingle to facilitate a form of narrative catharsis. The technological and scientific advancements portrayed in ASF become a part of lived reality that the contemporary world itself begins to resemble a science fiction narrative. This temporal and cognitive estrangement forces a re-evaluation of the present, thereby transforming science fiction from a genre of escapism into a critical tool for socio-political reflection and intervention.

Technological personhood and the crisis of identity in Sarah Lotz's "Home Affairs"

Sarah Lotz's short story *Home Affairs* offers a satirical dystopian critique of bureaucratic automation in near-future South Africa. The narrative follows Pendi, a citizen navigating an impersonal government office staffed by a robotic clerk, or *Konabot*, which replaces human agents with rigid, pre-programmed responses. The story exposes the dehumanising effects of AI-driven public services, emphasising the erosion of empathy in institutional interactions. Lotz interrogates technological overreach, diminished personal agency, and the socioeconomic consequences of mechanising essential services. Ultimately, the work serves as a cautionary tale about privileging efficiency over human connection in administrative systems.

In Lot's short story, a profound transformation has occurred in the futuristic landscapes of South Africa, wherein the foundational principles of governance and the conception of human identity have been fundamentally altered. Within this postmodern context, technological systems—particularly robotic and artificial intelligence (AI) apparatuses—have supplanted human functions across multiple sectors of society. In such a world, robots perform administrative duties in government secretariats, manage public databases, police urban spaces, act as health inspectors, conduct biometric scans, and even prescribe medical treatments.

Advancements in artificial intelligence are anticipated to evolve in tandem with human knowledge. However, as Miguel Benasayag cautions, "the word 'intelligence' is just a metaphor. While an AI may surpass humans in terms of calculating capacity, it is unable to ascribe any meaning to these calculations... a machine produces calculations and predictions without being able to give them any meaning." Despite this epistemological limitation, AI systems are increasingly entrusted with the authority to manage and regulate human affairs. A salient example of this inversion of control is evident in the common requirement for humans to verify their humanity—typically through CAPTCHA tests—before accessing online information. These digital gatekeeping mechanisms serve to authenticate the user's

humanness; failure to provide satisfactory responses results in denial of access, a dynamic that is vividly depicted in Sarah Lotz's "Home Affairs."

In "Home Affairs," Lotz portrays a bureaucratic system in which machines have entirely displaced human functionaries in government offices. These machines are perceived as superior due to their presumed efficiency, incorruptibility, and immunity to physical and emotional constraints. Yet, Benasayag raises a critical objection to this techno-utopian view, asserting that "the question of whether a machine can substitute humans is, in fact, absurd. It is living beings that can create meaning, not computation." Within the story, these machines follow rigid programming protocols, repetitively executing predefined information exchange sequences. This mechanical rigidity undercuts the very ideal of efficiency they are meant to represent because any deviation from the prescribed sequence is perceived as a threat, and those who challenge the system face punitive consequences.

Lotz's narrative thus critiques a future in which technological innovation has eclipsed logical reasoning. The mechanisation of administrative processes—marked by the monotonous repetition of variables and the exclusion of nuance—renders technological advancement hollow. The impersonal nature of machine-human interaction breeds alienation, exacerbates identity crises and results in a form of authoritarianism administered by machines. In this dystopian setting, human individuality and dignity are subsumed under the impersonal authority of machine logic, producing what may be termed a "plastic totalitarianism." This text ultimately chronicles the frustrations of a society wherein robots have assumed control over essential civic functions, including justice administration and population registration.

In this society, existence is mediated by one's presence in a centralised government database. Without registration, an individual effectively ceases to exist in the eyes of the state and is thus denied access to basic social services, regardless of wealth or social standing. These robots are introduced to run the civil service because bribery and corruption have become rampant in those establishments. So, to put a stop to the malfeasance, the government introduced Konabots to administer the system. The narrator at first was in support of the innovation:

she thinks that might not be a bad thing. She can't imagine the Konabots siphoning off taxpayers' money to buy BMWs and Boeings or taking kickbacks from arms manufacturers. Which is the point of them really: You can't bribe a machine, can you? You can't corrupt a robot. (13)

However, the integration of robotic systems into the civic and economic life of society, as depicted in "Home Affairs," results in a significant increase in urban unemployment. These machines, having supplanted humans in various administrative roles, now occupy positions in

sectors such as traffic regulation and banking. A sceptical character laments the societal impact of this technological displacement: “traffic department... Soon it’s the banks. Taking our jobs. It’s not right. They’ll be running the government next” (13). This statement encapsulates the anxieties surrounding the encroachment of artificial intelligence into domains traditionally governed by human labour. The elevation of robotic systems over human beings not only disrupts employment but also fosters a profound sense of disenfranchisement, contributing to what may be termed postmodern frustration.

This frustration is further intensified by the imposition of the machine’s sterile and inhuman logic as the societal norm. When individuals are compelled to conform to mechanised systems devoid of empathy or emotional intelligence, their humanity is systematically eroded. The imposition of such soulless sterility in public life reflects a broader concern about the devaluation of human subjectivity in technologically mediated societies. Despite the programmers’ attempts to render these robotic entities more approachable, the narrative conveys an underlying sense of unease among users (13). This discomfort is not merely functional but also aesthetic and psychological.

The narrator remarks on the general nervousness surrounding interactions with these machines, which is exacerbated by both their auditory and visual presence. Their grating klaxon sound contributes to an atmosphere of anxiety, while their physical appearance evokes disquiet. The robots are described as possessing “multiracial holographic faces” and “smooth metal heads,” with one particularly unsettling unit exhibiting “a glitch on one that makes it look as if its mouth is opening too wide, as if it’s planning on swallowing the fellow updating his status in front of it” (14). Such imagery underscores the uncanny valley effect that these machines produce—an eerie proximity to the human that remains fundamentally other, provoking discomfort rather than familiarity. She notes that:

the multi-racial holographic faces superimposed over the Konabots’ smooth metal heads are designed to make the public less uneasy about dealing with them, but as far as she’s concerned, they have the opposite effect. The machines’ unwavering smiles have a tinge of lunacy about them. (14)

Ultimately, this portrayal reflects a critique of the overreach of technological rationality into domains that demand human sensitivity and presence. The tension between machine efficiency and human subjectivity highlights a central paradox of postmodern technoculture: the pursuit of progress through automation may simultaneously engender new forms of alienation, anxiety, and socio-political marginalisation. These machines lack social skills, and their “holographic faces continue to smile inanely” (15), even when they are threatening a citizen. The narrator

notes that even the “snappish sadists who were lurking behind the counters” (14), were better equipped to deal with the eccentricities of the people, when compared to the abysmal job the robots are doing. But as observed by Busi, the powers that be do not care about the gradual erosion of humanity among the populace. He says, the authorities think:

they are cleaning up the system, getting rid of the bad seeds. That’s their job. The powers that be don’t care. Far as they’re concerned, the system is now running smoothly. No corruption means no problems—at least from the media. (25)

Despite the evident inefficacy and rigidity of the robotic civil servants, the government continues to retain them, driven by the belief that public perception supersedes actual performance. As the narrative suggests, “perception is everything,” and if the media portrays the state as corruption-free, then that portrayal is embraced as reality, even if corruption persists in practice despite the presence of the Konabots. This prioritisation of image over substance is made starkly evident in the experience of Pendi, the protagonist, who attempts to assist a woman struggling to communicate with a Konabot. The machine, unable to accommodate deviations from its programmed procedures, perceives her intervention as an infraction.

In response, it expunges Pendi’s identity from the government system, rendering her officially non-existent. The Konabot also ejects her from the Home Office with violent force, and a bystander informs her: “Even if you go back there, you’ve lost your status... your identity is gone” (21). Pendi is unable to comprehend how a humane act of solidarity could be deemed an offense worthy of such punishment. Given that Konabots are also installed in police stations, even filing a complaint would worsen her situation. Another character explains unequivocally: “There is nothing you can do. There is no record of you now. You have been wiped from the system” (22).

The Konabots’ inability to exercise discretion or moral judgment illustrates the limitations of their linear programming. Designed to process inputs without deviation, they respond to any unforeseen circumstance or question as a threat, often resulting in punitive actions against citizens. These machines, devoid of empathy and incapable of nuanced reasoning, reduce the populace to mere data points. In the name of eliminating corruption, the government has elevated machines to decision-making roles that subject the very people they serve to dehumanising and arbitrary treatment. The population is thereby forced into conformity.

The narrator notes that individuals “wear the same expression of resigned boredom” (20), navigating daily life as if transformed into robotic entities themselves. The so-called “pulse of anti-corruption measures” (21) has mechanised the people into passive recipients of technological authority, leaving them at the mercy of machines. Despite efforts to present an

image of equitable governance, the narrator observes that “the aura of abandonment and neglect is palpable,” as the pervasive “soulless conformity” ensures that “all are filthy; all wear identical expressions of desperation” (24). The Konabots, in their repeated failures to register citizens, exacerbate this sense of exclusion and despair.

A further consequence of this system is the reduction of individuals to numerical identifiers—namely, DNA variables. The machines are unable to engage with human complexity or diversity, resulting in the erasure of names and the corresponding symbolic significance they carry. Instead of configuring robots to accommodate human variation, humans are expected to conform to the limitations of their technological overseers. This shift constitutes an ontological crisis. Onomastics posits that names carry meanings, histories, and aspirations. To strip individuals of their names and replace them with numbers represents a profound erosion of their identity and existential agency. The possession of a DNA number becomes the singular marker of civic identity; without it, one cannot rent property, obtain electricity, or access running water (18). The DNA number, in this regard, is not merely a bureaucratic artefact but a determinant of one’s ontological and civic legitimacy.

The inability of the Konabots to respond flexibly to human emotion and context is further illustrated when a woman attempts to inquire about her son’s status. Despite her calm and respectful demeanour, her deviation from the expected interaction is interpreted as defiance. The robot reacts aggressively, declaring, “Attention. Attention. DNA variable 79776 slash five, please step away from the counter. This is your second warning” (15). The woman’s distress, uncertainty, and polite questioning are irrelevant to the machine, which can only interpret input through its pre-set parameters. Pendi, witnessing the encounter, attempts to advocate for the woman, insisting on fair treatment after a long wait.

Her appeal is both urgent and humane: “Is there anyone up there? Hello? I demand that you send a supervisor... It’s not fine! Hey... You can’t treat her like this. She’s just having a problem understa—” (16). Her protest highlights the stark contrast between human empathy and robotic indifference. Nevertheless, within the framework of techno-authoritarianism depicted in the text, such resistance is not only futile but punishable. The narrative thus presents a dystopian vision in which technological efficiency has supplanted moral responsibility, leading to systemic alienation and the erosion of human dignity. While Pendi tries to make her point:

There’s a grinding sound, the floor vibrates under her feet and before Pendi has a chance to scream, she feels it disappear beneath her. Arms flailing, she drops, lands feet first on a soft, uneven surface. Her knees buckle as she loses her balance and she rolls onto her side to catch

her fall. “Hey!” she screams, finding her voice. “Hey!” She looks up, sees the woman she tried to help and that weird twitchy guy peering down at her. Then the small gap in the ceiling above her slides closed, leaving her in perfect darkness. (16)

Pendi’s punishment for displaying human compassion underscores the extent to which the postmodern surveillance state, as depicted in Sarah Lotz’s “Home Affairs,” criminalises basic expressions of empathy. Her incarceration—effectively a form of erasure—results not from any subversive act, but from her attempt to assist a fellow citizen navigating a rigid, impersonal bureaucracy. She is imprisoned for showing human qualities – her humanness, and subsequently placed in a holding cell characterised by sensory deprivation: “no light source whatsoever and the blackness is impenetrable. The air in here smells musty and she can hear the skitter of rodent claws” (16). This disturbing setting reflects not just physical isolation, but symbolic annihilation. Her very existence is effaced from the system, a punitive measure inflicted for her deviation from the prescribed behavioural norms dictated by the Konabots.

When Pendi attempts to assert her identity by calling the Customer Care line, she is met with a chilling response: “I am sorry, madam, but there is no record of you being in the system... According to my computer, you do not exist, madam” (18). This denial of existence reveals the full extent of techno-bureaucratic control, whereby existence is not determined by consciousness, as in the Cartesian sense, but rather by biometric registration. Without a DNA number recognised by the system, she is denied recognition as a legal and social subject. The service provider confirms this limitation: they are “only at liberty to deal with queries regarding identity status where viable DNA information has been provided” (18). Consequently, Pendi finds herself in a state of ontological limbo: she has “lost her status, and with it, her identity” (21). Her erasure is complete, and recourse is impossible, as a concerned citizen bluntly tells her: “There is no record of you now. You have been wiped from the system” (22). The police, too, are administered by robots incapable of discretion or empathy, making appeals futile.

Ironically, the very machines introduced to combat corruption become tools through which corruption continues to flourish. To restore her identity, Pendi is compelled to engage in the same backdoor dealings the system ostensibly sought to eliminate. She turns to Busi, a former assistant manager of the Home Affairs office, who now operates an illicit service re-registering individuals whose identities have been deleted. He exploits a malfunctioning Konabot—one that evaded the standard factory settings—and uses it to surreptitiously re-integrate delisted individuals into the database. He explains, “Everything can be corrupted... no one has yet managed to hack them. Some people are born bad. This one was just manufactured bad” (26).

This malfunction becomes a loophole through which bureaucratic exclusion can be circumvented—for a price.

Pendi's disillusionment is palpable. She questions the fundamental premise of the system: "What do you mean corrupted? Like rusty or something? I mean, you can't corrupt them, that's the point of them, isn't it?" To which Busi replies with stark pragmatism, "Everything can be corrupted, lady" (26). The scene reveals the absurdity and futility of the so-called reforms: while the human face of corruption is replaced, its mechanisms remain intact, only now cloaked in the sterile rationality of digital governance. The irony is startling: the displaced human workers become agents of the very corruption they were supposed to eliminate. The narrator wryly observes, "the more things change, the more they stay the same" (27). Busi defends his actions with utilitarian logic: "If I didn't do it, someone else would!" (27). This cynical resignation raises a crucial question: What purpose does technological enforcement serve if its outcome is a reversion to the status quo?

The anti-corruption campaign, rather than uplifting the populace, produces widespread alienation and despair. Those delisted from the database are relegated to living beneath the formal structures of society, both literally and figuratively. Deprived of access to public services and stripped of legal identity, they occupy spaces of social abandonment. Pendi describes their condition starkly: they are "all filthy; all wear identical expressions of desperation" (24). These subaltern individuals, confined beneath the Home Affairs office, possess "no status, no identity" (25). They exist outside the reach of the state, not as a result of their criminality, but as casualties of a mechanical system that cannot accommodate human fallibility or exception.

Ultimately, the corruption that the system sought to eliminate re-emerges in mutated forms. While the government claims success in its anti-corruption measures, this success is based entirely on the absence of visible infractions rather than on substantive transformation. As Busi cynically remarks, "the powers that be don't care. Far as they're concerned, the system is now running smoothly. No corruption means no problems—at least from the media" (25). Thus, the campaign is more invested in managing perceptions than in enacting justice. In this system, truth becomes secondary to image; perception becomes reality; and the lives of the populace are reduced to mere pawns in a political performance designed for public and international approval.

Conclusion

In *Home Affairs*, Sarah Lotz constructs a dystopian vision of a technologically mediated future wherein the purported benefits of administrative efficiency through artificial intelligence culminate in a regime marked by dehumanisation, exclusion, and systemic dysfunction. Although the implementation of Konabots is ostensibly intended to eliminate corruption and inefficiency, their deployment reveals the fundamental inadequacies of mechanised governance. Rather than promoting justice or social equity, the AI-administered bureaucracy imposes an impersonal logic devoid of empathy, adaptability, or ethical discernment. Within this framework, identity is no longer grounded in consciousness, civic engagement, or legal recognition, but is instead contingent upon one's presence within a state-controlled digital registry—an archive maintained by entities incapable of comprehending or accommodating human complexity.

The narrative foregrounds the alienation and disenchantment engendered by a system that compels individuals to submit to algorithmic authority. Instances of compassion, such as Pendi's altruistic act, are not merely unacknowledged but actively penalised. Her erasure from the system—both literal and metaphorical—exemplifies the totalizing logic of a technobureaucratic regime in which deviation from programmed norms invites existential negation. In this context, human subjectivity is subordinated to machine objectivity, and qualities such as empathy, moral reasoning, and individuality are construed as threats to systemic coherence. Furthermore, the text underscores the ironic disjuncture between the anti-corruption discourse that legitimates the use of artificial intelligence and the persistence of corrupt practices under its rule. The narrative illustrates how former civil servants, such as Busi, manipulate technological flaws to sustain entrenched networks of patronage and illegality. In doing so, Lotz critiques not only the failure of technological reform to engender meaningful structural change but also the political motivations behind such reforms—motivations more concerned with maintaining appearances and securing international legitimacy than with achieving substantive justice.

Ultimately, *Home Affairs* functions as a cautionary tale against the uncritical embrace of technological solutions in matters of governance. It interrogates the consequences of delegating human judgment to unfeeling algorithms and warns of the epistemological and ethical reductions that ensue when human beings are rendered as data points, and moral complexity is flattened into executable code. In Lotz's speculative future, the state does not collapse under its inefficiencies; rather, it achieves a terrifying efficacy in producing conformity, silence, and despair. The narrative thus serves as a trenchant reminder that while technology may enhance

administrative processes, it must never supplant the human values and social relations that confer legitimacy and meaning upon governance

Works Cited

- Achebe, Chinua (1999). "Africa is People." *The Massachusetts Review*, vol. 40, no. 3. pp. 313-321. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/25091546. Accessed 28 July 2021
- Adejunmobi, Moradewun (2016). "Introduction: African Science Fiction." *Cambridge Journal Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*. vol. 3(3). pp. 265–272.
- Armillas-Tiseyra, Magalí (2016). "Afronauts: On Science Fiction and the Crisis of Possibility" *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, 3(3), pp. 273–290.
- Benasayag, Miguel (2018). "Humans, Not Machines, Create Meaning." *Courier*, 3, www.en.unesco.org/courier/2018-3/humans-not-machines-create-meaning. Accessed 14 Aug. 2021.
- Hopkinson, Nalo (2004). *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction*. Arsenal.
- Loomba, Ania, et al (2005). "Beyond What? An Introduction." In Ania Loomba et al (Eds.). *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*. Pp 1 – 38. Duke University.
- Lotz, Sarah (2012). "Home Affairs" in Ivor Hartman (Ed.) *AfroSF: Science Fiction by African Writers*. Pp 13 – 28. StoryTime Press.
- Mbembe, Achille (2001). *On the Postcolony*. University of California Press.
- McEwan, Cheryl (2009). *Postcolonialism and Development*. Madison Avenue, New York.
- Said, Edward (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.
- Schwartz, Henry and Ray, Sangeeta (2005). *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*. Malden, M.A.
- Spivak, G. Chakravorty. (1988). "Can the subaltern speak?" In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 66–111). University of Illinois Press.
- Savin, Darko (1975). *Metamorphosis of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*. Yale University Press.
- Young, Robert J.C. (2003). *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, Great Clendon Street, Oxford.

Literary Representation of the Effects of Betrayal in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Zikora: A Short Story"

Ogugua Omajuwa

*Department of Languages,
School of General Studies,
Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku,
Delta State.*

Email: oguguaomajuwa@gmail.com

and

Solomon Onovwiona

*Department of Languages,
School of General Studies,
Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku,
Delta State.*

Email: solomononovwiona@yahoo.com

Abstract

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Zikora: A Short Story" (2020) has been studied from many perspectives; single motherhood, maternal mortality, femininity, polygamy, sexism, etc, but little or no research has been done on the impact of betrayal on the protagonist, Zikora, mother. This study, therefore, is on the effects of betrayal, occasioned by discriminating against African values, on the emotions and psyche of Zikora's mother. Employing the method of close reading of the studied text, the study aims to highlight instances where injustice is done to Zikora's mother due to the dictates of her culture. The study draws on betrayal trauma theory to provide the basis for interrogating emotional hurts caused by trusted persons or institutions. The theory helps to identify and explore how she navigates the emotional spaces of intimacy and betrayal in which her culture occludes her voice and experience. The study concludes that Zikora's mother is made to live through hurt and betrayal and still maintain her relationship with those who betrayed her because her culture expects so from her.

Keywords: *African values, betrayal, betrayal trauma theory, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.*

Introduction

In many African cultures, a woman's success in life is mainly recognised in marriage and maternity. According to Davies:

In many African societies, motherhood defines womanhood. Motherhood is crucial to a woman's status in African society. To marry and mother a child (a son preferably) entitles a woman to more respect from her husband's kinsmen, for she can now be addressed as 'mother of...' (as cited in Ekwierhoma 318).

From the above, it is evident that motherhood is a powerful institution in Africa, as it is the fulcrum of all women's experiences. A woman is born, trained to get married and then bear children. Her purpose is to ensure that the family name lives on through her. A valuable woman is a woman who marries and procreates to ensure that the lineage continues.

In addition to hinging a woman's destiny to marriage and maternity, there is also the preference for a woman to birth male children. If a woman fails to bear a male child, her value and status are affected. Great value is placed on a woman who bears a male child. When the woman does not bear a male child, she will experience some degree of ill-treatment. El-Gilay and Shady's study states that:

Prevalence of son preference in itself does not signify more than an attitude according women a low value. Wherever son preference is strong, it tends to be accompanied by discriminatory practices against daughters, many of which have serious immediate and/or long-term consequences for their health and well-being (120).

These ill treatments take various forms. The woman may be neglected and abandoned alongside her daughter(s); if she has any, she may be asked to leave the house, or she may be formally divorced. The man may secretly have children outside of wedlock. He may also remarry, with hopes that the new wife will bear a male child. These ill-treatments and betrayal by their spouses can be traumatising.

Ironically, a woman's child does not belong to her, be it male or female. An Ogbaru proverb says, "*onwunwe nwata na enwe ewu bu na aji*", translated as "the child's ownership over a goat is only skin deep". This proverb can be used to summarise some women's role in marriage. She is there to bear children and care for them, but does not own them. Chukwuma avers that "the woman is the mother, but the child belongs to his father, whose name and lineage he bears and belongs to" (3).

Traumatic experiences resulting from violence, oppression and abuse are sometimes assumed to be the most damaging because they can have physical manifestations. However, trauma

resulting from betrayal can be equally as damaging. Betrayal trauma is devastating as it violates assumptions of interpersonal bonds and social relationships, and this leads to the loss of critical human connections.

The studied literary work is a 2020 short story by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Zikora*. The story is based on the titular character, who is in labour on the verge of becoming a single mother. In the throes of labour pains and experiencing abandonment by her young lover, Zikora recalls incidents from her past and present in a series of flashbacks. Zikora's past revolves around her parents' marriage, while her present revolves around her relationship with Kwame, her Ghanaian lover, and her resulting pregnancy. The study examines a wife's and a mother's betrayal by her husband and child. It is carried out within the tenets of betrayal trauma theory. It employs an in-depth textual analysis to examine the experiences and coping strategies of the studied character.

Theoretical Framework

Betrayal Trauma Theory (BTT) provides an explanatory framework for the psychoanalysis of the studied characters, Zikora and her mother, whose name was never mentioned in the novel. The concept of BTT was introduced by Jennifer Joy Freyd in 1991. Explaining the concept of betrayal trauma, Freyd writes that "Betrayal trauma occurs when the people or institutions on which a person depends for survival significantly violates that person's trust or well-being" (76). Sivers et al. describe BTT as "a theory that predicts that the degree to which a negative event represents a betrayal by a trusted other will influence how that event is processed and remembered" (169). Although BTT was initially developed with the child-caregiver relationship in mind, it "has since been applied to other adult relationships, including not only romantic relationships but hierarchical relationships (such as that between an employer and an employee, or an institution and its member) as well" (Bernstein and Freyd 18).

Within the theory of betrayal trauma, the concept of emotional detachment is an adaptive strategy in the face of betrayal trauma. Ryan & Lynch explain that "detachment can [...] represent loss and separation, wherein a relatively dependent person is severed from a source of guidance, affection or nurturance" (340). Ingoglia et al. affirm this by defining detachment as:

A more radical form of distancing from parents is associated with an experienced lack of parental support and acceptance, feelings of disengagement from parents, mistrust and alienation towards them. It may be defined as the loss of

developmentally appropriate attachments, representing not merely a casting off of infantile ties but a more general reluctance to rely on the parents and a distancing from them (4).

From the above definitions of detachment, emotional detachment can be described as emotional “distancing” or “withdrawal”. In the studied novel, emotional detachment is defamiliarised as Zikora's mother undergoes an emotional detachment from her family.

Betrayal and emotional detachment in “Zikora: A Short Story”

“All through the night, my mother sat near me but never touched me” (8)

The image above is striking because it defamiliarises one’s perception of the mother-child relationship of eternal connection and love, which is the socially expected perspective. Akujobi opines that “motherhood is often defined as an automatic set of feelings that are switched on during pregnancy and birth of a child” (2). So, what happened to Zikora’s mother’s “automatic set of feelings” for her only child, who is being torn by labour pains? This section of the paper discusses the traumatic events that severed a woman’s emotional attachment to her husband and daughter, Zikora.

After years of peaceful marriage, Zikora’s father announced he needed a second wife to bear him sons. When he informed his wife of his decision, Zikora’s mother felt betrayed as she had thought they had a good marriage and family. Zikora’s father betrayed his wife because of his desire to sire a male child. He broke their marital bond, the trust and security it offered her. He betrayed the institution upon which their relationship was built. She gave him a daughter and went through three miscarriages and a hysterectomy for a chance to have a male child or more children for him. She did everything possible to give him a son, but it was not destined to happen. In the face of her helplessness, and given that her daughter cannot inherit her husband’s property, as dictated by their tradition, she peacefully agreed to let him take another wife.

I’d used my mother’s story: a woman from a wealthy family marries a man from a wealthy family, has one daughter, three miscarriages, and an emergency hysterectomy, after which her husband decides to marry again because he needs to have sons who will inherit the family property.

“My mother is uncommon but normal,” I had replied to the woman, and then corrected myself with, “Uncommon and normal. (23)

Zikora's mother was uncommon because, ordinarily, a woman cannot willingly share her husband with another woman. However, what she did by allowing her husband to take another is normal because it happens within a culture that dictates that a man must have a male child to succeed him. Zikora's mother did not protest because she believed that since she could not bear her husband a male child, she should peacefully step aside for another woman to do so.

To cushion the effect of the shock of his decision on his wife, Zikora's father promised to live with Zikora and her mother while he visits his second wife. She grasped his promise as her lifeline when she was on the losing end. However, even this promise Zikora's father could not keep. He once again broke her trust in him. He decided to move permanently to his second wife's home. His excuse is that his first son needs his influence to grow correctly, but his daughter, Zikora, does not. Hearing her husband's decision to leave the house completely, Zikora's mother was shattered. For the first time, she allowed her rage and pain to consume her. In her enraged mood, she physically confronted her husband.

I remembered that afternoon in drawn-out, static images: my father blurted out the words, eyes trained on the cards in his hand, words he must have been thinking about how to say for days, and my mother staring at him, her body so rigid and still. Later, she stood at the top of the stairs, in my father's way, as he tried to go downstairs. She reached out and pushed him backwards, and he surprised, tottered.

"This is not what we agreed!". (25)

Three things happened with that emotional outburst. First, she had channelled and purged herself of all feelings she had for her husband with that outburst, hence she was left empty and numb. Second, her husband still did what he wanted. Third, because she opposed her husband, the tables turned on her. Zikora, her daughter, blamed her for driving her father away.

Zikora's mother remained in the marriage to maintain her marital status, which is highly regarded in her culture concerning a woman's life. However, she detached herself emotionally from her husband. This served as her armour against future trauma from her husband's betrayal. With her emotions detached, she could pretend that all was well. She could act her role as the ceremonial first wife and endure a relationship with her co-wife.

It was my mother who sat beside my father at weddings and ceremonies; it was her photo that appeared above the label of "wife" in the booklet his club published in his honour. Respect was her reward for acquiescing. She could have been difficult about Auntie Nwanneka, fought with my father, quarrelled with his sisters, disrupted things with relatives. Instead, she always bought Christmas and birthday presents for Auntie

Nwanneka's sons. She was civil, proper, restrained... Senior wife. My aunty Uzo, my father's sister, said "senior wife" like a title, a thing that came with a crown. "You are the senior wife; nothing will change that," Aunty Uzo told my mother a few days after my father moved out of our house. (24-25)

When Zikora's father calls to congratulate her on the safe delivery of her son, her mother's withdrawal is observed by Zikora: "I looked at my mother, by the window turned away, separate and apart from the conversation" (24).

Zikora betrayed the family bonds she had with her mother. She broke their mother-child bond. Her mother, who had been betrayed and abandoned by her husband, watched her only child forge a relationship with her rival, her husband's second wife.

On several occasions, Zikora's mother tried to get Zikora to act like a loyal child so that they could put up a united front, but Zikora betrayed her. She once betrayed her mother by accepting food from Aunty Nwanneka, her stepmother. This she did after her mother had rejected Aunty Nwanneka's offerings, telling her they had eaten earlier. Rejecting Aunty Nwanneka would have implied that Zikora does not acknowledge Aunty Nwanneka as family. However, Zikora accepted her stepmother's food because she wanted to be a part of her father's new family and maintain her relationship with him. Zikora would rather please her father, and indirectly her stepmother, than her mother.

The last time Zikora betrayed her mother was when her mother begged her to stand by her by not attending Aunty Nwanneka's birthday party. Zikora left her mother and went on to have fun at the party. This was the last straw. By the time Zikora returned from the party, her mother had severed the emotional bond connecting her and her daughter.

I remembered the night of Aunty Nwanneka's birthday party. A big party. Canopies ringed by balloons had been set up in her compound. My mother asked me not to go. It was shortly after my father had moved out of our house, the strain between my parents still ripe and raw. "Stay and stand by me," my mother said, and I scoffed silently, thinking she was being dramatic. Chill out; it's not as if this is a blood feud. I went to the party. When I came home... My mother was in the living room reading. "Mummy, good evening," I greeted, and she said nothing. She looked up from her book as though to show she had heard me, and then turned away. A recurring image: my mother turning away, retreating, closing windows on herself. (26-27)

Similar to what Zikora's mother went through after her outburst over her husband's betrayal, Zikora's defiance in the face of her mother's emotional anguish made the situation clear to her mother. Zikora's mother realised that Zikora would always be her father's child. She will always choose her father, who left her, over her mother, who stayed. For this reason, Zikora's mother withdrew from her daughter. By doing this, she can stay strong and withstand all of Zikora's insults.

Zikora keeps trying to ruffle her mother's feathers to get her to react, but since her mother's emotions were already detached and guided, Zikora keeps failing. An example was when Zikora told her mother that she had been pregnant before as a teen:

For long moments, I could not find any words to fling at her.
"I've been pregnant before, so I knew very early on," I said finally.
She said nothing...
"Thank God I was able to remove that pregnancy," I said.
Her silence bruised the air between us.
"I was so relieved," I said.
"Some things are better left unsaid." She turned away.
I wanted to wound her, but I wasn't sure why I chose this to wound her with. Now, her indifference grated. Did it even matter to her? (20)

It is worth mentioning that after Zikora is betrayed by her lover, Kwame, she realised and confesses that "I looked at my mother, standing by the window. How had I never really seen her? It was my father who destroyed, and it was my mother I blamed for the ruins left behind" (25). It seems that the sacrifices of a mother are appreciated more when one has passed through some life challenges. Also worth noting is that toward the end of the story, we see a happy side of Zikora's mother, which emerges at the birth of her grandson: "'Beautiful boy,' my mother said, smiling down at him" (17). We see that she is emotionally attached to him, an innocent baby who has never betrayed her: "My son woke up and began to cry. My mother hurried to his crib. I watched her cradle him and lower her head, as though to inhale him, touching the skin of his face with the skin of hers" (28). Her love for her grandson shows that she is naturally a caring woman. It is safe to say that the trauma she went through at the hands of her husband and daughter is responsible for her coldness towards them.

Conclusion

The desire to have a son has left many homes and hearts shattered. Within the context of the African family, one can say that a man's heart is where his son is. Cultural demands can be said to have occasioned women who have no sons to experience some level of trauma. In the novel, *Zikora's* mother lost her husband and child to the woman who bore sons for her husband.

Their betrayal, actions and selfishness caused her to become traumatised. As the study on betrayal trauma has revealed, victims of betrayal trauma tend to continue their relationship with their abuser because they believe that they need the relationship. Zikora's mother did not leave her husband or child because they were her family. Instead, she withdrew her emotional attachment to them. This strategy helped her move on from her bruised emotions and also protect her from future ones. Her emotional detachment from her husband and child seemed to have cushioned her. It protected her well enough because there were no permanent damages done to her ability to connect to others emotionally. The result of her coping strategy can be seen in her ability to connect to a new hope, her grandson.

Works Cited

- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Zikora: A Short Story*. Seattle: Amazon Original Stories, 2020.
- Bernstein, Rosemary and Freyd, Jennifer. "Trauma at Home: How Betrayal Trauma and Attachment Theories Understand the Human Response to Abuse by an Attachment Figure" *Attachment: New Directions in Psychotherapy and Relational Psychoanalysis*, vol. 8, 2014, pp. 18-41.
- Chukwuma, Helen. "Women's Quest for Rights: African Feminist Theory in Fiction". *Forum on Public Policy: A Journal of the Oxford Round Table*, 2007.
- El-Gilany, Abdel-Hady and Shady, Ibrahim. "Determinants and Causes of Son Preference among Women Delivery in Mansoura, Egypt". *Eastern Mediterranean health journal = La revue de santé de la Méditerranée orientale = al-Majallah al-ṣiḥḥīyah li-sharq al-mutawassiṭ*, vol. 13, 2007, pp. 119-28.
- Evwierhoma, M. I. E. "Scripting Women into the Mainstream?: The Women of Tomorrow in "The Angel" and "The sisters", edited by Gbemisola Adeoti. *Muse And Mimesis Critical: Perspectives On "Ahmed Yerima's Drama*, Spectrum Books, 2007, pp. 313-320.
- Freyd, Jennifer J. "What is a Betrayal Trauma? What is Betrayal Trauma Theory?" 22 Oct 2021, <http://pages.uoregon.edu/dynamic/jjf/defineBT.html>. Accessed 21 Dec 2022.
- Freyd, Jennifer J. *Betrayal Trauma: The Logic of Forgetting Childhood Abuse*. Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Ingoglia, Sonia et al. "Emotional Separation and Detachment as two Distinct Dimensions of Parent—Adolescent Relationships". *International Journal of Behavioural Development - INT J BEHAV DEV*, vol. 35, 2011, pp. 271-281.
- Ryan, Richard M., and Lynch, John H. "Emotional Autonomy Versus Detachment: Revisiting the Vicissitudes of Adolescence and Young Adulthood". *Child Development*, vol. 60, no. 2, 1989, pp. 340–356. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1130981>.
- Sivers, Heidi et al. (2002). "Recovered Memories". *Encyclopedia of the Human Brain*, vol 4, 2002, pp. 169-184. 10.1016/B0-12-227210-2/00299-5.

Trauma Of Becoming in Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika's *Tamara*

Chinwendu Cynthia Eze

*Department of English and Literary Studies,
University of Nigeria,
Nsukka.*

chinwenducynthia99@gmail.com

and

Chiamaka Amalachukwu Ugoka

*Department of English and Literary Studies,
University of Nigeria,
Nsukka.*

chiamaka.ugoka@unn.edu.ng

Abstract

*The oppressive nature of patriarchal impositions has been extensively explored in literary discourse, highlighting its damaging effects on individual autonomy and selfhood through forced conformity. Significantly, to avoid examining past studies, this study mainly examines the trauma of becoming Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika's *Tamara*. Trauma of becoming refers to the distress an individual experiences while struggling to convert, transform, or grow into living by another person's ideals, principles, or expectations. To carry out this study, two objectives were formulated: to examine how the protagonist experiences trauma and its effect on the protagonist in the text. In addition to the above, trauma literary theory, which advocates for dislocated minds, is adopted as its theoretical framework to guide this qualitative investigation. This research reveals that the protagonist, Tamara, experiences trauma in the novel through her father's imposition of his ideals on her. The traumatic experience affected her, resulting in self-loss. In other words, the representation of trauma of becoming in the work shows that Tamara's father's self-imposition precipitates self-loss in his daughter. The study concludes that the literary writer represents trauma through the theme of self, specifically highlighting the consequences of self-imposition.*

Keywords: *African Literature, Dehumanisation, Identity Crisis, Parenting Style, Postcolonial Studies, Trauma Studies*

Introduction

African literature serves as a canvas for African experiences, portraying their struggles and triumphs. According to Nnolim, African literature must embody African experiences to be fully understood and appreciated (16). These experiences often highlight pressing issues such as displacement, economic struggles, social injustice, political corruption, inequality, migration, slavery, racial oppression, environmental degradation, and emotional distress. Ojaide and Obi

note that African literary genres, prose, drama and poetry address social issues arising from human interactions (5). Enukoha further emphasises that African literature exposes humanity's inhumanity (12-13). Trauma is a significant theme in African literature. According to Oge-Chimezie, post-colonial African literature portrays trauma stemming from patriarchy, colonialism, and racial segregation (126). Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* explains that trauma in English, German and Greek means physical wound, but in literary studies, it refers to psychological wounds (3). Oge-Chimezie further defines trauma as an intense pain resulting from ill-treatment (127-128). Ruglass and Kendall-Tackett describe trauma as events that compromise an individual's emotional and psychological well-being (3). Given the concept, trauma encompasses experiences of abuse or distress caused by human, natural or supernatural factors. Conversely, based on the topic of discussion, trauma of becoming refers to imposed or enforced pain or distress while struggling to fit into societal expectations or conform to others' standards.

Scholars have explored trauma studies, revealing diverse perspectives. D'Auria suggests that the bildungsroman genre effectively analyses trauma's effects (1-2). Heidarizadeh emphasises the importance of interdisciplinary approaches, incorporating concepts like intersubjectivity and dissociation (788-790). D'Auria notes that literary writers explore traumatic events still under investigation (1-5). Wang adds that traumatic complex representations including trauma metaphors and psychological trauma. Also, not all traumatic experiences represented in literary works have received scholarly research (225). Ogho affirms that there are various angles of trauma in literary works that have not been examined (109-110). In addition, Oge-Chimezie says that there are unhealthy experiences of trauma that affect an individual's personality and cause bad emotional responses like violence, madness, and the divided self (131). These views reveal a research gap, which this study addresses by applying trauma literary theory to examine the trauma of becoming in Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika's *Tamara*.

Review of Related Scholarships

Tamara, like much of Asika's work, has garnered significant attention and criticism. Critics have focused on social anomalies and related issues. Okolo and Ezekwere's study, "Nurturing as a Social Problem in Ikechukwu Asika's *Tamara*", highlights nurturing failure that leads to Tamara's downfall is as a result of social issues, which are her penchant for sex, longings to relate with people which is against her father's rule and the social environment she finds herself (46-50). Notably, nurturing is both a social and cultural work. Another scholar, Odiye, in

“Social and Moral Values in African Literature: A Study of Ikechukwu Asika’s *Tamara*, reveals that societal moral decay stems from factors like get-rich-quick syndrome, selfish desires, prostitution, and the pursuit of freedom (89-93). Additionally, poor parenting styles contribute to the erosion of moral and social values depicted in the work. “A Naturalistic Reading of Ikechukwu Asika’s *Tamara*” by Egbuchiem and Ujowudu highlights the novel’s portrayal of individuals’ struggles against environmental challenges, life’s problems, and fate (127). Also, it explores the protagonist’s struggle to overcome the trauma of conforming to parental expectations. Odinye further explored another investigation titled “Domestic Violence in the Familial Context: Feminist and Psychoanalytic Perspectives of Ikechukwu Asika’s *Tamara*” She examined the novel through feminist and psychoanalytic approaches, highlighting diverse domestic violence amidst patriarchal forces (148-150). One of the domestic violence is forceful self-imposition on another. In another study, “Similarity of Customs and Traditions of Morality across Africa as Depicted by African Writers”, Takana states that the novel is embodied with moral lessons, customs, and traditions of people in a given social milieu (27-30). Nevertheless, it encompasses the psychological state of oppressed individuals. Odinye’s further explorations in “The Influence of Style and Creativity in Ikechukwu Asika’s *Tamara* express how Asika’s epistolary style enhances creativity and narrative beauty (52-53). Nonetheless, this style facilitates the transmission of the trauma message to readers. Okolo and Okoye’s study reveals that the novel portrays African feminist bildungsroman, highlighting patriarchal traditions and chauvinistic attitudes. They argue that the protagonist’s attitudinal approach showcases revolutionary African bildungsroman (104-105). Notably, the novel also explores the trauma of becoming. Ihueze and Okpala’s investigation discovers that the novel highlights factors contributing to human trafficking, including ignorance, poverty, unemployment, and parental negligence (127-128). Additionally, it exhibits individuals experiencing imposed pain. The present study has not been studied by researchers. However, this study explores the trauma of becoming in Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika’s *Tamara*.

Trauma of Becoming in Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika’s *Tamara*

Importantly, Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika’s *Tamara* explores psychological displacement experienced by individuals conforming to societal expectations. Through Tamara’s narrative, the novel depicts dehumanisation and imposition of patriarchal ideals, highlighting the trauma of conforming to her father’s dictates rather than her own identity. In the novel, we see “. . . tales, travails, the rise and fall of a young girl...” (60). Showing Tamara by her father’s

imposition of his ideals on Tamara. This epistolary narration is because “People learn fast from other people’s mistakes ...” (60). According to Horvitz, trauma representations in narratives serve as a call to be heard and to narrate, highlighting the significance of sharing and acknowledging traumatic experiences through epistolary form (19).

The narrator, Tamara, illustrates her father’s strictness and imposition of his ideals, as she writes, “I knew you were a very strict father, a great disciplinarian, insisting even at gunpoint that things must be done your own way” (14). The patriarchal norms and gender-based expectations imposed by her father are evident in:

We had timetables and schedules for everything we did and the training we received. My brother was towing a different line of training and upbringing as a man and was strictly being used as a girl, and that was why, though we stayed and slept under the same roof, our paths never crossed much often like children who stay in the same house do. We often met the moment he would be leaving the garden for me to take over for a thirty-minute reflection, and also the moment he would be done playing with some of the game equipment in the game reserve. He left so that I could take over for another thirty minutes of playing alone with all the equipment one can imagine Late in the evening, I would take a little walk in the garden and play in the amusement game park built for us. Once after dinner, I will be restricted from being seen elsewhere except on my reading table. (14-15).

Tamara’s father’s controlling behaviour, which is imposing himself on Tamara, in other words, self-imposition involves “... no activity ever extended outside the walls of the compound” (15). Being that they “... were not allowed to go out. The only living beings I knew then in my life were my teachers, my schoolmates, my mother, brother, and other members of the house and the few crowds I encountered each morning I was being driven to my school” (15). The height of the father’s self-imposition lies in all the “. . . things you’ve always wanted us to do, the things you vowed we become ...” (17). When she takes first position in class, she waits for her father’s arrival to show him, despite it being against his wishes for her to stay awake late. Motivated by his desire for her academic success, she waits. However, instead of praise, he scolds her, “What about your report card? Speak before I skin you alive” (21). She becomes traumatised that amidst tears she stutters “Dad ... Daddy... I ... I... wanted... wanted to show ... you my report ... report” (20). Her Father’s reaction causes her to have emotional paralysis that “The words refused to come forth, all my rehearsals flew away with the stern look in your

eyes and anger in your voice” (21). When an action results in actual or threatened wound, death, sexual violation, threat to the physical integrity of an individual, and the individual’s response includes fear, helplessness and horror, this constitutes trauma (Ruglass and Kendall-Tackett 5).

After hearing the good news, he still scolds, “Is that why she should be walking round the house at this time of the night when every child has long gone to bed? You know, I could mistake her for a spirit! (21). All he ends up saying is “Go to bed, I will speak to you in the morning” (21). This creates “. . . tears suffusing my face, I ran back to my room and refused to open the door for anyone” (21). Heidarizadeh expresses that it is a sad moment that affects individual’s feelings and emotions (788-791). Even when she finally agrees to open the door for her mother, she “. . . went into her arms and she allowed me to cry out my sorrows” (21). Later, he gives her mother money to buy a new dress and anything else she needs, which she blatantly refuses due to the traumatic experience of being scolded for her father’s ideals. In her wishes to be herself and not another, she expresses thus:

For years, I longed to play in the sand like the other children did. I longed to shout in the rain like some of my peers. I never knew what it meant to shout into the ant holes, nor bury my milk teeth on a thatched roof while praying that the god of tooth would restore to me another one stronger and whiter. I knew nothing about the ‘okoso’ game. (27)

In her letter, she uncovers other rules her father makes her live by, which are “We were not allowed to visit anyone and no one visited you confined us in a big house, fending for us, lavishing all sorts of wealth. If only you had realised that there was more to this life than wealth” (27). Another incident that makes him enforce his ideals on her is the day she tries to be herself. She happily sits listening to the folktales her mother wants to tell them, since her father is not coming back home that day. Immediately, he comes back home, they “. . . scurried to hide but it was too late” (30). Tamara’s father’s response to their greeting is “What the hell is going on here?’ . . . “Can someone explain to me what is going on here or have you all turned deaf and dumb? I am talking to you woman!” (30). Her father’s reaction leaves her emotionally paralysed, as she reveals, “I hid behind my mother to shelter myself from your burning anger. I was so busy with my own survival to notice what my brother was doing at that moment” (30). Trauma is a social experience (Oge-Chimezie 127). After realising that they were bored, she decides to counsel and tell them stories. In a bid to remind them to live according to his principles, he says:

Counsel them, when did you become a counsellor? If they had need for one I am their father, I will willingly provide them one, not you. And you are here telling them animal stories, fairy tales, nonsensical folktales and songs! Look at all of you dancing like slaves released from the chains of slavery! Just take a good look at all of you! Of what relevance are animal stories, fabricated, barbaric and outdated tales to them? What! . . . How can you be telling stories when they are supposed to be in their beds? Is that what every child of their age is doing right now? When in school, the teachers can tell them as many stories as they choose, but this is my house, and my children will live to respect my orders. Stop making them defy me! Stop! (31)

The intensity of their emotional pain and vulnerability is seen as they “...disappeared with our hearts in our hands, crushed and stepped upon” (31). Also, “Mother cried and that was what continued to echo in my head till I slept” (33). Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History* explains that trauma is more than just a painful experience. It is also an experience that cannot be fully grasped or owned (10-24). To enforce his principles, he commands them to go out with him. At the restaurant, they eat in silence, with no apologies from him regarding the previous incident; instead, they only “... sat around cracking bones, drinking juice and wallowing in our individual thoughts” (34). Trauma can be caused by both individual actions and situational factors (Visser 259-264).

In all his discussions with Tamara, “You were not interested in my greetings but in what you wanted to say because you had not much time and you never had. I was used to all that then” (50). She has been “... longing to show you the shape of my heart, to speak to you about my future plans and career in life. I had always wanted to watch you listen to my dreams and aspirations and see how much sense they made and to walk on whatever path you will mark for me, but you were not there, again hurried away” (51). The university admission she longs for becomes a source of trauma instead of joy when her father insists that she “... go to school from home ... You did not care about my refusal to accept the admission but your decision” (82). Whenever she tries to discuss “About myself, my life, everything” (97) with her father, he replies, “Yes, I can see you are changing, growing more beautiful, more robust, and all. But if it is all about allowing you live in the house in those campuses, forget it. My decision still stands” (98).

Struggling to live by her father's principles, she laments, "What did I do? Did I choose my fate? I never did! (9). This makes her feel like an individual "...born into a strange family in a very strange world" (88), due to being "...born to a strange father (no insult intended here. Father, but is it not true?). By a mother not too strange, I must admit, but to a brother far too strange beyond my comprehension (88). In her letter to her father, she experiences the emotional toll of his pressure and expectations, highlighting the strain of living up to his self-imposed demands. Hence:

Amidst riches and affluence, I was alone, so empty and unfulfilled. There were about many things I lacked, things miles away from what money can buy, most especially love, tender care, motivation, freedom and encouragement. I lacked them all, and they made me cry. Even now, I can feel the trace of tears in my voice. (16)

The trauma of becoming her father's wish is "... so painful; even now it is still painful. The pain still lingers on, father and I knew nothing again that can assuage or take it away from my heart. It was a pain borne all over the years in loneliness and perpetual sadness..." (16). In narrating her trauma of becoming to her father, she narrates that it "...often made me cold and I was known in school as a very quiet girl secluded and in no need of company" (27). The classic trauma model described by Caruth in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* includes repression, repetition, and dissociation, which are key psychoanalytic features (9). She wishes that "If only they read my heart, they would have understood the pains beneath the facades and flashes of false laughter" (27). In her narration of her trauma of becoming, she continues to express what she endures:

The year mother died was exactly the year I knew pain. For the few months that followed, I was a ghost. I ate, I drank, I walked around, I played, sang and watched the television but I was a living ghost; without life, without family, alone in the whole wild world. These moments were filled with torments and no one was close to understanding my pain. (40)

The trauma of becoming affects her sense of reasoning, interpretation, and evaluation, as evident when she says, "... I heard his voice in the sitting room, I knew I was going to have his love in return. Kizito was the only man I'd truly been so close to, and I knew if he ever proposed to me right at that moment in the sitting room, I would marry him" (40). Dewani posits that trauma has a twofold nature, arising from distressing events and functioning as a means to

manage their emotional aftermath (1). In another instance, she rushes to share her feelings with her brother that she struggles "... to wear my bedroom slippers, and tie my hair together, but when my hair refused to adjust to the shape I wanted, and when my slippers were proving to be a jungle boot, I left them as they were and raced to the sitting room" (40). With a mindset of defiance, she does not care about the "... tradition that forbids a brother from marrying a sister; I would have married him and damned the consequences" (40). Prior studies on trauma have identified key neurobiological consequences, including dissociation, distorted representations, and lasting psychological damage (Balaev 1). Another traumatic incident that arouses the workers in the house is the day Hassan "... locked up the gate quickly the moment he saw me running with all my might towards the gate and fled for his dear life. It took him minutes to recover and he came rushing to me with his poisoned arrow (41). Hassan has to explain to her that her brother is not with them and won't be passing through the gate; meanwhile, he "... went on to explain but I did not listen. It was useless. Like a shadow I walked back into the house and was crying my lungs out..." (42). In "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History", Caruth notes that trauma typically stems from an intense, often catastrophic event, triggering delayed and uncontrollable symptoms like recurring hallucinations and intrusive memories (181).

The traumatic effect on her overrides her sense of self, causing her to revert to her father's influence even when given slight opportunities to assert herself. When Aunt Ebele, the cook, asks what she would like to eat for dinner, she responds, "I thought there was a timetable?" (43). Similarly, when Aunt Ebele suggests a salon visit to fix her unkempt hair, she exclaims, "No! Father will kill us both if he comes back..." (44). The trauma of becoming creates immense fear and pain that:

I had no one to call my friend and I knew nothing about what the outside world had to offer. I was unsure what I would want to study in the university. No one was close to help me; Aunt Ebele knew nothing about education. I was helpless and I wished you could see through me. Waiting for my JAMB exam, writing it and expecting the result, as well as the weight of gaining admission into the university were the most trying moments of my life. (48)

In her memories of trauma of becoming, she recalls, "...the emotional trauma; I remember the struggle to steady my voice" (38). She is often overcome with emotion, expressing, "... tears, wishing I was a man... wishing I had my own ways to escape the prison walls of your big

mansion where I'd been confined like a princess, wailing for my true love's first kiss" (39). Experiences following dehumanising events are referred to as post-traumatic (Ogho 109-110). In her journey through trauma of becoming, she reflects, "Talking about smiles, I never knew what it was ..." (61). In her existence, she realises, "... how lonely my life was, how miserable, how pathetic, cold and colourless ..." (61). Herman elucidates that trauma is determined by the severity of its impact on human life, not the frequency of the events (33). In her disapproval of her experience of distress of becoming someone else. Hence:

...could make sense of our own pains as humans trying and struggling against the wishes of some foreign gods, deities, humans and all to become ourselves, that person we have always wanted to be and not an extension of who our fathers, mothers, brothers, relatives, friends and the world want us to be. (92-93)

These experiences evoke intense emotions: "Tears of pain, disgust drained my face" (99). Recounting traumatic memories, she laments, "... [he] guided us so hard until it began to pain and we all missed directions and lost track" (17). She further reveals, "We were following your light, unknown to us that you were leading us in the wrong direction. It is so painful, father! (17) Caruth in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* argues that trauma triggers emotional pain (3). In her letter, she candidly discusses how the trauma of becoming leads her astray, resulting in deep-seated hatred that "The only thing in my mind was how to make you pay, how to take you to hell for being such an uncaring and insensitive father" (50-51). Her anger intensifies to the point of wishing to "...have strangled all life out of you and damned the consequences" (38). Traumatic experiences remain vivid and alive through memories, nightmares, and flashbacks (Dodhy 234).

This trauma also affects her self-expression around her father, as she recalls "... countless number of times I had wished to ask you what you were singing, but I failed. I failed because of those torrential looks in your eyes. It seems they are always coated with venoms and positions" (11). The traumatic experiences of becoming like her father led to her mother's demise and her only brother, Kizito, disowned his father and ran away from home. This heightened her distress, as reflected in her words:

For years, I waited but the gate never flung open. For years, I waited with tearful and downcast eyes, but they never came... Life after the demise of my mother and sudden disappearance of my only brother was unbearable. Everything fell in one swoop. Life lost its taste and colour. (37)

This traumatic experience also creates a significant emotional disconnection between her and her father, as shown below:

...the gap between us continued to widen. I hardly knew when you were around or not. Our paths rarely crossed. I avoided it as much as you did. The few moments we encountered ourselves, we always felt trapped and we hurried away with a casual 'how are you?' and 'I am fine, thank you!' That was it! That was all we owed each other! It was the only thing uniting a father and a daughter. (37)

The consequences of her father's imposition of his ideals on her, which create trauma of becoming like him, lead to her self-loss. She gets involved in a sexual relationship with her driver, Dunga, even when "He only wished to be my friend. He kept his words; he was true to his side of the bargain" (67). Rather, she "... was the one who betrayed him, the one who broke my part of the agreement" (68). Upon her father's discovery, Dunga was imprisoned and lost his job. These dehumanising experiences under her father's influence result in self-loss. The impact of the trauma of becoming like her father also "... denied me the opportunity to be free and, just like you, I was always in a hurry to go home, to escape the real world of people to my world, a world of loneliness and misery" (83). In addition, "... account for the reason I never made friends" (83). Inasmuch as trauma leads to a stronger sense of identity and renewed social cohesion, it also destroys individuals (Visser 259-264).

The aftermath still pushed her into having a sexual relationship with Obed, a part-time student, but on the same level as her. She did not "... discover his background. It was not necessary to me. I didn't care about his past, only the future made sense to me. It didn't matter who he was, where he came from ..." (85). The relationship is one-sided, that "... he had never told me he loved me and I had never really noticed it. I was the one doing all the loving, pushing myself on him, pleading with him to accept me into his world, which I was sure he had none" (86). This is why "... he did not only leave me with a broken heart he left me with a child in my womb, a pregnancy I knew nothing about" (85). This self-loss did not end here. In her bid to run away from the trauma of becoming like her father, she still encounters self-loss. Horvitz notes that it is better not to be experienced at all because of its destructive outcome (5-21).

To overcome her pains, she runs into Senorita who did not only help her abort the baby but take her to Italy with the promise to "... escape that lonely house, mix with real people, pick a new identity, start a new life, be myself, make my own decisions, and my own money, work and cater for myself and find a nice man who would love me" (102). Rather, they are all

mirages; she hires her "... into travelling to Italy for prostitution" (112). It didn't end there "I became addicted to sex and I started taking hard drugs to keep me safe" (122). These outcomes are all self-loss. The hard drugs she takes lead to having "... a damaged kidney that was almost decaying" (129). Though the doctors remove the damaged kidney, which makes her have only one, she still goes against "... the hospital's advice, I continued to drink hard drinks and smoke my cocaine..." (130). This migrates to "My right kidney... [being] damaged and was giving me a hell of a problem" (141). Even her saviour, Carlos Baggio, is not able to save her from experiencing self-loss. He gives her one of his kidneys and marries her; she gives birth to a baby girl named Tamara Carlos. Still, she was diagnosed to "... have cancer, a dangerous cancer of the lungs that cannot be cured" (146). In addition, "... my kidney, the one Carlos gave me was almost failing me too [because]... the cancer of the lungs... has eaten deep into me ..." (146). Tal asserts that victims of trauma are remoulded into another identity that is irreparable (6-9). In all her struggle "... to escape them, she embraced them and they destroyed her!" (121). In other words, Tamara's experience of the trauma of becoming results in self-loss.

Conclusion

This study examined the trauma of becoming in Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika's *Tamara* through the lens of trauma literary theory. Two objectives guided this qualitative study: examining how the protagonist, Tamara, experiences trauma and its effect on her. The analysis shows that Tamara's trauma stems from her father's imposition of his principles, forcing her to conform to his expectations. The forceful exertion on her results in her self-loss, which is the effect of the trauma she experiences. One could argue that the novel sheds light on the trauma of becoming, particularly when individuals are forced to conform to others' expectations, serving as a commentary on the consequences of such impositions. Furthermore, the literary writer uses the concept of self to demonstrate trauma.

Works Cited

- Asika, Ikechukwu Emmaunuel. *Tamara*. Kraft Books Limited, 2013.
- Balaev, Michelle. "Literary Trauma Theory Reconsidered". *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*, edited by Michelle Balaev, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Edited by Cathy Caruth, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History". *Yale French Studies: Literature and the Ethical Question*, edited by Claire Nouvet, Yale University Press, 1991, pp. 181-192.
- *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

- D'Auria, Bernadette. "Bildungsroman and Trauma in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*". *Student Research Submissions*, vol. 465, 2022, pp.1-12, www.scholar.umw.edu/student_research/465. Accessed 3 March 2025.
- Dewani, Richa. "The Impact of Trauma in Literature". *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT)*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2023, pp. 1-9.
- Dodhy, Shamaila I. et al. "The Role of Secure Base and Safe Haven: A Means of Reconstructing the Broken-Self in Yvonne Vera's *Under the Tongue*". *Pertanika Journal Social Science & Humanities*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2017, pp. 1821-1832.
- Egbuchiem, Lizzy-Jane Onyebuchukwu, and Ujowudu, Cornel Onyemauche. "A Naturalistic Reading of Ikechukwu Asika's *Tamara*". *MAJELS Madonna Journal of English and Literary Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2024, pp. 27-41.
- Enukoha, Celine. "Morality in Rems Umeasigbu's *End of the Road*". *UNIZIK Journal of Arts and Humanities*, vol. vi, September 2005.
- Heidarizadeh, Negin. "The Significant Role of Trauma in Literature and Psychoanalysis". *Procedia – Social and Behavioural Sciences*, vol. 192, 2015, pp. 788-795.
- Herman, Judith L. *Trauma and Recovery*. Basic Books, 1992.
- Horvitz, Deborah M. *Literary Trauma: Sadism, Memory, and Sexual Violence in American Women's Fiction*. State University of New York Press, 2000.
- Ihueze, Adaobi Olivia, and Okpala, Ebele Peace. "Fanning the Embers of Slavery: Human Trafficking in *Tamara* and *Pain in the Neck*". *The Criterion: An International Journal of English*, vol. 14, no. 1, February 2023, pp. 127-138.
- Nnolim, Charles. *Approaches to the African Novel: Essays in Analysis*. Ihem Davis Press Ltd, 1999.
- Odinye, Ifeoma Ezinne. "Domestic Violence in the Familial Context: Feminist and Psychoanalytic Perspectives of Ikechukwu Asika's *Tamara*". *postScriptum: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Literary Studies*, vol. vii, no. i, January 2022, pp. 136-152.
- "The Influence of Style and Creativity in Ikechukwu Asika's *Tamara*". *Epitome of Education*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2020, pp. 52-63.
- "Social and Moral Values in African Literature: A Study of Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika's *Tamara*". *Awka Journal of English Language and Literary Studies (AJELLS)*, vol. 6, no.1, 2015, pp. 76-95.
- Oge-Chimezie, Onyekachi Georgeline. "Societal Undertone of Trauma in Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*". *Interdisciplinary Journal of African & Asian Studies (IJAAS)*, vol. 6, no.1 2020, 2020, pp. 126-132.
- Ogho, Amadhe Bernice. "Shades of Trauma in Selected Nigerian Novels". *International Journal of Advanced Academic Research*, vol. 8, no.1, 2022, pp. 109-120.
- Ojaide, Tanure, and Obi, Joseph. *Culture, Society and Politics in Modern African Literature: Texts and Contexts*. Carolina Academic Press, 2002.
- Okolo, Luke Ndudi, and Ezekwere, Chidozie. "Nurturing as a Social Problem in Ikechukwu Asika's *Tamara*". *Madonna Journal of English and Literary Studies*, vol. 2, no. 10, 2017, pp. 46-53.
- and Okoye, Chiamaka Obioma. "African Bildungsroman as a Revolutionary Subgenre: A Psychoanalytic Perspective in *Beyond the Horizon* and *Tamara* as Feminist Bildungsroman". *International Journal of Education & Arts* vol. 1, no. 3, 3 November 2021, pp. 97-107.
- Ruglass, Lesia M., and Kendall-Tackett, Kathleen. *The Psych 101 Series: Psychology of Trauma 101*. Springer Publishing Company, 2015.
- Tal, Kali. *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.

- Takana, Ali Ibrahim. "Similarity of Customs and Traditions of Morality across African Writers". *International Journal of Contemporary Applied Researches*, vol. 6, no. 3, March 2019, pp. 18-32.
- Visser, Irene. "Decolonizing Trauma Theory: Retrospect and Prospects". *Journal of Humanities*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2015, pp. 250-265.
- Wang, Liting. "A Study of Trauma Metaphor in Morrison's Novels". *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, vol. 625, 2021, pp. 225-228.

Deepening Spirit-Spouse Concept through Plot Structure and Characterisation in Daniel Oriahi's "Sylvia"

Imoh Sunday Obot, PhD.

Department of Performing Arts and Music

Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo

Email- imohobot2000@gmail.com

08033835185

Abstract

The spiritual spouse is a long-debated concept often relegated to myth and fables. Although this concept is present in several cultures across the African continent, the Nigerian film industry, also known as Nollywood, has not given it the desired thematic prominence in recent times. This posturing affects the regularity in terms of scholarly engagement with the issues. However, the emergence of Sylvia in 2018 has brought a renewed interest in the spirit-spouse relations. It is against this backdrop that this paper subjects the movie Sylvia to critical examination to ascertain the plot structure and the aesthetics of characterisation as used in the movie to achieve a perfect blend of fiction, myth, and reality in the scenes. Critical film analysis was used as a method of data gathering, and psychoanalysis was a theoretical framework, respectively. The paper found that aesthetic characterisation enhanced the plot structure, which helped the film achieve a realistic rendition of real and surreal characters, thus blurring the lines between both worlds, and enhancing believability.

Keywords: *Aesthetic Characterisation, Nollywood films, Symbolism, Psychoanalysis, Realism*

Introduction

One might have thought that, of all the social, economic, cultural, religious, political, and economic issues affecting Nigerians, spirit wife/husband matters would be at the back of the list, if they ever made the list of worries. To imagine that a 21st-century feature film, of good digital quality and current film techniques, can give prominence to the subject matter is doubtful. However, in 2018, an award-winning Nollywood blockbuster movie, Sylvia, emerged with a spirit spouse narrative enmeshed in 21st-century colourations. Spirit-spouse ideology is not new in the cultural terrain of the Nigerian people. It has existed for several decades, generating several debates to the point of attracting patronage from the Nollywood movie industry (*Izaga, Sakobi, Karishika, End of the Wicked, Married to a Witch, Witches, Mark of the Beast, Sylvia, The Maid*, etc.). However, a good number of these Nollywood movies that thematise spirit-spouse relations lack good plot structure, visual aesthetics, and believability in terms of characterisation. These shortfalls, inadvertently, blurred the lines in

terms of narratives that perceive the spirit spouse as a concept beyond mere cultural and religious myth.

Contrastively, the movie *Sylvia* seems to have changed that narrative by reconciling the spirit spouse concept as a reality by leveraging a strong plot structure and characterisation (Haynes, 2014). Extant works on aesthetic characterisation in Nollywood movies, especially those leaning towards spirit-spouse, seem scant. Therefore, this paper examines the Nollywood movie *Sylvia* to establish the plot structure and the aesthetics of characterisation as used in the movie, which led to a realistic blend between fiction, myth, and reality in the scenes. Critical film analysis was deployed as a methodology, and psychoanalysis served as the theoretical framework. The essence of this study is to deepen the spiritual-spouse concept through plot appropriation and aesthetic characterisation.

Conceptual Clarifications

Although we may not have a generally acceptable definition of film, to a large extent, many agree that it is a powerful means of communication. What makes film a great and infectious medium is encapsulated in the statement of Emmy Idegu (2014), "...that motion picture tries to do is to make people see, hear, and feel the motion picture. Emmy Idegu calls it a total experience of the audio-visual medium.

Going further, Enahora (1989), explains that "film is a means of socialisation, i.e. the process and experience that help the individual to become sensitive to the expectations of other members of the society, their values and culture". The point to underscore in this statement is "a means of socialisation," which is to help people understand other members of the society, irrespective of their cultural, religious, and social background. This also means that film is essential for the understanding of people's culture, tradition, beliefs, or worldview. Invariably, films open up new vistas explaining certain realities, or explicates actions that may, or may not, align with rationality. The present study takes a look at how films explicate the concept of spirit-spouse.

It is important to note that spirit-spouse related films either help viewers to understand or misunderstand the concept. The argument is that before the advent of *Sylvia*, Nollywood movies treated spirit-spouse as fables with unrealistic scenes. Whereas, in *Sylvia*, there are elements of the new Nollywood approach or practices that help to blur the lines of misconceptions, and situate the narrative in the present reality. Hitherto, the conceptualisation of spirit-spouse in the African culture has been that of surreal and spiritist engagements. But in many climes in Nigeria, traditions and belief systems, especially in the Southwest, uphold their

existence. Perhaps, the assertion of Ekuazi (1978:7) that “the film is a reflection of self-consciousness and self-expression of the people”.

It is noteworthy to state that the concept of spirit-spouse has cultural, religious, and economic inclinations across different climes. But in general terms, it is regarded as known or unknown conjugal relations between an individual (male or female) and with spiritual entity. A plethora of such relationships are unknown to the human partner as he or she experiences the spiritual spouse in dreams. Carnal sex is often reported in this relationship, often without consent from the human partner. In known cases, benefits exist for both partners (human and spiritual) such as protection, powers, wealth, and emotional stability (Jimoh, 2017). It is imperative to note that the aforementioned benefits are what make the human partner lose interest in other suitors and stay married to the spiritual husband or wife. It has been reported that in some cases, children are involved (Jimoh, 2017).

The love affair may, however, be illicit or based on proper conduct of marriage between them, as shall be seen later. In either case, some women (not all) who are involved in such an affair face similar problems faced by those believed to have a spirit husband in the Yorùbá traditional belief.

Manifestations may be through dreams and sexual encounters. Several problems come with a spirit-spouse. For women who have spirit relations (husband), they can hardly get human suitors to marry because the spiritual partner frustrates those suitors. These women can be barren or find it difficult to marry. It is believed that spiritual spouses are extremely jealous and can harm any human who tries to play with their physical partners. In some cases, they are said to manifest physically and cause havoc. It is also stated that a spirit spouse does not leave except through deliverance or exorcism. In the African society, the spirit husband is more pronounced than the spirit wife. However, in *Sylvia*, the phenomenon is a spirit husband. Phenomenally, the spirit wife is known to be deadlier and more jealous. They can either destroy the one they have a relationship with or any other woman who comes near the man.

The emergence of the spirit-spouse relation in Nollywood movies in Nigeria began with the movie *Hot Cash*, also known as *Willie Willie*. It was regularly aired on the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) in the 80s (Bellanaija.com, 2018). Essentially, the depiction of *Willie Willie* was somewhat indigenous; a spirit/ghost with long hair in a flowing white garment. It made a great impact in Nigeria, perhaps because it was the first indigenous horror television programme. The plot captured a young boy named Willie, who was sacrificed at a tender age for money rituals. The spirit of the young boy came back for revenge. Many described the

series as a Nigerian version of *Nightmare on Elm Street*, a 1984 American horror film written and directed by Wes Craven. Since the emergence of “Hot Cash”, several indigenous movies have ghost/spirit-spouse relationships have been released (Franklin, 2018). A good number of the storylines have focused on the human and spiritual relationship that has led to acts of vengeance against individuals and society at large.

Plot Structure and Aesthetics of Characterisation

There is hardly a good film without an excellent plot structure. Interestingly, this is essential because a well-crafted plot structure enhances a logically progressive story, which keeps the audience actively engaged and creates a satisfying and meaningful experience. Many agree that plot structure refers to the organised sequence of events in a story. The plot must be organised in a sequence to enhance a smooth unfolding of the events in the story. The keyword here is “organisation”. This could imply that a creative artist (writer, director, etc.) could deploy exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution in order to achieve a fascinating and appealing narrative. In the absence of an organised plot structure in film, for instance, it can be bereft of strong motivations and conflicts, leading to a less engaging story (Card, 2003). Characterisation is the arrangement of characters to bring out the beauty and believability of a story (Lodge, 1992). This is further achievable by some design elements, often referred to as audio-aesthetic (Obot & Obasuyi, 2021). For instance, the use of lighting, colour, costume, make-up, scenery, and special effects can enhance plot structure effectively. Auditory elements such as sound effects, music, dialogue, and monologue help channel plot structure and characterisation in the right direction to achieve the best audio-visual narrative. A weak understanding of a character's motivations and inner struggles can make movie viewers miss out on the emotional weight of a story. In cases where a character's personality or actions shift inconsistently throughout the story due to poor characterisation, a lack of interest arising from confusion can ensue. There are instances where movie audiences struggle to understand or believe in a character, and distraction is imminent. Global film industries such as Hollywood, Bollywood, etc. (Basu, 2010) have mastered the art of plot structure and aesthetic characterisation, especially in respect of horror movies, science fiction, and crime movies. However, other emerging film industries, especially those in Africa, still grapple with these issues. Nevertheless, the “New Nollywood” seems to have gradually changed the narrative by deploying surreal aesthetics in a more convincing proportion (Ferguson, 2008). An example of these achievements is observed in the film under review.

Psychoanalysis as Theoretical Framework

Psychoanalysis is deployed to explain the link between the spiritual spouse relationship and mental health. This is predicated on the fact that the movies also addressed issues of mental disorders. The making of the film was to say that mental disorders can be a product of an unhealthy fallout or interference from the external world. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory is a theory of personality development and mental illness that focuses on the unconscious mind. Freud believed that unconscious drives, thoughts, and memories influence human behaviour. The theory is made up of three key concepts, namely: the id, ego, and superego. These are the three parts of the mind that make up a person's personality. The *id* is unconscious, the *ego* operates in the conscious mind, and the superego operates both consciously and unconsciously.

***Sylvia*: The Summary**

Sylvia is a Nollywood film that explores the concept of a "spirit-spouse," a common folklore in Nigerian culture. It is a suspenseful story of the supernatural context with weird fiction, fantasy, horror, and psychological suspense. Thematically, it carries stints of obsession, romance, love, and betrayal. Written by Vanessa Kanu and directed by Daniel Oriahi. The movie is about a lifelong imaginary love relationship between Richard and Sylvia, which soured when Richard abandoned Sylvia, his imaginary lover, to marry Gbemi, the woman he met at a restaurant and fell in love with. Sylvia became enraged because of Richard's traitorous act. Richard presumed Sylvia to be an object of his dream world, despite getting all the help that took him to the top of his career from her. Because of this, Sylvia made a physical manifestation, and the conflict that ensued led to the death of Richard's pregnant wife (Gbemi) and Obaru, his best friend. Eventually, Richard ended up in a psychiatric home as a result of losing family and career. That Richard ended up in the psychiatric facility because of the perceived vengeful act of Sylvia reawakened the consciousness that mental disorder can have a direct or indirect correlation with supernatural causes.

Further Plot Analysis

Plot analysis is a careful reading of a film to tease out the sequence of events in a film story and explain certain meanings and context. A closed reading of the film revealed a five-act plot framework: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. Exposition: The exposition deals with the introductory part of the film. In this part, a surreal representation of the relationship between Richard and Sylvia in the infant stage was shown. The essence of this

exposition was to foreground the fact that a spirit spouse relationship can exist before both parties come into the world. At some point in the movie, Sylvia told Richard, “I have loved you from the day you were born”. The picture below shows Richard and Sylvia side by side in a field in a surreal (dream) world. The picture reveals infant intimacy between both characters, as well as the insignia of their bond, which is the Hibiscus flower. The essence of the red Hibiscus can be understood from the concept of symbolism. The red hibiscus was used as the key to the portal between the two worlds (the real and the surreal).



Figure 1 shows Sylvia and Richard in a dream world conversing. A screenshot from Daniel Oriahi's *Sylvia* (2018)

Figure 1 above reveals school homework that Richard usually takes to Sylvia to help him solve. It is noteworthy to state that the relationship that Richard had with Sylvia was such that of benefits. This is in line with the assertion of Jimoh (2017) that there are benefits accruable to known cases of spiritual spouse. Richard was in the know about the surreal relations he had with Sylvia, and he had everything about his life challenges sorted out by her. There was virtually nothing he wanted that she could not provide or resolve. For instance, his school homework was easily done by Sylvia, especially mathematics, which Richard feared the most. This trend continued till Richard became a grown-up man creative designer working with a reputable advertising firm. With her constant assistance, he became one of the celebrated staff members in his workplace (Tosin, 2020).

Rising action: The rising action here begins when Richard and Sylvia have grown into adults and Richard meets a lady called Gbemi, and falls in love with her at first sight. When he relayed the feeling he has for Gbemi, Sylvia was infuriated and straight away told him that she wants

him all to herself. Richard's mind was made up to move on since he felt that Sylvia was not real.

The idea that Sylvia was not real was a major setback in their relationship. It was at this point that Sylvia told Richard succinctly that she had always loved him and wanted no other woman to come closer to him. She reiterated that her jealousy made her kill his mother to have him all to herself. The picture below is the Gbemi, the girl that Richard fell in love with and got married to without the consent of Sylvia.



Figure 2 shows Gbemi, staring at Richard the first time they met at a restaurant. A screenshot from Daniel Oriahi's Sylvia (2018)

However, the love story between Richard and Sylvia turned sour when Richard married Gbemi. This event led to Sylvia's transition into the real world: a onetime naïve, innocent, beautiful Sylvia transformed into a wicked, cruel, and mean lady.



Figure 3 shows Sylvia manifesting as a lady in the physical world. A screenshot from Daniel Oriahi's Sylvia (2018)

This marked the climax of the film. Sylvia emerged in the physical world as Cynthia and became Richard's friend's fiancée, Obaru. Sylvia was much more infuriated when she found out that Richard's wife was pregnant. She warmed her way into Gbemi and Obaru's worlds. That gave room for various manipulations that led to Richard killing Gbemi, his pregnant wife, and Obaru, his best friend.



Figure 4 shows Richard with a knife after killing his pregnant wife, thinking it was Sylvia. A screenshot from Daniel Oriahi's *Sylvia* (2018)

After this incident, Sylvia appeared as a police officer and made up a story to show that Richard had a mental disorder. This narrative was to send Richard to the psychiatric home instead of jail.



Figure 5 shows Richard in a psychiatric home. A screenshot from Daniel Oriahi's *Sylvia* (2018)

However, Sylvia was never going to give up on Richard; she gave him a second chance by sending a hibiscus flower to Richard in the mental home through a nurse.



Figure 6 shows a nurse at the psychiatric home with a red hibiscus sent from Sylvia to Richard as a symbol of a second chance. A screenshot from Daniel Oriahi's *Sylvia* (2018)

Apparently, after Richard's actions and the eventual remand in a psychiatric home, a falling action ensued. The hope of his having his life back in society began to shake and become uncertain. With the veracity of Richards's actions, there was hardly any room for a second chance. However, Sylvia's attempt to get Richard back became the falling action. The resolution became apparent when Richard rejected the second chance by Sylvia and decided that it was best to remain in the Psychiatric home rather than go back to a spirit-spouse relationship.

Enhancement of Spirit-Spouse Representation through Aesthetic Characterisation

This paper interrogates how aesthetic characterisation was deployed to achieve a believable transition between the dream state of Richard and the actual manifestation of Sylvia and the accompanying consequences as a result of the vengeful escapades of Sylvia. Among the Nollywood movies portraying spirit-spouse, *Sylvia* has been adjudged the best horror thriller of the new Nollywood. This analysis is in line with Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. Based on Freud's contextualization, dreams are the disguised expression of wish fulfillments. Humans dream and cannot avoid it. This can be categorised into the 'id', just like sexual desires, anger expression, or hunger. The film began with Richard and Sylvia spending time together in a dream. And to demarcate the two realms, the hibiscus flower was used as a point of connection. This was to depict a point of transition between the real and the surreal hemispheres. The environment is rendered in black and white mode, which was depicted in Figure 1.

Freud emphasised the importance of early childhood experiences in shaping our personality and behaviour. The movie did not show any point where Richard had real-life friends. He was unconsciously overwhelmed by the relationship with Sylvia. Class assignments were undertaken by Sylvia. Being that Richard related every bit of his real-life activities to her, and all her interventions scaled through effortlessly and flawlessly. The hibiscus flower was given to Richard by Sylvia, and it is only through that means that they can meet without any hitches. The movie showed Sylvia as all-knowing and capable of solving all the challenges that he brought to her.

Based on Freud's belief that many mental illnesses are a result of a person's inability to accept reality, it could be stated that Richard had the opportunity of seeing Sylvia as a reality after all, she had solutions to his physical challenges, even from the dream state. This assumption was perhaps the reason why Richard decided to opt for a real woman. The ability of the filmmakers to manage the transition was a result of costume, makeup, and environment. The environment was an open and wide expanse of savanna land without any form of human presence. This was able to capture a different world. And the mysterious appearance of Richard, more as a stranger to that world, was an obvious technique that worked the magic. The use of the red hibiscus flower as a spiritual link between Richard and Sylvia was essential. Sylvia would give him one to tether him to her world and enable him to return. The moment he drops the flower under his pillow, he unwittingly tethers her to his world.



Figure 7 shows Sylvia handing a red Hibiscus flower to Richard. A screenshot from Daniel Oriahe's Sylvia (2018)

Conclusion

The film *Sylvia* has deepened the concept of spirit-spouse through aesthetic characterisation, deploying realistic representation to bring a myth-like or surrealistic situation into a somewhat

21st-century reality, with such a leaning that many cannot doubt or refute. Aesthetic characterisation built the plot from exposition to resolution with a realistic essence, leaving little room for fictitious elements by relying on fluid character development and progressive aesthetic unbundling of the lines between the real and the surreal climes. Inevitably, the film brought to the fore issues that may have dissipated doubts and myths surrounding the spirit-spouse relationship in the African culture. Thus, aesthetic characterisation is recommended for films that require a smooth transition from one realm to the other.

Reference

- Basu, A. (2010). *Bollywood in the Age of New Media: The Geo-televsual Aesthetic*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. [CrossRefhttps://scholar.google.com/scholar_lookup?title=Bollywood+in+the+Age+of+New+Media:+The+Geo-televsual+Aesthetic&author=Basu+Anastup&publication+year=2010](https://scholar.google.com/scholar_lookup?title=Bollywood+in+the+Age+of+New+Media:+The+Geo-televsual+Aesthetic&author=Basu+Anastup&publication+year=2010)
- bellanaija.com (2018). Nollywood Week in Paris! Ini Dima-Okojie & Udoka Oyeka attend the premiere of 'Sylvia'. Retrieved 7th February, 2025 from <https://www.bellanaija.com/2018/05/nollywood-week-paris-ini-dima-okojie-udoka-oyeka-attend-premiere-sylvia/>
- Card, O. S. (2003). *Character and Viewpoint*. Writer's Digest Books.
- Enahora, A. (1989). African Council on Communication Education. *Film Makers and Film Making in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects*. Africa Media Review, Vol. 3(3). Pp.98-109
- Enahora, A. (1989). African Council on Communication Education. *Film Makers and Film Making in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects*. Africa Media Review, Vol. 3(3). Pp.98-109
- Ferguson, J. 2008. *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press. [Google Scholar](#)
- Franklin, U. (2018). Sylvia. Retrieved 7th February 2025 from <https://www.pulse.ng/articles/entertainment/movies/pulse-blogger-movie-review-sylvia-2024080100592970915>
- Haynes, J. (2014). "New Nollywood": Kunle Afolayan." *Black Camera: An International Film Journal* 5 (2): 53–73. [CrossRefGoogle Scholar](#)
- Jimoh, S. L. (2017). A Comparative Discourse on Yorùbá Concept of Spirit- Husband and Muslim Exorcists' Belief in Intermarriage Between Jinn and Man. *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies*, (IJOURELS) Vol 7(1), pp.51-66. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ijrs.v7i1.4>
- Jimoh, S. L. (2017). A Comparative Discourse on Yorùbá Concept of Spirit- Husband and Muslim Exorcists' Belief in Intermarriage Between Jinn and Man. *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies*, (IJOURELS) Vol 7(1), pp.51-66. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ijrs.v7i1.4>
- Lodge, D. (1992). *The Art of Fiction*. Penguin
- Obot, I. S. (2020). The Role of Social Media in Conflict Management and Peace Building in Nigeria. *Journal of the Faculty of Humanities, Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, Nigeria (ACUJOH)*. Vol. 3 (1): 164 - 174
- [Tosin, O.](#) (2020). The Story of Sylvia, the Spiritual Wife. Retrieved 7th February, 2025 from <https://ebytptr.medium.com/the-story-of-sylvia-the-modern-day-spiritual-wife-7f41bc272d58>

Representation of Female Trauma in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Agboola, Olubunmi Tayo, PhD.
Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo
ot.olufolabi@acu.edu.ng

Abstract

*While trauma theory has significantly shaped contemporary literary studies, its application to African women's war narratives remains underexplored. This paper addresses this critical gap by examining the representation of female trauma in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* through an innovative synthesis of trauma theory and postcolonial feminist perspectives. Moving beyond conventional Eurocentric trauma models that privilege individual psychological responses, the analysis demonstrates how Adichie's novel articulates a distinctly African feminist understanding of trauma that intertwines personal suffering with collective historical memory. By focusing on narrative strategies of fragmentation, embodied testimony, and strategic silence, the paper reveals how Adichie captures both the psychological devastation of the Nigeria-Biafra War on women and their resilient resistance to complete erasure. The study ultimately argues that *Half of a Yellow Sun* expands the boundaries of trauma literature by centring on African women's experiences while challenging Western paradigms of trauma representation.*

Keywords: *African feminist trauma theory, Nigeria-Biafra War, embodied testimony, postcolonial trauma, narrative silence*

Introduction

In recent literary discourse, the devastating impact of war on human civilisation has sparked intense scholarly debate, particularly regarding how such experiences are represented in literature. One such harrowing event is the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), which has become central to Nigerian literary history. Writers from various parts of the world have sought to depict the psychological and social aftermath of war, especially the suffering endured by its victims. Since the emergence of trauma theory in the 1990s, there has been a marked increase in academic interest in literary portrayals of trauma.

Trauma, broadly defined, may arise from diverse sources such as physical violence, abuse, accidents, natural disasters, or the abrupt loss of loved ones. Its manifestations include acute stress reactions, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), intrusive memories, emotional detachment, hyperarousal, and cognitive or mood disturbances. Importantly, trauma is subjective—individuals experience and respond to traumatic events differently, depending on their psychological resilience, coping mechanisms, and personal history. Moreover, trauma can be both individual and collective, affecting entire communities and societies. Understanding trauma in literature thus requires acknowledging its various forms and the complex ways it is processed and represented.

The rise of War Literature has offered a platform for representing the layered traumas experienced across different strata of society. Within the Nigerian literary context, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie emerges as a prominent voice among the third generation of Nigerian writers. Her work engages with gender, race, identity, violence, and diaspora politics (Anju, 5021). Adichie has played a crucial role in positioning African literature within global discourses through her literary contributions. As Madhu Krishnan observes, this third generation of Nigerian writers reflects “the striving of a younger generation to remember the trauma of the past and to forge a sense of kinship and identity through their shared connection in the community” (Krishnan 187).

In her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), Adichie combines historical facts and fiction to revisit the catastrophic Nigerian Civil War—a conflict that claimed over one million lives. Her work continues the literary legacy of earlier Nigerian writers, such as Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe, who also engaged with the war’s brutal realities (Anju 5022). However, Adichie’s narrative distinguishes itself through its sustained focus on the experiences of women and its nuanced exploration of the gendered dimensions of war and trauma.

Despite the significant body of literature on war, critical discourse has frequently overlooked non-Western and gendered perspectives on collective suffering. Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* offers a vital intervention in this regard, presenting the Biafran War from a distinctly female and African standpoint. While Krishnan has examined the historical underpinnings of the novel and Matthew Lecznar has explored its alignment with trauma theory, relatively little scholarly attention has been given to the novel’s articulation of gendered postcolonial trauma. This paper seeks to address that gap by examining how Adichie constructs an African feminist trauma aesthetic—one that challenges conventional narratives and resists the erasure of women’s wartime experiences.

War constitutes a profound social crisis that disrupts individual lives and permanently alters the course of national histories. Authors writing about war often aim to understand its causes, mourn its consequences, and provoke reflection and action. The Nigerian Civil War, in particular, left an indelible mark on Nigeria’s socio-political fabric and sparked ongoing debates about national unity and identity. Nigerian and international writers have produced a substantial corpus of fictional and non-fictional literature that interrogates the war’s complexities and lasting effects.

However, much of this literature has been produced from an androcentric perspective, focusing mainly on male experiences and silencing or marginalising those of women. The essential roles played by women during the war, as well as the specific traumas they endured, are often underrepresented. This critical gap perpetuates the stereotype of women as passive victims in conflict zones. As Laura Sjoberg asserts, “War has gendered causes, gendered practices, and gendered consequences. It is also lived and experienced in gendered ways” (252). Her argument underscores the necessity of re-evaluating war

narratives to foreground the experiences of women, not only as victims but also as agents of survival and resistance.

Accordingly, this paper investigates the gendered experience of war in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, with particular attention to how women navigate trauma, victimisation, and survival. By highlighting the novel's African feminist trauma aesthetic, the study contributes to broader conversations about postcolonial memory, gender, and narrative agency in African literature.

Theoretical Framework

This study reconceptualises trauma theory by drawing on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic framework in conjunction with Cathy Caruth's literary trauma theory. Since the 1990s, literary criticism has increasingly engaged with trauma studies to examine how literature represents and processes traumatic experiences. The foundations of contemporary trauma theory are rooted in Freud's early psychoanalytic writings, which introduced a radical understanding of trauma and its long-term psychological repercussions. This approach continues to shape scholarly inquiry.

Freud defines trauma as resulting from emotionally distressing, violent, frightening, or life-threatening events that continue to disrupt an individual's psyche well after the initial occurrence. He argues that trauma is not confined to physical harm but involves deep psychological damage. In *The Ego and the Id* (1923), Freud emphasises that a traumatic event is characterised by its immediate threat and overwhelming and incomprehensible nature. Because the mind cannot fully register the experience as it unfolds, trauma triggers a fight-or-flight response and results in what Freud terms "a disturbance on a large scale." This inability to process the event in real-time forms the basis of its lingering and often disruptive aftermath.

Building on Freud's insights, Cathy Caruth offers a refined definition of trauma in her seminal work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), in which she describes trauma as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth 11). Caruth advances Freud's ideas by stressing the fragmented and belated nature of traumatic recall, showing how trauma disturbs the linear flow of time and challenges the act of representation itself. For Caruth, trauma does not conform to conventional narrative structures because it is fundamentally unassimilated, returning in fragmented and uncontrollable forms.

Freud's trauma theory in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and Caruth's framework in *Unclaimed Experience* provide a theoretical foundation for understanding trauma in literary texts. While both focus on the individual psyche, their work also accommodates broader interpretations of trauma, including collective, historical, and intergenerational dimensions. Both theorists conceptualise trauma as a temporal phenomenon anchored in a singular initiating event whose effects reverberate across time.

This study adopts a working definition of trauma that integrates Freud's psychoanalytic lens with Caruth's emphasis on belatedness and fragmentation, offering a robust interpretive tool for analysing the depiction of traumatic experience in literature, particularly in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

Caruth's observation that trauma is "not experienced in the first instance but rather belatedly" (Caruth 4) is especially useful for understanding the protagonist Olanna's fragmented recollections of her pre-war life, which resurface unpredictably amidst the violence of the Nigerian Civil War. However, Adichie's novel necessitates expanding Caruth's model through postcolonial and feminist perspectives. While Caruth maintains that trauma resists representation because it exists "outside the boundaries of any single place or time" (Caruth 8), the trauma of Biafra—rooted in concrete colonial histories and sociopolitical ruptures—demands a more situated theoretical framework.

Judith Herman's feminist trauma theory offers essential insights into the gendered dimensions of traumatic experience. Her concept of "complex trauma," defined as trauma resulting from "prolonged periods of repeated victimisation" (Herman 121), is critical to understanding the layered psychological wounds endured by Adichie's female characters. These women are not only victims of wartime brutality but also of patriarchal oppression that predates the conflict and intensifies its impact. The novel's depiction of sexual violence—as both an overt spectacle and a routine form of subjugation—echoes Herman's assertion that "traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community" (Herman 51), a rupture made more acute by the residual effects of colonial domination.

Adichie's most radical departure from conventional trauma representation lies in her use of the female body as both a site of violence and a vehicle of testimony. Elaine Scarry's argument in *The Body in Pain* that "physical pain has no voice" (Scarry 4) highlights the paradox that Adichie addresses through vivid corporeal imagery. When Olanna observes her emaciated body — "her collarbones jutted out like wings" (Adichie 287) — the visual image substitutes for verbal expression, conveying the psychological and physical erosion of selfhood through hunger and trauma. Such embodied representations of suffering communicate what language cannot, underscoring the novel's emphasis on non-verbal testimony.

Equally significant are the novel's narrative silences surrounding sexual violence. In contrast to Western trauma narratives that often rely on explicit revelation, Adichie employs what Dori Laub calls "the absence of an empathic listener" (Laub 57) to underscore the limits of representation. The novel references mass rapes obliquely—through averted gazes and soiled clothing—rather than through direct narration. These silences generate what Georges Hartman calls "traumatic knowledge at the edge of comprehension" (Hartman 542). The description of restraint heightens the impact of violence by inviting readers to confront the unspeakability of trauma and the ethical complexities of its representation.

The novel's engagement with postcolonial trauma theory becomes most evident in its exploration of historical memory and collective suffering. Frantz Fanon's understanding of colonial violence as "psycho-existential" damage (Fanon 14) illuminates the psychological toll of colonisation on Adichie's characters. Odenigbo, for instance, embodies the crisis of the colonised intellectual, whose idealism collapses under the weight of war, reflecting trauma that precedes but is intensified by the conflict. This intersection of personal and historical trauma reveals how colonial legacies continue to shape the psychological and cultural landscape of postcolonial societies.

Michael Rothberg's "multidirectional memory" theory further elucidates how *Half of a Yellow Sun* situates Biafra within a broader global history of violence. Through the character of Richard, a British journalist documenting the war, the novel explores the dynamics of cross-cultural memory. Rothberg argues that "memory works through negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing" (Rothberg 11), and Richard's role as an outsider who mediates Biafran trauma for a Western audience exemplifies this process. His dual position—as witness and foreigner—highlights the inherent tensions in representing postcolonial suffering within a globalised literary and historical framework.

By drawing on a range of trauma theorists — including Freud, Caruth, Herman, Scarry, Laub, Fanon, and Rothberg — this study foregrounds the complexity of trauma as both an individual and collective experience. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie constructs a uniquely African feminist trauma aesthetic that resists conventional modes of narration and challenges the adequacy of language in representing suffering. Her narrative strategies illuminate the gendered, embodied, and postcolonial dimensions of trauma, offering a decisive intervention into trauma theory and war literature alike.

Synopsis of *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Half of a Yellow Sun by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a powerful historical novel set in 1960s Nigeria, capturing both the political upheaval and the profoundly personal struggles brought about by the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970). The novel intricately weaves the lives of three central characters—Olanna, Odenigbo, and Ugwu—whose fates become entwined as they navigate love, betrayal, and survival in the face of war.

As Nigeria fractures and war erupts, their once-stable lives are torn apart. The characters are forced to confront devastating losses, unexpected betrayals, and the brutal realities of ethnic violence, famine, and displacement. Their relationships are tested, ideologies are challenged, and their sense of identity is reshaped as they struggle to survive the horrors of war.

Analysis and Discussion

Female Trauma in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* foregrounds war's domestic and human dimensions, shifting the focus away from direct combat to explore how individuals continue to love, live, and adapt amidst conflict. Rather than depicting the intricacies of warfare, the novel situates the war as a backdrop, emphasising its characters' personal and emotional resilience. Kharoua observes that the novel's narrative prioritises the war's impact on the domestic lives of ordinary people over the experiences of soldiers in battle, a narrative approach he describes as "the mixing of the everyday and the extreme" (210). In this way, the novel highlights women's critical roles in national development while addressing the historical neglect of these roles, often misrepresented through "colonial distortions or nationalist exaggerations" (211). To counter such omissions, Adichie constructs her female characters, particularly Olanna, as embodiments of the Biafran ideal—individuals willing to fight, defend, and endure suffering for the cause. When Olanna and her family are displaced from Nsukka, she actively contributes to the war effort in Umuahia by becoming a teacher for refugee children. Her unwavering commitment to Biafra is particularly evident in moments such as her lesson on the significance of the Biafran flag, reinforcing her role as both an educator and a symbol of resistance:

She unfurled Odenigbo's cloth flag and told them what the symbols meant. Red was the blood of the siblings massacred in the North; black was for mourning them; green was for the prosperity Biafra would have; and, finally, the half of a yellow sun stood for a glorious future (Adichie 212).

When the brightest girl in Olanna's class, influenced by her deep hatred for the opposing side, declares, "I want to kill all the vandals, Miss," Olanna experiences a moment of guilt. However, Odenigbo reassures her that she has instilled patriotism in the child. Throughout the novel, Adichie does not avoid portraying the brutal realities of war, often placing her female characters at the centre of these harrowing experiences. As mothers, daughters, wives, and sisters, they bear witness to the horrors of war firsthand and endure profound personal losses.

Olanna, in particular, is confronted with the brutality of the war when she flees the North following the outbreak of violence. After witnessing the massacre of her uncle's family in Kano, she observes:

The train was a mass of loosely held metal, the ride unsteady, as if the rails were crossed by speed bumps, and each time it jolted, Olanna was thrown against the woman next to her, against something on the woman's lap, a big bowl, a calabash. The woman's wrapper was dotted with splotchy stains that looked like blood, but Olanna was not sure. Her eyes burnt, she felt as if there were a mixture of peppers and sand inside them, pricking and burning her lids. It was agony to blink, agony to keep them closed, agony to leave them open. (Adichie 213)

While Olanna grapples with the sorrow of her fellow Igbo people and the dangers they have escaped in their flight from enemy territory, the novel offers a glimpse into the collective nature of their trauma. This shared experience is encapsulated when, hours later, a voice cries out in Igbo, “*Anyi agafeela! We have crossed the River Niger! We have reached home!*” (Adichie 214). In this moment, their grief transforms into a collective sense of victory and escape, breaking the silence that had previously marked their suffering. This episode exemplifies cultural trauma, highlighting the formative stage of its lasting consequences. Although each individual has endured unique losses, their shared oppression solidifies a collective identity—one shaped by the traumatic event they have witnessed and from which they are now fleeing. Their euphoric cries at crossing the Niger are particularly significant, as ‘home’ symbolises a place where they are no longer afraid to speak, breaking free from the silence imposed upon them in enemy territory. This moment not only reinforces their communal bonds but also underscores their status as an oppressed and marginalised group within Nigeria.

This dynamic aligns with Jeffrey C. Alexander’s argument that cultural trauma occurs when members of a collective perceive themselves as having been subjected to a catastrophic event that leaves an indelible mark on their group consciousness, permanently altering their identity (215). He further contends that through the articulation of trauma, groups and societies gain insight into suffering, either by apportioning blame or by assuming responsibility. This process of identifying trauma and assigning culpability strengthens the solidarity of the collective, deepening their awareness of shared suffering. The novel illustrates the stages of collective acceptance of trauma by depicting Igbo identity in the context of war. While Adichie’s Igbo characters experience the war’s effects in varying degrees as individuals, their collective mourning, grief, and demand for freedom from the oppressive structure of Nigeria—represented in this instance by the North—bind them together. As they flee the hostile territory in a makeshift vehicle held together by rotting bolts, individual trauma merges with the broader suffering of the Igbo people, reinforcing their collective identity. This unification is powerfully symbolised through Olanna’s haunting encounter with the woman carrying a calabash containing the severed head of her daughter. This image lingers in her mind even upon her return home.

Following the attacks in the North, the collective spirit of the Igbo people extends beyond individual suffering. The severed head of the young girl on the train comes to represent the head of every mother’s daughter, encapsulating the shared trauma of an entire community. Against this backdrop, the act of crossing the River Niger assumes profound symbolic significance. It is not merely an act of physical relocation but a reclaiming of identity; the passengers rejoice not as Nigerians but as Igbos. Adichie’s deliberate choice of the Niger River as the site of this symbolic transition resonated with historical events, particularly the Igbo Landing of 1803 when approximately seventy-five Igbo captives chose to drown themselves in Dunbar Creek, Georgia rather than live in enslavement. Just as the Igbo Landing evokes themes of homeland and resistance in the diaspora, the deaths of those who perished in both the North and the Biafran War prompt discussions about the construction of national and diasporic identities.

However, crossing the Niger, while representing a homecoming, does not negate the profound losses endured. The woman seated next to Olanna, clutching the calabash that has served as an object of both horror and solace, remains consumed by grief. Her silence throughout the journey is finally broken, not through words, but through a gesture—an invitation for her fellow passengers to witness the contents of the calabash. In this moment, the novel transforms her silence into a tangible presence, forcing both the characters and the reader to confront the weight of her suffering.

Take a look, she said again. Olanna looked into the bowl. She saw the little girl's head with the ashy-grey skin and the plaited hair and rolled-back eyes and open mouth... the woman closed the calabash. 'Do you know,' she said, it took me so long to plait this hair? She had such thick hair. (Adichie 217)

The image of the severed head with intricately plaited hair, presented in a calabash in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, serves as one of the most harrowing and symbolically loaded moments in the novel. It is not merely a representation of physical violence but a multilayered emblem of psychological disintegration, maternal anguish, and historical silencing. This scene is a potent metaphor for the fragmentation of identity and the collapse of societal order under the pressures of war. The severed head—once part of a living, nurturing human body—is now reduced to an object, a grotesque relic of conflict, yet paradoxically still bearing signs of care, tradition, and cultural continuity through the plaited hair. This juxtaposition underscores the dissonance between life and death, presence and absence, continuity and rupture.

Psychically, the severed head becomes a locus of trauma. It embodies Freud's concept of the uncanny (*Das Unheimliche*)—familiar yet terrifyingly estranged. The plaited hair, a culturally intimate symbol of maternal care, femininity, and communal bonding, is rendered horrific when attached to a decapitated head. The horror is not merely in the violence of the beheading but in the grotesque preservation of a symbol of life and identity amid overwhelming death. This contradiction enacts what Cathy Caruth describes as trauma's essential paradox: it is an event that is not fully grasped as it occurs but returns in haunting images and belated symptoms (Caruth 1996). The calabash—traditionally a vessel for nourishment—becomes a morbid container of loss and psychological torment, evoking the uncanny transformation of ordinary objects into sites of terror.

Moreover, the implications of the severed head extend into the realm of collective and intergenerational trauma. Plaiting hair is a domestic and generational ritual, often performed by mothers, aunts, or older women for younger girls. It is a tactile expression of continuity, identity, and care. That this deeply symbolic gesture remains visible on the victim's severed head signifies the irrevocable rupture of such traditions. The war not only extinguishes lives but also interrupts the transmission of cultural memory, feminine agency, and maternal practices. This is a trauma that extends beyond the battlefield: it infiltrates the intimate spaces of the home and the psyche. Judith Herman's notion of "complex trauma" is particularly resonant here. What the image evokes is not a singular traumatic event but the cumulative

effect of prolonged exposure to violence, loss, and dehumanisation, particularly as experienced by women (Herman 1992).

The scene also underscores the gendered dimension of war trauma. While male narratives of war often focus on combat and heroism, this image centres on maternal suffering and the mutilation of female identity. The continued presence of the plaited hair on the dismembered head signifies not only the victim's youth and gender but also the violent erasure of her subjectivity. Yet, her presence persists as a ghostly reminder of all that has been lost—not only a life but also a lineage, a memory, and a set of gendered cultural practices. This recalls Saidiya Hartman's theory of "the afterlife of violence," which insists that the material and psychic residues of atrocity — particularly gendered and racialised ones — remain embedded in the social fabric long after the event itself (Hartman 2008).

Politically, the image exposes the failure of the postcolonial state to protect its most vulnerable citizens. It dramatises the collapse of the civic and moral order during the Biafran war, symbolising the wider disintegration of national unity and humanity. The severed head not only signifies personal loss but also represents the systemic erasure of women's voices from historical narratives of war. The fact that the trauma remains unresolved—both for the characters and within the symbolic structure of the novel—underscores the inadequacy of post-war recovery and the silencing of female suffering within patriarchal and nationalistic discourses.

The psychological impact of this image on the novel's characters—particularly Olanna, who witnesses it—is both immediate and enduring. It catalyses a rupture in her perception of reality, triggering a dissociative state that mirrors trauma's disruptive impact on consciousness. Olanna's repeated references to "the head in the calabash" after the incident signal the intrusive and involuntary return of the traumatic memory, aligning with trauma theory's emphasis on repetition and belatedness. Her trauma, marked by silence and internalised horror, mirrors the broader narrative strategy of the novel, which often withholds confrontation with atrocity in favour of fragmented glimpses and echoes—what Dori Laub terms "the absence of an empathic listener" (Laub 1995).

The severed head with plaited hair in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, therefore, operates as a densely symbolic site of trauma. It speaks not only to the psychic devastation of individuals but also to the broader socio-political crises of gender, memory, and national identity. The image resists resolution or closure; instead, it is a lasting indictment of how war fractures bodies, traditions, and histories. Through this disturbing yet profoundly moving moment, Adichie confronts the reader with the unbearable weight of what cannot be neatly narrated: the enduring, gendered, and intergenerational trauma of war.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie intricately explores individual and collective trauma manifestations, particularly among women from formerly privileged backgrounds. The war strips these women not only of material wealth but of dignity, identity, and stability, exposing the fragility of privilege in the face of systemic collapse. The degradation they suffer—evident in their desperate search for powdered egg yolk or condensed milk—is a powerful metaphor for the psychic

dislocation wrought by war. These acts of survival signal more than physical deprivation; they reveal the slow erosion of selfhood and social standing, resulting in a collective crisis of disempowerment.

Individually, characters like Olanna embody a deeply personal trajectory of trauma. A university lecturer raised in affluence, Olanna's descent into a life marked by starvation, displacement, and relational breakdown illustrates the psychological dismantling of identity. Her relocation to Umuahia, driven by war, forces her into proximity with other displaced women, many of whom look to her for leadership or aid based on outdated assumptions about class and education. Her encounter with Mama Oji — who assumes Odenigbo is a physician and, therefore, a source of medical salvation — exposes the futility of such expectations in wartime. When told he is merely a “doctor of books” (Adichie 220), Mama Oji's desperation does not waver, reflecting how survival renders social hierarchies irrelevant. This moment also captures Olanna's psychic crisis: she must reconcile her internalised identity of competence and privilege with her increasing inability to provide for herself and others.

Collectively, the female experience of war trauma is framed not as passive endurance but as active, often desperate, navigation of a shattered world. Adichie resists the tendency to marginalise women's roles in conflict, instead situating them as central figures who adapt, lead, and suffer in ways that men often do not. While male characters such as Odenigbo descend into alcohol-fueled despair, women like Olanna, Mrs Muokelu, and Mama Oji demonstrate a kind of trauma-induced resilience that becomes a collective survival mechanism. Mrs. Muokelu, for instance, is a former schoolteacher who must abandon her educational role to support twelve dependents, including a war-maimed husband. Her consideration of crossing enemy lines to engage in the afia attack (the dangerous underground salt trade) illustrates the extremes to which women are driven. Her psychological trauma is compounded by social expectations and the burden of caregiving, but she adapts nonetheless, at significant personal risk.

The war also distorts familial and romantic relationships, often transforming sites of intimacy into sources of pain and alienation. Olanna's commitment to Baby, the child of her partner's coerced affair, signals a profound reconfiguration of maternal identity, one rooted in acceptance and emotional labour rather than biology or romantic stability. This emotional resilience contrasts sharply with Odenigbo's retreat into helplessness, positioning women as the emotional anchors of war-torn communities. The psychic weight Olanna carries—balancing grief for Ugwu, disgust and forgiveness for Odenigbo, and her maternal responsibility for Baby—epitomises the complex intersection of personal trauma and communal obligation.

Eberechi's storyline, though brief, is a chilling example of how war commodifies female bodies. Her coercion into transactional sex with an army colonel, sanctioned by her parents, speaks to the structural violence women face when economic collapse intersects with patriarchal norms. Her trauma is mainly silent, gestured at rather than explicitly articulated. Yet, it reverberates through the text as a form of what Judith Herman calls “complex trauma”—a cumulative, insidious erosion of self-shaped by long-term exposure to coercion, fear, and powerlessness (Herman 1992). The collective nature of this trauma

is visible in how normalised such arrangements become within the refugee community, demonstrating how systemic pressures warp ethical boundaries and obliterate childhood.

Ugwu's later narrative, drawn from Olanna's recollections, affirms the centrality of women's testimonies in documenting war's psychological toll. His initial inability to process the horrors around him underscores the need for alternative narrative agents. By embedding Olanna's perspective within Ugwu's retrospective text, Adichie reinforces the importance of female-centred accounts in preserving collective memory. These testimonies represent individual psychic wounds and a communal attempt to resist historical erasure.

Ultimately, *Half of a Yellow Sun* presents trauma as both a solitary burden and a shared condition, especially for women navigating the dual oppressions of war and patriarchy. Their psychic crises are not momentary reactions but ongoing states of disorientation, adaptation, and muted resistance. Through characters like Olanna, Mrs Muokelu, and Eberechi, Adichie constructs a nuanced portrait of how trauma shapes and is shaped by gender, class, and social expectation, fragmenting and fortifying women's identities in times of national catastrophe.

Olanna's sharing the horrific details of the massacres with Odenigbo highlights the importance of narrative in trauma theory, particularly concerning testimony. According to Felman and Laub, healing requires bearing witness and entrusting one's story to a qualified listener. Laub asserts that the failure to articulate trauma perpetuates its psychological tyranny (224). In Olanna's case, her initial inability to speak is a symptom of trauma, but her decision to recount the horrors of Kano to Odenigbo signifies the first step toward healing.

Through this act of verbalisation, Olanna initiates her recovery. Her narration is crucial, as it allows Odenigbo to become the conduit for her story, retelling it to her parents, Kainene and Richard, when they arrive. In this way, Odenigbo assumes the role of what Atieh describes as "the other who can hear the anguish of one's memories and thus affirm and recognise their realness" (4). Adichie thus underscores the essential role of storytelling in processing trauma, ensuring that the suffering of women—so often silenced by history—is acknowledged and remembered.

This affirmation functions as a mechanism for healing, enabling the repetition and verbalisation of trauma through Odenigbo if Olanna chooses not to articulate her experience following her initial recognition of the trauma. The trauma Olanna endures in Kano continues to haunt her throughout the novel. However, her recovery begins as she acknowledges the event verbally, allowing her to process the experience. In response, she takes on the role of a wartime schoolteacher, actively contributing to the Biafran war efforts. The significance of traumatic testimony becomes evident when Olanna recounts the image of the child's head in the calabash bowl to Ugwu.:

She realised that she clearly remembered how [the child's hair] was plaited, and she began to describe the hairstyle, how some of the braids fell across the forehead. Then she described the head itself, the open eyes, the greying skin. Ugwu was writing as she spoke, and his writing, the earnestness of his interest, suddenly made her story important made it

serve a larger purpose that even she was not sure of, and so she told him all she remembered about the train full of people who had cried and shouted and urinated on themselves. (Adichie 512)

Olanna recognises the broader significance of conveying her traumatic encounter with war. By sharing her story, she contributes to the collective history of the Biafran experience during the civil war. Furthermore, the more she recounts her experiences, the closer she moves toward recovery. Beyond the therapeutic effects of verbalising trauma, Adichie's novel highlights the significance of witness selection. In Olanna's case, storytelling does not yield immediate relief, as she continues to suffer from her "dark swoons" for an extended period. However, her role as a female witness legitimises the female experience of war and underscores the various roles women assume during the conflict.

While still recovering from the psychological paralysis induced by the events in Kano, Olanna remains aware of her surroundings and stays informed about the country's state following the attacks.

She knew that the university women's association was organising food donations for the refugees that Colonel Ojukwu was now seen as the leader of the Igbo, that the people were talking about secession, and a new country, which would be named after the bay, the bight of Biafra (Adichie 225)

In her silence, Olanna passively absorbs conversations regarding the latest developments in the aftermath of the massacres in the North. These surrounding voices transform her trauma from an individual burden into a shared experience within the collective. As a result, she becomes an informed member of her community, and her suffering becomes intertwined with the broader struggles of her Igbo people.

Also, Adichie presents a deeply textured exploration of trauma, focusing primarily on its psychic implications for women during the Biafran War. Through the twin sisters, Olanna and Kainene, Adichie constructs a layered narrative of emotional fragmentation, psychological defence, and reluctant resilience. Olanna's experience of trauma is marked by denial, a mechanism she deploys to navigate the unbearable realities of loss and betrayal. After witnessing the brutal massacre of her relatives, she descends into a dissociative state, physically ill and emotionally numb—an instance that reflects Freud's theory of trauma as a psychic wound too overwhelming for immediate assimilation. Rather than confronting the full magnitude of her grief, Olanna seeks refuge in routine caregiving and the preservation of domestic roles, particularly in her continued efforts to protect Baby and reconcile with Odenigbo despite his infidelity. This denial of psychic rupture preserves coherence in a world collapsing around her. At the same time, her breakdowns—moments where she cannot speak, move, or eat—signal what psychoanalytic discourse traditionally defines as hysteria: a psychosomatic response to internalised and unexpressed suffering. Olanna's body becomes the medium through which her silenced anguish erupts, reinforcing Elaine Scarry's assertion that pain, especially in its extremity, resists language and renders the sufferer voiceless. Kainene, by contrast, exhibits a different psychic response that aligns with the Freudian concept of sublimation. Rather than withdrawing, she channels her trauma

into purposeful action, managing refugee logistics and navigating dangerous black-market trades to support those in her care. Her pragmatism masks an interiority likely marked by unspoken pain, and her ultimate disappearance during an afia attack becomes an unsettling metaphor for the erasure of countless women whose trauma remains unacknowledged. Within this framework, Adichie also critiques the condescending hierarchies that persist even in crisis. Women like Olanna, formerly shielded by privilege, are stripped of social status and must barter for survival like everyone else. The condescension exchanged between displaced women—such as Mama Oji’s assumption that Olanna’s husband must be a medical doctor—signals how class-based judgments persist, even as the war collapses pre-existing structures. Adichie further reveals how women’s trauma is not confined to the domestic or private realm but is inherently political. These women are not passive victims; they bear the psychological burden of holding communities together while male figures, like Odenigbo, succumb to despair. Olanna’s perseverance amid forced conscription, Odenigbo’s alcoholism, and Baby’s vulnerability illustrate a profound emotional labour that war narratives often neglect. Similarly, the stories of women like Mrs Muokelu and Eberechi offer a collective account of trauma marked by impossible choices and moral compromises—teaching refugee children one moment, risking death for salt or submitting to sexual exploitation the next. In these moments, Adichie resists the conventions of war literature that marginalise women’s voices, foregrounding instead their psychic crisis as central to the narrative. The trauma they endure is not merely the result of physical violence but of a broader existential disintegration—of identities fractured, relationships distorted, and futures lost. Through this portrayal, *Half of a Yellow Sun* becomes a historical novel and a feminist trauma text, insisting on the visibility of women’s suffering and resilience in the face of social and psychic collapse.

Works Cited

- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Lagos: Farafina Kachifo Ltd, 2006.
- Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. University of California Press, 2004.
- Anju Mehra. Muffled Voices and Scarred Souls: Revisiting the Nuances and Trauma of the Biafran War in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry (TOJQI)*, vol. 12, no.3, 2021, 5021 – 5025.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience- Trauma, Narrative, and History*. John Hopkins University Press, 2016.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Duke UP, 2003.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox, Grove Press, 2004.
- Felman, Shoshana & Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Ego and the Id*. Translated by James Strachey, Hogarth Press, 1923
- Hartman, Geoffrey. “On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies.” *New Literary History*, vol. 26, no. 3, 1995, pp. 537-563.
- Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery*. Basic Books, 1992.

- Kharoua, Mustapha. 'Traumatic Realism and the Retrieval of Historical Value in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's postcolonial text *Half of a Yellow Sun*' *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, vol. 2, no.1, 2015, pp. 1-10.
- Krishnan, Madhu. Biafra and the Aesthetics of Closure in the Third Generation Nigerian Novel, *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2010, 1-15.
- Laub, Dori. "Bearing Witness." *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, edited by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Routledge, 1992, pp. 57-74.
- Leczna, Matthew. "Postcolonial Trauma in *Half of a Yellow Sun*." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2015, pp. 85-100.
- Rothberg, Michael. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford UP, 2009.
- Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford UP, 1985.
- Sjoberg, Laura. *Gendering Global Conflict: Toward a Feminist Theory of War*. Columbia University Press, 2013.

Proportions of Psychological Projection in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*

Abasi, Tortivie Sorbo

Department of English and Literary Studies,
Faculty of Arts and Education,
University of Africa, Toru-Orua, Bayelsa State, Nigeria
Email: tortivie.abasi@uat.edu.ng

and

Jonathan, Eddington Obaro

Department of English and Literary Studies
Delta State University, Abraka
obajone@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the psychological projections in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel Americanah (2013) through Freudian psychoanalytic theory. Psychological projection, a defence mechanism where individuals assign their unacceptable thoughts, feelings or motives to another person, is a recurring motif in the interactions and experiences of Adichie's characters. The novel elucidates the numerous ways characters project their insecurities, prejudices and desires onto others; to provide an intricate analysis of the characters' coping mechanisms and the broader implications for understanding identity formation and cultural adaptation in contemporary literature by considering the interplay and complexities of identity, race and belonging. The protagonist, Ifemelu, circumnavigates her journey as an African immigrant in America, confronting the projections of both herself and those she encounters. This paper delves into particular instances of projection in Americanah, underlining how Adichie portrays the intricacies of self-perception and otherness in her novel. The paper highlights the psychological underpinnings of the characters' behaviours and interactions. This paper concludes by maintaining that Adichie's exploration of psychological projection not only enriches the narrative but also provides an insightful exploration of the wide-ranging sociocultural dynamics of identity formation, self-perception and racial relationships in the contexts of Nigeria and the United States in contemporary America.

Keywords: *Adichie, Americanah, Coping Mechanisms, Psychoanalytic Theory, Psychological Projection*

Introduction

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* is set against the backdrop of a globalised world where issues of race, identity and cultural displacement are prominently explored. The novel traces the journey of Ifemelu, a Nigerian woman who moves to the United States for education and becomes a prominent blogger addressing race and identity. The context of the paper lies in examining how psychological projection, an unconscious defence mechanism where

individuals attribute their unacceptable thoughts and feelings to others, manifests within this narrative. In *Americanah*, projection serves as a critical tool for understanding how characters navigate their complex identities amid cross-cultural interactions. Ifemelu's reflections on race and her experiences in America prompt her to project her internal conflicts and insecurities onto others, thereby influencing her perceptions and relationships. The theory of psychological projection is particularly relevant in this context as it helps unravel the underlying psychological dynamics that drive character behaviour and interpersonal relationships in *Americanah*. This exploration not only enriches the understanding of Adichie's characters but also offers insights into the broader implications of projection in discussions of race and identity in contemporary literature. The context of the paper thus emphasises the importance of psychological mechanisms in interpreting character motivations and thematic elements within the novel.

While *Americanah* has been extensively explored about migration, identity, race, and gender, there remains a gap in the scholarship concerning the psychological dimensions of character behaviour, particularly in the use of psychological projection as a defence mechanism. Many analyses focus on the socio-political or transnational aspects of Adichie's work, often overlooking the internal psychological conflicts that influence the characters' choices and relationships. This study seeks to address this gap by offering a psychoanalytic reading of *Americanah*, with a focus on how projection structures character motivations, interpersonal dynamics, and the broader themes of self and otherness.

This paper aims to examine the role of psychological projection in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* through the lens of Freudian psychoanalytic theory. It focuses on identifying significant instances where characters project their inner conflicts, insecurities, and desires onto others. The paper also explores how projection functions as a coping mechanism in response to cultural dislocation, racial tension, and personal dissatisfaction. By analysing these manifestations, the paper seeks to demonstrate how psychological projection shapes identity construction and interpersonal relationships in the novel, thereby enriching the reader's understanding of both the individual and collective experiences of diasporic characters.

Theoretical Framework

Psychological projection is a concept within the realm of psychology that describes a defence mechanism wherein individuals attribute their unwanted feelings, thoughts or characteristics to someone else. This phenomenon is particularly intriguing as it reflects not only individual

psychological states but also broader sociocultural dynamics. A person might deal with uncomfortable emotional states by projecting these onto others, thereby alleviating the internal conflict associated with acknowledging undesirable traits within themselves. This mechanism often operates unconsciously, and as such, individuals may not be aware that they are employing projection as a way to cope with their feelings or behaviours. The role of psychological projection in influencing interpersonal relationships and self-perception is crucial to understanding both individual psychology and group dynamics in various contexts. Whiteley reveals:

Recent investigations into emotion and discourse processing using the Text World Theory framework (Werth, 1999) regard psychological projection as a key factor in readers' emotional responses to discourse (Gavins, 2007; Lahey, 2005; Stockwell, 2009). The present article examines psychological projection in relation to an extract from Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989) and the comments made by a group of readers discussing the novel. As a result, a more nuanced account of psychological projection is proposed, which highlights the multiple perspectives which readers are able to monitor and adopt during text-world construction. (23)

The theoretical underpinnings of psychological projection can be traced back to early psychoanalytic theorists, most notably Sigmund Freud, who first identified it as a defence mechanism. Freud posited that projection allows individuals to cope with anxiety or feelings of guilt by attributing these feelings to others, thus defending their self-image (Lilienfeld et al. 27). This idea was later expanded upon by other psychologists, including Karen Horney and Anna Freud, who articulated the significance of projection in various psychological states and disorders. Lilienfeld et al. say:

Watkins et al. (1995) found that 5 projective techniques, including the Rorschach and Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), were among the 10 instruments most frequently used by clinical psychologists. For example, 82% of clinical psychologists reported that they administered the Rorschach at least "occasionally" in their test batteries and 43% reported that they "frequently" or "always" administered it. (27)

Contemporary psychology continues to explore projection's implications, examining its manifestations in different social contexts and its utility as a tool for understanding complex emotions and behaviours linked to mental health.

In considering the manifestations of psychological projection, it's essential to consider both individual and collective dimensions of this phenomenon. At an individual level, projection can manifest in various ways, such as accusing a partner of infidelity while experiencing insecurities about one's fidelity, or projecting feelings of inadequacy onto colleagues. This often contributes to a cycle of conflict and misunderstanding within relationships. In an organisational context, projection might arise when leaders exhibit distrust toward team members, stemming from their feelings of insecurity regarding their leadership capabilities. This dynamic can lead to significant adverse outcomes, such as reduced teamwork and increased interpersonal conflict (Zheng *et al.* 1213)

Psychological projection can emerge in group settings as individuals unconsciously shift their undesirable traits onto others within the group. This is particularly evident in scenarios involving stereotypes or societal biases, where individuals may project their negative feelings about a particular group onto members of that group. For instance, a person might harbour feelings of anger or resentment and project these onto a minority group, thereby rationalising their prejudices and justifying discriminatory behaviour. The impact of these projections can be profound, perpetuating a cycle of negativity and conflict within society at large (Kaulio).

The contemporary implications of psychological projection extend beyond individual and societal dynamics; they are also relevant in therapeutic settings. Clinicians often engage with projection when attempting to address clients' maladaptive behaviours and thoughts. Understanding how projection manifests allows therapists to guide individuals toward greater self-awareness and emotional acceptance. Techniques such as reflective listening and guided visualisation can help clients untangle their projected feelings from their true experiences, fostering healing and emotional growth. Additionally, training in cultural competencies recognises projection's role in cross-cultural interactions, where individuals may mistakenly attribute their own cultural biases to those from different backgrounds, further complicated by social narratives and stereotypes. Gharib and Phillips are of the view:

By starting the process early, in introductory classes, we can better prepare our students to engage in more in-depth and meaningful cross-cultural learning in future upper-division classes. For example, Chew et al (2009) suggested using service-

learning projects in psychology courses to foster greater cultural awareness. Introducing the theme of psychological differences among cultures discussed in introductory psychology may lay the foundation for upper-division courses that could incorporate service-learning projects. (428)

In literature and artistic expression, psychological projection plays a pivotal role in how audiences interpret characters or themes. Researchers have utilised frameworks like Text World Theory to elucidate how readers project their emotions into narratives, thereby shaping their understanding and engagement with the text. This reflects an intricate interplay between reader experiences and textual interpretations (Whiteley 23-42). Literature, therefore, becomes a mirror reflecting not only societal fears and desires but also individual insecurities and projections.

Review of Related Literature

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah* is an exploration of identity, race, migration, and cultural dynamics experienced by its protagonist, Ifemelu, a Nigerian immigrant attending university in the United States. The narrative intricately weaves personal experience with broader socio-cultural discussions, particularly concerning race and identity in a transnational context. Ifemelu's journey is not merely one of physical relocation but also of self-discovery, where she navigates the complexities of code-switching, cultural identity, and the often-fraught experience of being a Black woman in America.

At the heart of *Americanah* is the illustration of code-switching, a phenomenon highlighted as vital for character development and thematic emphasis within the text. The theme of transnationalism is prevalent throughout the narrative. Adichie critiques the multicultural policies that push immigrants towards assimilation while simultaneously valorising the diverse identities they carry. Ifemelu and her love interest, Obinze, embody this theme as they navigate their identities across national borders, wrestling with notions of home and belonging. Acharya and Koirala are of the view that *Americanah* reimagines immigrant identity by examining nationality, globalisation, and culture through the experiences of Nigerian lovers Ifemelu and Obinze. Adichie uses their transnational journeys to critique Western assimilation policies while highlighting how migrants like Ifemelu contribute to their homeland's growth despite globalisation (67). This critique extends to how globalisation impacts individual identity, particularly for migrants who grapple with cultural duality and the expectations placed upon them by both their homeland and host country.

The novel also looks into the personal experiences of race and identity, particularly how these constructs are perceived and lived by Black individuals in America. Ifemelu's blog, which serves as a narrative device, provides a platform for her to articulate the nuances of race and culture, effectively making her voice an important counter-narrative to dominant discourses around race (Koutchadé and Loko). Her reflections allow her to confront and dissect the complexities of being Black in America while also highlighting her cultural heritage as a Nigerian woman, establishing an intersectional perspective on identity.

Americanah engages with significant issues surrounding hair as a symbol of identity and resistance. The narrative depicts hair as a form of cultural expression that carries deep personal and political implications within African communities (Dick 859). Hair becomes a metaphor for self-identity, femininity, and cultural heritage, providing deeper insights into the characters' relationships with themselves and societal perceptions. The act of hair styling, particularly for women, serves as a site for cultural significance and a form of resistance against Western beauty standards. This intersectional analysis highlights the multiple layers of identity that characters navigate, making hair a pivotal motif in the story (Kmita 119).

The novel also addresses broader themes of 'otherness' and the complex constructions of identity within diasporic spaces. As Ifemelu grapples with her sense of self amid a milieu that often marginalises her identity, the text presents a rich tapestry of cultural dialogues that underpin the immigrant experience. Nwanyanwu observes that Adichie's *Americanah* explores themes of otherness and identity, showcasing African immigrants' struggles to affirm and redefine their identities in marginalised migrant cultures. (386) This exploration reveals a subtle understanding of how African emigrants affirm and redefine their identities through the lens of their experiences within predominantly white societies. Such themes resonate profoundly in contemporary discussions around race and identity, extending Adichie's commentary beyond the confines of individual experiences to encompass broader societal critiques.

As Ifemelu's journey unfolds, the construction of masculinity and its implications for cultural identity also emerge as pertinent themes within the narrative. The interaction of gender and cultural expectations significantly informs the characterisation of Obinze, illustrating how hegemonic norms shape the lives of male characters in diasporic contexts (ELKATEB and Amara 119-128). This complex interplay highlights the necessity of examining identity formation as multifaceted, influenced by race, gender, and cultural background. The male

characters in *Americanah* negotiate their identities within the matrix of these intersecting factors, reflecting the broader societal pressures faced by immigrants in their pursuit of belonging.

The struggle against alienation and for acceptance is a recurrent motif in the novel, as characters experience both the excitement and the heartbreak of migration. Adichie engages with the metaphor of crossing borders—both literal and metaphorical—to depict the conflicts and reconciliations that immigrants experience as they confront new cultural landscapes. Okolie and Abonyi observe that their paper examines how individuals grapple with “self and the other” within identity frameworks, adaptation, and cultural shifts, using Bessie Head’s *A Question of Power* and Adichie’s *Americanah* to explore migration’s conflicts and paradoxes. It also questions whether shared experiences exist among migrants, particularly in border crossings and host countries, as they navigate belonging, alienation, and agency in literature (22). The emotional landscape of the characters is marked by moments of alienation that compel them to reconsider their identities and place in the world, driving home the resonant themes of belonging and identity negotiation. In addition, Adichie’s exploration of Afropolitanism adds depth to her examination of identity in *Americanah*. Ifemelu’s eventual decision to return to Nigeria serves as a counter-narrative to the prevalent idea that leaving Africa equates to advancement. Instead, her return prompts a significant re-evaluation of what constitutes ‘home’ in the context of modern African identities, challenging the notion that migration is a necessary path to success. Òké says in his article:

...follows a perplexing juncture in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s 2013 novel *Americanah*: Ifemelu’s choice to return to Nigeria. Following the themes of “home,” “travel,” and “Africanness,” this article explores the link between the migration away from and to Africa and the apparent racelessness Ifemelu experiences as she crosses the fragmented racial zones between Nigeria and America. It challenges the claim that returning to Africa is counterintuitive and only a departure from the Continent is desirable, thus, analysing the logic of travel concomitant with contemporary phenomenologies of Africanness (Afropolitanism). (289)

This critical look at the parameters of ‘Africanness’ allows Adichie to reframe the dialogue surrounding migration, identity, and cultural belonging in contemporary society. Furthermore, the comparative analysis of immigrant experiences across generations reinforces the complexity of acculturation processes. The novel juxtaposes the experiences of first-generation

immigrants, like Ifemelu, with those of their second-generation counterparts, enhancing the reader's understanding of the immigrant experience as fluid and multifaceted, one that encompasses both challenges and adaptive strategies as migrants navigate their cultural identities. (Niraula 47)

Textual Analysis

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* meticulously dissects the psychological phenomenon of projection, wherein characters externalise their internal conflicts, anxieties, and unmet desires onto others, revealing the fraught intersections of race, identity, and relationships. Ifemelu's blog posts, for instance, transform personal alienation into sweeping indictments of racial privilege, while Blaine's critiques of her activism betray his insecurities about performative allyship. Obinze, disillusioned by unfulfilled aspirations, projects his self-contempt onto Nigeria's elite, and Auntie Uju's suffocating expectations for Dike mirror her unresolved trauma as an immigrant single mother. Even Curt's colorblind romanticism obscures his discomfort with racial realities, exposing projection as both a shield and a weapon—a means to evade self-scrutiny while imposing one's unresolved tensions onto intimate and societal bonds. Through these layered portrayals, Adichie illustrates how projection distorts self-perception and interpersonal dynamics, rendering it a pivotal lens for understanding the novel's exploration of belonging, power, and self-deception.

To begin with, Blaine, Ifemelu's African-American boyfriend, has strong opinions on social justice and identity. His frustrations with Ifemelu, particularly regarding her blog or her involvement in racial discussions, reflect his insecurities or unmet expectations in their relationship. Blaine projects his anxieties about racial identity or his frustrations with societal injustices onto Ifemelu, criticising her for not being “enough” of an activist or for approaching issues in ways that differ from his ideals. Ifemelu notices Blaine's disappointment when she doesn't participate as actively in his social justice efforts or when she voices opinions that don't align with his. This indicates that Blaine is projecting his idealistic views and frustrations onto her, expecting her to conform to his standards of activism and identity. When Blaine becomes critical of Ifemelu's approach to racial issues or her level of involvement in activism, Ifemelu resents it:

At first, thrilled by his interest, graced by his intelligence, she let him read her blog posts before she put them up. She did not ask for his edits, but slowly she began to

make changes, to add and remove, because of what he said. Then she began to resent it. Her posts sounded too academic, too much like him. (227)

This might be seen as a projection of his insecurities about whether he's doing enough or being effective in his efforts.

After returning to Nigeria, Obinze struggles with the reality of his changed circumstances and his unfulfilled dreams. He repeatedly visits Chief, hoping for an opportunity, while enjoying the hospitality and hopeful atmosphere of the gatherings. He observes the dynamics of wealth with both disdain and desire, torn between pity for the wealthy and his aspirations to join them. (23) He projects his dissatisfaction onto others, particularly those who represent the success he feels he should have had. Obinze projects his frustrations and feelings of failure onto his peers or colleagues, attributing to them the emotions or desires he harbours. When Obinze reacts to the lifestyles of other wealthy Nigerians, it could be interpreted as a projection of his internal conflict about his success and the compromises he made.

Aunty Uju's relationship with The General is complicated by power dynamics and societal expectations. Ifemelu reflects on the situation:

So many women lose themselves in relationships like that. What I really had in mind was Aunty Uju and The General. That relationship destroyed her. She became a different person because of The General and she couldn't do anything for herself, and when he died, she lost herself. (303)

Aunty Uju's feelings of dependency and resentment are projected onto others, particularly Ifemelu:

"I'm trying to forget him, Aunty. Stop talking about him!"

"Sorry," Aunty Uju said, not looking sorry at all. She had told Ifemelu to do everything to save the relationship, because she would not find another man who would love her as Curt had. (218)

Aunty Uju projects her feelings of entrapment and helplessness onto Ifemelu, criticising her for not understanding or appreciating her situation. Aunty Uju's harshness towards Ifemelu when discussing her life choices is a reflection of her dissatisfaction with her reliance on The General and her unfulfilled aspirations.

Ifemelu's blog posts often explore themes of race, identity and societal expectations. These posts contain exemplars of projection, where Ifemelu attributes her frustrations or observations to broader societal trends. Ifemelu projects her personal experiences and frustrations onto her readers, generalising her struggles as universal truths about race relations. Ifemelu demands in her blog post that when a Black American shares their experiences of racism, don't immediately compare it to your struggles, dismiss their perspective, or make excuses—listen and acknowledge that their reality with race is different from yours. Avoid claiming colour-blindness, insisting you're "tired of talking about race," or using token friendships to defend yourself—Black Americans don't *want* racism to exist, but they must keep addressing it because it keeps happening. (237) In blog posts where Ifemelu discusses the concept of "privilege," she is projecting her feelings of alienation and anger onto the broader white community.

Aunty Uju faces significant challenges as a single mother in a foreign country, which causes strain in her relationship with her son, Dike (117). She projects her anxieties and fears onto Dike, interpreting his actions or behaviour as a reflection of her fears about his future. In a tense conversation, Ifemelu confronts Aunty Uju about telling her son, Dike, that he isn't Black, arguing that she failed to affirm his identity while dismissing racial struggles. Aunty Uju defends herself, attributing Dike's depression and suicide attempt to clinical illness rather than unresolved identity issues (274). Reading further, Dike's issue gets more attention from Ifemelu. Ifemelu blames herself for Dike's suicide attempt, believing she failed to see his hidden pain behind his laughter. Overwhelmed with guilt, she becomes overly protective, restricting his interactions even against professional advice (275). Ifemelu projects her concerns about Dike's potential struggles with identity and belonging onto him, possibly overreacting to his actions or interpreting them as signs of deeper issues. And when Aunty Uju becomes overly critical of Dike, it could be seen as a projection of her fears of him facing the same struggles she did as an immigrant, especially regarding issues of race and identity in America.

Also, Obinze's marriage to Kosi is marked by his internal dissatisfaction and longing for a more authentic connection, which he previously experienced with Ifemelu. His feelings of emotional emptiness are projected onto Kosi, interpreting her actions as contributing to the distance between them:

It was stupid to claim that he needed time to think things over when all he was doing was hiding from a truth he already knew. She (Edusco) had called him a coward, and there was indeed a cowardliness in his fear of disorder, of disrupting what he did not even want: his life with Kosi, that second skin that had never quite fit him snugly. (329)

Obinze recalls the birth of their daughter, Buchi, and is unsettled when his wife, Kosi, apologetically says they'll "have a boy next time," realising how little she truly understands him. He feels disdain for her conformity to gender expectations and regrets their lack of deep communication, recognising their fundamental differences in outlook on life (331). Obinze compares his passionate, demanding sexual relationship with Ifemelu to his wife Kosi's passive compliance, feeling guilt over his lingering attachment to Ifemelu. When Kosi notices his emotional distance, he avoids comforting her, torn over whether to confess his unresolved feelings for another woman. (333-334) Obinze projects his guilt or feelings of inadequacy onto Kosi, blaming her for their emotional disconnect when in reality, his unresolved feelings for Ifemelu are the root cause. When Obinze feels a lack of fulfilment in his marriage, he perceives Kosi as overly materialistic or emotionally distant, projecting his internal discontent onto her actions.

Moreover, Curt, Ifemelu's white boyfriend, is deeply in love with her, but their relationship is marked by cultural and racial differences that Curt sometimes downplays or overlooks:

Curt came into the kitchen, smiling shyly, his hair slightly wet, wearing a fresh, light cologne. "Hey," he said. He had called her at night to say he couldn't sleep. "This is really corny but I am so full of you, it's like I'm breathing you, you know?" he had said, and she thought that the romance novelists were wrong and it was men, not women, who were the true romantics. (196)

Curt projects his idealised view of their relationship onto Ifemelu, ignoring or minimising the racial dynamics that Ifemelu experiences. Reading further: "He was full of plans. "I have an idea!" he said often. She imagined him as a child surrounded by too many brightly coloured toys, always being encouraged to carry out "projects," being told that his mundane ideas were wonderful" (146). She felt a deep, unfulfilled longing with Curt, unable to fully embrace the emotions he inspired, despite loving him and the carefree life he offered. Though she cherished his optimism, she sometimes wanted to disrupt his happiness, as if testing the limits of their relationship. (210) This projection is his way of dealing with the discomfort of acknowledging

these differences. Curt's tendency to dismiss Ifemelu's concerns about race, or to believe that their love can overcome all obstacles, is a projection of his desire to see their relationship as uncomplicated and free from societal issues.

Aisha, the hairdresser who does Ifemelu's hair, is a minor character who shows an intense interest in Ifemelu's personal life, particularly her relationships (33). Aisha projects her desperation and anxiety about securing her future onto Ifemelu, pushing her to reunite with Obinze because she sees it as a way to ensure her security through marriage. When Aisha insists that Ifemelu must return to Nigeria and marry Obinze, this is a projection of her fears about being alone or unfulfilled, reflecting her deep-seated anxieties about her life and relationships.

Conclusion

Americanah exposes how projection, rooted in unmet desires, racial tensions, and cultural dislocation, shapes relationships and self-perception. Key observations emerge: Ifemelu's blog generalises personal struggles as societal truths, Blaine's activism masks performative insecurities, and Auntie Uju's fears for Dike reveal intergenerational trauma. To mitigate these distortions, Adichie implicitly recommends self-awareness and honest dialogue, as seen in Ifemelu's eventual rejection of performative allyship and Obinze's confrontation of his emotional dishonesty. The novel's closure, particularly Ifemelu's return to Nigeria and reconciliation with Obinze, suggests that authenticity, not projection, offers redemption. Characters reclaim agency, urging readers to interrogate their own biases and embrace the messy, unvarnished truth of identity and connection by confronting their projections. Adichie's work thus stands as both a mirror and a map: reflecting our defences while charting a path toward genuine self-reckoning.

Works Cited

- Abood, Ayad A. "Navigating Cultural Identity Through Code-Switching: An Analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*" *Journal of Basrah Research for Human Sciences*, no. 4, 2024, p. 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.59750/jobrhs.49.4.22>
- Acharya, Badri, et al. "Transnational Ethos in Adichie's *Americanah*". *Interdisciplinary Journal of Innovation in Nepalese Academia*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2022, p. 67-78. <https://doi.org/10.3126/ijina.v1i1.51969>
- Dick, Angela, et al. "Identity and Hair Narrative in Adichie's *Americanah*". *Journal of English Language and Literature*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2018, p. 859-864. <https://doi.org/10.17722/jell.v9i3.364>

- Elkateb, Nesrine, et al. "Negotiating Masculinity and Cultural Identity in *Americanah*: An Analysis of Hegemonic Norms in Nigerian Diaspora Literature". *JLT*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2024, p. 119-128. <https://doi.org/10.70204/jlt.v4i2.355>
- Gharib, Afshin, et al. "Assigning Culture: An Example of a Cross-Cultural Assignment for Teaching Introductory Psychology". *Psychology Learning and Teaching*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2012, p. 428-432. <https://doi.org/10.2304/plat.2012.11.3.428>
- Kaulio, Matti, et al. "A Psychological Contract Perspective on Project Networks". *Project Management Journal*, vol. 49, no. 4, 2018, p. 81-88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/8756972818781713>
- Kmita, Karollina, et al. "Hair as a Form of Resistance in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*". *New Horizons in English Studies*, vol. 8, 2023, p. 119-129. <https://doi.org/10.17951/nh.2023.8.119-129>
- Koutchadé, Innocent, et al. "Analysing Lexico-Grammatical Features in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*". *English Linguistics Research*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.5430/elr.v5n3p72>
- Lilienfeld, Scott, et al. "The Scientific Status of Projective Techniques". *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2000, p. 27-66. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1529-1006.002>
- Niraula, Sanjeev, et al. "Identity Formation and Acculturation in Smith's *White Teeth* and Adichie's *Americanah*: Critiquing the Immigrants' Generational Experiences". *The Outlook Journal of English Studies*, vol. 15, 2024, p. 47-59. <https://doi.org/10.3126/ojes.v15i1.67759>
- Nwanyanwu, Augustine, et al. "Transculturalism, Otherness, Exile, And Identity In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*". *Matatu*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2017, p. 386-399. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18757421-04902008>
- Òké, Rónke, et al. "Travelling Elsewheres: Afropolitanism, *Americanah*, and the Illocution of Travel". *Critical Philosophy of Race*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2019, p. 289-305. <https://doi.org/10.5325/critphilrace.7.2.0289>
- Okolie, Mary, et al. "Head, Adichie and The Patterns of Migration Struggles". *Journal of Migration Affairs*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2022, p. 22-33. <https://doi.org/10.36931/jma.2022.4.2.22-33>
- Whiteley, Sara, et al. "Text World Theory, Real Readers and Emotional Responses to the Remains of the Day". *Language and Literature International Journal of Stylistics*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2011, p. 23-42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963947010377950>
- Zheng, Haichao, et al. "Sponsor's Cocreation and Psychological Ownership in Reward-Based Crowdfunding". *Information Systems Journal*, vol. 28, no. 6, 2018, p. 1213-1238. <https://doi.org/10.1111/isj.12190>

Semiotic Analysis of Dress Code and Picture Postures of G5 Governors

Nelson Orkaan Alyebo, PhD.

Department of English,

Benue State University, Makurdi

oalyebo@bsum.edu.ng nelsonalyebo@gmail.com 08032319654

and

Meshach Terfa Zayol, PhD.

Department of English,

Benue State University, Makurdi

mzayol@bsum.edu.ng and meshachterfa55@gmail.com 07034806899

Abstract

Micro and macro-linguistic branches of study have enjoyed more research attention compared to semiotics, which is generally referred to as the study of signs. Semioticians conceive semiotics as not only what is referred to as signs in everyday conversations, but also anything that stands for something else. This is because they know that signs take the form of words, images, codes, pictures, sounds, gestures, and objects, which, in turn, become subjects of rigorous investigations, leading to mastery of their application devoid of mere linguistic generalisations. This paper examines the dress code and picture postures of G5 Governors during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. This is done using the semiotic lenses to draw out how meanings were portrayed and how realities were represented by the G5 Governors through dress codes and picture postures. The data for this study is drawn from Premium Times, Peoples Gazette, The Guardian, The Sun, The Nation Newspaper, and other electronic sources. The pictures of the G5 governors, two, are randomly selected from each of the newspapers for analysis, thus making a total of ten pictures. This sampling is purposive to ensure uniformity in the spread of data and selection of the pictures and dress codes. Through these photo-positioning and dress codes, the study examines how codes and pictures are used in news tabloids to reflect specific societal ideologies and power relations and relationships. The Theory of the "Five Codes" by Roland Barthes is adopted for the analysis of the dress codes and picture postures of the G5 Governors in this study. The findings of the study reveal hidden gems of semiotics and its cinematography in the dress codes and picture postures of the G-5 Governors. These speak to the subconscious awareness of the viewers with their visual appeal sending subliminal messages to the audience as well as the G-5 Governors and the overall nexus of their ideology. The findings further reveal the important role culture plays in semiotics as the dress codes of the G-5 Governors were always a calculated representation of the period, setting, theme, mood, style, context and setting of the occasion.

Keywords: Pictorial Semiotics, Codes, Sign, Signifier

Introduction

Unlike the other micro and macro-linguistic branches of study, very little is written on semiotics, which is generally referred to as the study of signs. Semioticians conceive of semiotics as not only what is referred to as signs in everyday conversations, but also of anything that stands for something else. This is because they know that signs take the form of words, images, codes, pictures, sounds, gestures, and objects, which, in turn, become subjects of rigorous investigations, leading to mastery of their application devoid of mere linguistic generalisations. According to Daniel Chandler, "...costume and the body are often neglected in academic analysis, with existing literature focused on the interpretation of fashion trends, production and consumption, but rarely on the embodied aspects of dress" (149). Consenting to this view, Ron Burnett opines that "dress is a fundamental daily practice found in every historic and modern society..." (78). Marcel Danesi, however, avers that "scholars have studied human motivation and the reasons we cloth our bodies but found many differences of expression among cultures. Some cultures use dress for protection, others for modesty and still others to denote social status (329).

Agreeing with Danesi's position above, John Hartley maintains that decoration was found to be the one universal driver of dress and was observed as a motivator among every civilisation, past and present. To decorate the body, therefore, is an essential human practice and clothing the body thus evolved out of this basic and innate desire" (97). The major aim of this paper is to do a semiotic analysis of dress code and picture postures of the G5 Governors in Nigeria and illustrate the consistency and clear messages they communicated using dress codes and picture postures during the 2023 general elections. The analysis is limited to the *G-5 Governors*. The *G-5 Governors* were known for their notoriety and prominence, challenging the decisions of the National Executive Working Committee of the Peoples Democratic Party to nominate His Excellency Alhaji Atiku Abubakar for president for the 2023 general election in Nigeria. They were particularly vehement and critical of power remaining in the north instead of shifting to the south.

Semiotics is one of the major concepts that draws attention to language users, whether it be a verbal or nonverbal form of communication. To approach this task, this study draws insights into what semiotics means. Communication is relevant to the study of semiotics since the whole idea about signification is anchored on the construction of meaning. In other words, it is an aspect of human social life by which ideas, thoughts or feelings are expressed. The act of engaging in arguments, sharing of ideas and experiences, imparting knowledge and so on are

all regarded as communication. However, West and Tuner contend that “communication is a social process in which symbols are employed to establish and interpret meanings” (10).

While several studies have been conducted on semiotics, there is none known to these researchers that has been carried out on the G5 Governors about dress codes and picture postures. This creates a research gap which the present study intends to fill. As consented to by Chapell, Micael and Real, Moses, “communication is any means by which thought is transferred from one person to another” (28). These positions imply that communication does not only mean the production or use of speech to express thoughts and ideas, but it includes wordless signals, symbols and the use of objects and materials for information transfer. It is clear, from the foregoing, that nonverbal communication is a process of generating meaning using behaviour other than words. Nonverbal communication has a distinct history and serves separate evolutionary functions from verbal communication in different cultures and communities.

The above reveals the relevance and objectives of this study which are to establish how semiotics goes a long way to reinforce the role of symbols in interpersonal or group interactions as seen in the dress codes and picture postures of the G5 Governors; unravel how their outfits and pictorial positionings convey meaning by reinforcing, substituting for, or contradicting verbal communication as well as how these are used to influence Nigerians and regulate or stimulate conversational flow. The study also analysed how dress codes and picture postures played a central part in relational communication and identity expression during the 2023 general elections.

Conceptual Clarifications

It is apt to posit that the analysis of meaning based on signs and symbols is purely a semiotic enterprise. According to Hodge, Robert and Kress Gunther, semiotics “...is an investigation into how meaning is created and how meaning is communicated. It is a way of seeing the world, and of understanding how the landscape and culture in which people live has a profound impact on them unconsciously” (67). Semiotics can also be said to be the study of signs and symbols, in particular as they communicate things spoken and unspoken. To come to terms with the major contentions in this study, it is apt to clarify key concepts relating to the topic. For this reason, concepts such as sign, pictorial semiotics, codes, and signifier are briefly clarified hereunder.

Sign

The term semiotic means a lot to different people, as there are varying definitions given by various scholars. What is, however, certain is that almost, if not all, the definitions are linked

to the concept of sign. Sandler opines that "...the shortest definition of [semiotics] is that it is the study of signs themselves and the way they work. The name of this science goes from the Greek *semeon* "sign" (7). He was, however, quick to observe that:

The next question appears automatically "What is the sign?" the kinds of signs that are likely to spring immediately to mind are those, which we routinely refer to as 'signs' in everyday life, such as road signs, pub signs and star signs. Now, you can probably assume that semiotics is about visual signs. (7)

While Sandler's submission above can easily be misinterpreted, it is important to realise that certain signs are used that do not point to anything in the physical surroundings. They take the place of things that are perceived in the past, or even things that can merely be imagined by combining memories or that are in the past or future experience. This explains why Sandler emphasises that signs "...serve to let us develop a characteristic attitude towards objects, which is called "thinking of" or "referring to" what is not here" (8).

According to Geoffrey Beattie, "the term sign refers to the relationship among the elements of the semiotic model, or it can be used to indicate the first of the three elements...the physical thing perceived" (134). Sandler, however, feels "the term sign is loosely defined as a pattern of data which, when perceived, brings to mind something other than itself, the notion of the sign is central to the semiotic approach to the study of communication" (12). In elaborate detail, Paul Copley explained thus:

All individuals...are meaning-makers. Distinctively, we make meanings through our creation and interpretation of "signs". Signs take the form of different objects, but such things have no any meaning and become signs only when we invest them with meaning. Anything can be a sign as long as someone interprets it as 'signifying' something – referring to or standing for something other than itself. (122)

The implication of his submission above is that signs do not mean anything in and of themselves until we assign meanings to them. What, however, is important is that the meaning assigned to any sign must relate to it, as Saussure argues that signs refer primarily to each other. "Within the language system", as consented to by Saussure, "everything depends on relations. Both signifier and signified are purely relational entities" (78). Drawing inferences from the American philosopher – Charles Pierce's pioneering postulations on semiotic triangle and signs, it can be summed here that a sign and a concept are connected by the person's perception; the concept and the object are connected by the person's experience; the sign and the object are connected by the conventions, or the culture, of the social group within which the person lives.

These connections are important to the study of how meaning arises during the daily encounters with the many signs that fill the human environment.

Pictorial Semiotics

It is apt to posit that human beings recognise patterns of information and can organise them to generate meaning and it is the collections of these organised patterns that form the languages that humans use when they communicate. According to Graham Allen, “semiotics is considered as the theory of the production of meaning. Meaning is made by the deployment of acts and objects which function as 'signs’ about other signs” (60). He further posits that “in general, meaning is not believed to reside within any particular object, text or process, rather, meaning arises during the communication process itself” (60-61).

Code

When one pays close semiotic attention, one will understand that our perception of the everyday world around us involves codes, and as consented to by Chandler, “a perception is always already representation. Perception depends on coding the world into iconic signs that can re-present it within our mind” (158). With elaborate illustrations, he emphasises what codes are and what they are not, and though lengthy, it is useful to quote him here thus:

Codes are not simply “conventions” of communication but rather procedural systems of related conventions, which operate in certain domains. Codes organise signs into meaningful systems, which correlate signifiers and signifieds. Codes transcend single texts, linking them together in an interpretative framework. Stephen Heath stated, “While every code is a system, not every system is a code”. Codes are interpretive frameworks, which are used by both producers and interpreters of texts. In creating texts we select and combine signs in relation to the codes with which we are familiar “in order to limit the range of possible meanings they are likely to generate when read by others”. In reading texts, we interpret signs with reference to what seem to be appropriate codes. (158-9)

The implication of Chandler’s postulation above is that a range of typologies of codes are found in the literature of semiotics but the ones most widely mentioned in the context of media, communication and cultural studies are social codes, bodily codes, commodity codes, rhetorical and stylistic codes, technical and conventional codes, perceptual and interpretative codes, aesthetic codes, ideological codes such as individualism, liberalism, feminism, racism, materialism, capitalism, progressivism, conservatism, socialism, objectivism, consumerism and populism; and verbal language codes covering phonological, syntactical, lexical, prosodic,

and paralinguistic sub-codes. A close linguistic observation of the dress codes and picture postures of the G5 Governors reveals how the aforementioned inundated the G5 Governors with resultant semiotic interpretations. The above ideological codes pontificated the dress codes and picture postures of the G5 Governors as would be seen in the analysis later in this paper.

Methodology

The data for this study is drawn from *Premium Times*, *Peoples Gazette*, *The Guardian*, *The Sun*, *The Nation Newspaper*, and other electronic sources. The pictures of the G5 governors, two, are randomly selected from each of the newspapers for analysis, totalling ten pictures. This sampling is purposive to ensure uniformity in the spread of data and selection of the pictures and dress codes. The researchers conducted three viewings of each of the dress codes and picture postures, each time with a different goal in mind. For the first viewing, the researchers looked at the pictures as normal individuals would, not overly conscious of any minute details, nor trying to draw any conclusions about the dress codes or postures. The intention was to grasp the bigger picture of the pictures' context, the G5 Governors, and their overall tone and let pictorial postures play the secondary role they do for the average viewer or onlooker. For the second viewing, however, the researchers took the opposite and spent a great deal of time with each code and posture of a picture and pictorial semiotics observed therein. The pictorial images with each code and posture change occurrence were captured and copious notes of the action in each shot were taken as well. This yielded two pictures each from *Premium Times*, *Peoples Gazette*, *The Guardian*, *The Sun*, and *The Nation Newspaper*, respectively. Before the third viewing, the researchers spent time culling through the pictures selected from each newspaper and narrowed the list for analysis down to a handful. These curated pictures were the best representations of the G5 Governors' costume designs from a clothing, dress codes, pictorial positioning, conveyed through a hidden ideology and power relations perspective. The pictures were then viewed for the third time, focusing closely on the semiotic undertones and the language surrounding each picture. The contexts and ideologies that unfolded in each of these pictures, as well as the semiotic messages inferred by the viewer leading up to, during, and immediately following the capture of each picture, were notated by the researchers. It was upon the completion of this step that analysis of each picture was done using the theoretical framework explained below.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses the Theory of the “Five Codes” by Roland Barthes for the analysis of the dress codes and picture postures of the G5 Governors in this study. His theory advances the reason for which an analysis of dress code and picture posture is important, “For an understanding of dress codes or fashion – if taken as a language – this suggestion is crucial: we are innately obliged to narrate clothing forms either verbally or mentally; if we do not do this when thinking about clothing, especially fashion, then a magazine, an advert, a friend, a shop-worker, [a film], whatever, will do it for us” (122). And in Barthes’ own words, ‘It is impossible to consider a cultural object outside the articulated, spoken and written language which surrounds it’ (122). Many Semioticians posit that to properly examine Barthes’ work and fully understand the contributions he made to studying pictorial fashion as a language, we must first look to Ferdinand de Saussure, who is credited as one of the forerunners of semiotics. Chandler, particularly, maintains that “it is Saussure who originally developed the concept of Sign, Signified, and signifier, asserting that a linguistic sign is the resulting product when a concept and sound-image unite” (197). Echoing this first formulation of Saussure’s sign system, Barthes developed a rhetoric of fashion which is often referred to as the “poetics of clothing” (264). Using the same terms as Saussure, his system includes three codes. First, the signifier, which Barthes classifies as the garment or article of fashion. Then, the signified, which represents the world or the culture surrounding the signifier, and, finally, the sign is commonly considered the intersection of the two and often cited as the “reason” behind fashion (264-270). According to Chandler:

Barthes describes this system of fashion as a “work in reverse” and theorises that the act of dressing is always an answer to a question, a question of being: *the who* or a question of doing: *the what, when, or where*. The former is a question of identity (who) and conjures the statement, “If you want to be this, you must dress like this.” The latter addresses matters of circumstance or activity (what, when, where) and sounds something like, “If you want to signify what you are doing here, dress like this” (Barthes, 1983, p. 278). The final step in Barthes’ vestimentary code is the sign or union of clothing and the world surrounding it. (198)

The point to take from Barthes’ above is that since pictures, dress codes or fashion do not directly declare their reasons, they use rhetoric to communicate the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Since clothing did not evolve as a coded system like that of grammar, the quest for its meanings lies in its “functions, distinctions, oppositions, and congruencies”

(293-295), as he puts it. This study analyses the dress codes and picture postures of the G5 Governors through the lens of Roland Barthes' Theory of the Five Codes in this study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Plate 1. (Taken from *Premium Times Newspaper*). Part of the positions espoused by the theory adopted in this study pertain, in humans, as is the case between the G5 Governors and the viewers, the persistence of the mode of thought suggests that concepts start as mimetic or osmotic portrayals of the physical environment. These are first tied to the operations of our sensory apparatus. It is only after they have become routinised through cultural diffusion that they become free of sensory control and take on an abstract quality.

The iconicity of the G5 Movement, due to persistence and self-styled modelling messages,



dress code and picture postures, became cemented in the minds of and at the core of how Nigerians responded to their mission and vision.

A group of five governors known as G5 – led by Nyesom Wike (Rivers State), Samuel

Ortom (Benue State), Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi (Enugu State), Okezie Ikpeazu (Abia State), and Seyi Makinde (Oyo State)- were against the presidential bid of Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, arguing that his election as presidential candidate goes against the agreement to zone the presidency to the south. As they were often heard saying, “all we are asking for is equity, fairness, and justice, and that is the hallmark PDP stands for. All we are saying, let the right things be done. When the right thing is done, the country would see that the crisis in the party is over”. The symbolic reality is that the G5 were a crack in the wall of the PDP party. Their vehement refusal to team up with the party pierced a huge hole in the party's 2023 presidential election bid. Their potential to do this was intensified by the right fight the wrong, as it was morally and constitutionally right for the rotation of the presidency from north to south.

Plate 2. (Taken from *Premium Times Newspaper*). A keen observation of modern times reveals that walking sticks are usually only seen worn by people with formal attire. This is used not just as a walking aid but also as an ornamental accessory to flaunt one's social status and accent



styling wardrobe. This is the case in this plate, where the G5 Governors are seen as revealed in the picture.

The posture and photo-positioning also confirm a representation of power and influence. Both governors are seen wearing the same cap, with the cap node falling to their left, even as their right

hands wield the walking stick. Unlike Nyesom Wike, whose both hands support the stick, the rest of the G5 allow their left hands to lean on their sides. The fact that Wike does this and is in the centre of the picture is deliberate. This is to confirm his position in the G5 as the leader. While the four others are in black shoes, he is seen in white shoes. He is also the only one wearing goggles here. The semiotic implications of this dress code and picture reveal Barthes's symbolic or proairetic codes. This also highlights how cultural semiotics emphasises the importance of context in interpreting signs and symbols. It recognises that the meaning of a sign or symbol is not fixed, but rather depends on the cultural context in which it is used. Therefore, cultural semiotics emphasises the need to understand the cultural context to fully interpret the signs and symbols used within it. The theory further asserts that culture is a system of signs and symbols that people use to communicate and make sense of the world around them.

Plate 3. (Taken from *Peoples Gazette*). This plate contains a picture showing the G5 in Tiv traditional attire known as *Anger*. They are also wearing caps woven from the traditional attire,



while holstering onto their shoulders *ikpa Iabor atar*. This attire and bag are symbolic representations of the Tiv people as well as their culture. Both are wielding *iwange*, a highly revered Tiv traditional staff bestowed upon someone deserving of recognition and honour. This also affirms that

the G5 are received wholeheartedly by the host and are also a worthy representation of the Tiv tradition, anytime, anywhere. His Excellency, Governor Samuel Ortom, who hosts the G5, is seen as the only person wearing a different outfit. This is symbolic as much as it is deliberate. He also stands in the middle as a mark of hospitality.

Plate 4. (Taken from *Peoples Gazette*). The spoken semiotic messages of this picture's posture and clothing are just a small piece of the overall picture.



The code and posture are messages that can be translated as communicative symbolism, using the G5 Governors' bodies as the informational vehicle, their eyes as message senders and interpreters, as well as the mind. The cut and alignment lines of their clothing and the

composition of their bodily adornment, as well as their relation to surrounding scenery, underscore the commitment of the G5 Governors.

Plate 5. (Taken from *The Guardian Newspaper*). This plate is a prime illustration of how picture posture and dress code can be distilled in diverse and semiotic ways to set a scene,



convey a mood, create a context, or even send a shocking message capable of making enemies frozen with fear and stark terror. This was the case as their meeting in London became the topic of discussion on the lips of Nigerians and in

virtually all media houses in the country. Worse still, the meeting of the G5 in London showed flashes of a looming collaboration with Bola Tinubu of the APC. Using the skilful costume canvas of the designer, they appear impeccable, revealing visual messages of power and resolutely cultural backings which not only added to the occasion's buzz but nearly rump it in hype. This meeting knitted and kneaded the key moments of their decision to become a thorn in the flesh of their party's presidential candidate if their conditions were not met. They were indeed not met as the party refused to remove Dr Iorchia Ayu as its National Chairman, nor did it change its flag-bearer, nor nominate Wike as its Vice-Presidential candidate.

Plate 6. (Taken from *The Guardian Newspaper*). This plate bears a reflective approach by mirroring the symbolic import of the meeting as conveyed behind their smiles, posture, and artistic fabrics. This makes a symbol of the G5, their mission, and idea with a directly



representational intent. This serves us with many symbols to convey interpretational objectives that ordinary words would not describe.

This picture came out of a moment of a hard decision, which, it must be said, was much harder for Governor Samuel Ortom. It was so for him as he and Iyorchia Ayu are from the same state and geopolitical zone in Benue. Ortom may have pretended to put on a broad smile, but inwardly, he was heartbroken because it was he, Samuel Ortom, who fought tooth and nail for the installation of his kinsman Iyorchia Ayu as the PDP National Chairman. The smiles wielded by the rest of the G5 Governors were

genuine and as an expression of fulfilment. It was here that they also solidified their right to kick against their party's decision to give the position of the national chairman to North Central and worse still, give the presidential ticket to the north. These facts attracted sympathy from good people of conscience and expanded the publicity of their movement. As their looks in the picture suggest, they also excluded themselves from the party's presidential campaign over calls for Iyorchia Ayu to step down as the national chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party.

Plate 7. (Taken from *The Sun Newspaper*). This plate contains a picture showing the G5 in Tiv traditional attire known as *Anger*. They are also wearing caps woven from the traditional attire, but unlike in plate 2, they are not heaving onto their shoulders *ikpa I abor atar* neither are they wielding *iwange*. This is deliberate as the context and purpose of the occasion is a visit to the IDP Camp in Benue State.



Unlike in the other pictures analysed, they appear gloomy and unsmiling, the mood befitting the occasion of their visit. Those wearing eyeglasses appear to be shielding tears and sorrows from the public eye. The symbolic aspect of this picture, posture and attire attracts sympathy from the

onlookers, unveiling the possibilities of drawing meaningful symbolic and cultural conclusions. In this picture, it can be seen, the powerful ability of clothing and posture to communicate messages of innocence and maturity, exhaustion and excitement, strength and grief, is heaped in semiotic underpinnings all at once without sounds.

Plate 8. (Taken from *The Sun Newspaper*). This plate contains the G5 Governors hovering around His Excellency, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu.



Both governors entered into a closed-door meeting with Tinubu as they continued in their fight against their party's nomination of Alhaji Atiku as the party's presidential flag-bearer. Here, as is the case in the rest of the pictures, Nyesom Wike, alongside Samuel Ortom and the rest of the G5, is posed in the picture. The symbolism in

this picture reveals the contrast of the event and occasion: the outfit and woven fabrics they are wearing are not uniform. While the rest of them as well as the president appear in caftans, Wike is seen in a navy-blue suit, over a white shirt and a tie with sparkling shades of red-cornflower tie on the storefront. The broad smiles on their faces appear to suggest how unafraid they are that they are wining and dining with the All Progressive Congress even as members of the Peoples Democratic Party. The semiotic implication, as well as the symbolism, lies in the complete resolve of their ideology.

Plate 9. (Taken from *The Nation Newspaper*). This plate reveals what others may have overlooked for the wrong reasons as the costume and the body on which the attire embodies aspects of power relations, ideologies, and collaboration by a people united into a common force.



In a grand style, they move in lock-step as they head to make a press statement. They hammered on their resolve to turn things around and ensure the rule of law is enforced in PDP. The colour, style and posture, pontificated by the grand movement, symbolise integrity, patriotism, equity, fairness, and justice. This was the hallmark of their resolve.

Their uniquely distinct style of dressing became a fundamental daily practice found in every historic and modern event in the build-up to the 2023 presidential election, much to the chagrin of Alhaji Atiku Abubakar – the PDP Presidential flag-bearer and his fellow travellers.

Plate 10. (Taken from *The Nation Newspaper*). This plate shows the G5 in blue except Governor Seyi Makinde, who is wearing a cornflower dress. The colour and its role to



communicate notions of morality, femininity, religion, order, respectability, passivity, and confidence are drawn, symbolically, from the picture.

The straightforward, visual component of the attire, which could be seen as contained within the picture, is intended to draw the viewer's attention to their call as

integrity governors. Whether they are true to their words or not is up to the viewers to decipher. From a semiotic point of view, the action surrounding the picture and the context in which the picture is occasioned index the signified as well as the significant, both of whom are tied to resolve and conviction by the G5 Governors. In addition to this validation is the article of clothing, accessory, hairstyle, picture posture, which, working in tandem with the pictorial context, have given room for drawing symbolic and cultural conclusions based on the observations raised in the preceding sentence.

Findings and Conclusion

This paper examined the dress code and picture postures of G5 Governors during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. This was done using the semiotic lenses to draw out how meanings were portrayed and how realities were represented by the G5 Governors through dress codes and picture postures. Through these photo-positioning and dress codes analysed, findings revealed how codes and pictures were used in news tabloids to reflect specific societal ideologies and power relations and relationships. The analysis carried out has revealed hidden gems of semiotics and its cinematography in the dress codes and picture postures of the G-5 Governors. These speak to the subconscious awareness of the viewers with their visual appeal sending subliminal messages to the audience as well as the G-5 Governors and the overall nexus of their ideology. The analysis also revealed the important role culture plays in semiotics as the dress codes of the G-5 Governors were always a calculated representation of the period, setting, theme, mood, style, and context of the occasion.

It suffices to state that the findings have indeed proven that the study has achieved its set aim and objectives. Based on the objectives of the study, the findings have shown that the people

have symbols relating to ceremonies, marriage rites, burials and use them before and during such practices. The findings further established how semiotics goes a long way to reinforce the role of symbols in interpersonal or group interactions, as seen in the analysis of the dress codes and picture postures of the G5 Governors. The analysis also unravelled how their outfits and pictorial positionings conveyed meaning by reinforcing, substituting for, or contradicting verbal communication, as well as influenced Nigerians and regulated or stimulated conversational flow. The study also analysed how dress codes and picture postures played a central part in relational communication and identity expression during the 2023 general elections.

From the foregoing analysis thus far, this study concludes that there is a powerful ability of dress codes and picture postures to communicate messages of conviction, justice, rejection, innocence and maturity, exhaustion and excitement, strength and grief. The G5 Governors, whose dress codes and pictures have been interrogated in this study, were often seen adorned with costumes and attires that were constantly working in tandem with the group's context and ideology, saying important things to the viewer and Nigerians, often on a subconscious level. The spoken messages of their dress codes and picture postures conveyed what codes were embedded in the cut, colour, and composition of their attire, how these pictures spoke semantically and what their symbolic connotations were, and finally, the cultural and linguistic messages that were conveyed through their dress codes and picture postures. Through the researchers' observations and personal perspectives, the anatomy of dress codes and picture postures have been dissected to understand, more deeply, the meaning, message, and symbolism of the role the G5 Governors played in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election.

Works Cited

- Allen, Graham. *Intertextuality*. Routledge Press, 2000.
- Barthes, Roland. *S/Z*. Hill and Wang Press, 1974.
- Barthes, Roland. *Système de la Mode*. Éditions du Seuil Press, 1983.
- Barthes, Roland, Stafford Anderson and Michael Carter. *Language of Fashion*. Bloomsbury Academic Press, 1974.
- Beattie, Geoffrey. *Visible Thought: The New Psychology of Body Language*. Routledge Press, 2003.
- Burnett, Ron. *How Images Think*. MIT Press, 2005.
- Chandler, Daniel. *Introduction to Semiotics*. Routledge Press, 2007.
- Chapell, Micael and Real Moses. *Communication: Any Means by Which Thought is Transferred from One Person to Another*. Routledge Press, 1997.
- Cobley, Paul (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics and Linguistics*. Routledge Press, 2001.

- Danesi, Marcel. *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Semiotics, Media, and Communication*. University of Toronto Press, 2000.
- Hartley, John. *Communication, Culture and Media Studies: The Key Concepts*. Routledge Press, 2006.
- Hodge, Robert and Kress Gunther. *Social Semiotics*. Polity Press, 1988.
- Malcolm, Barnard. *Graphic Design as Communication*. Routledge Press, 2005.

Faith and Farming: A Historical Study of Anglican Missionaries and Food Security in Ekitiland (1894-2024)

Olaoba, Olaitan Oyedele, PhD.

*Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Humanities,
Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo*

Email: oo.olaoba@acu.edu.ng, 08033966560

Abstract

This paper investigates the role of Anglican missionaries in fostering food sustainability in Ekitiland from 1894 to 2024. It traces the historical evolution of missionary engagement in agriculture and rural development, highlighting their influence on indigenous farming practices, education, and social structures. The study employs historical and qualitative methods, drawing on archival materials, oral interviews, and existing literature. Framed within the sustainable livelihoods' framework, the research reveals that Anglican missionaries played a pivotal role in introducing modern agricultural techniques, establishing farm settlements, promoting cooperative societies, and instilling ethical values that contributed to enhanced food security. The study concludes that the church's historical and continuing influence in promoting sustainable agriculture in Ekitiland underscores the need to integrate faith-based models into contemporary rural development strategies.

Keywords: *Anglican Church, Missionaries, Food Sustainability, Ekitiland.*

Introduction

The Anglican Church, through its missionary efforts, has historically been associated with religious conversion, education, and healthcare delivery in Nigeria. However, its contributions to food security and agricultural development, particularly in Ekitiland, remain understudied (Adeyeye and Samuel, 2019). From the inception of missionary activities in the region in 1894, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and its successors established missions that not only evangelised but also promoted sustainable agricultural practices. Ekitiland, with its fertile land and agrarian culture, provided a suitable landscape for such interventions. The convergence of religious values, community organisation, and agricultural innovation offers a unique case study of how missions impacted food sustainability across different epochs.

Despite substantial scholarly engagement with the missionary enterprise in Nigeria, particularly its roles in evangelism, Western education, and healthcare delivery, limited attention has been given to the intersection of religion and agricultural development. Existing works have predominantly focused on the theological, socio-political, and educational dimensions of Anglican missions, often sidelining the Church's economic and agrarian initiatives. For instance, Ogunjobi (2018) offers a historical study of the Anglican Church in

Ado-Ekiti but restricts discussion of agricultural interventions to incidental mentions, without a sustained analysis of their scope or impact. Similarly, other regional studies highlight the Church's contributions to literacy and social organisation while overlooking how it shaped rural food systems or promoted sustainable farming practices. As a result, the specific contributions of Anglican missionaries to food sustainability in Ekitiland over the last 130 years remain insufficiently documented and critically analysed. There is a clear knowledge gap regarding how religious institutions have influenced agricultural education, land use ethics, and rural community resilience, issues that are particularly vital in the context of climate change, food insecurity, and contemporary development discourse in Nigeria.

This work aims to examine the role of Anglican missionaries in promoting food sustainability in Ekitiland between 1894 and 2024, with the objectives of tracing the historical evolution of Anglican missionary engagement in agriculture in Ekitiland, identifying the strategies employed by missionaries to enhance food production and sustainability, assessing the long-term impact of missionary agricultural initiatives on Ekiti local communities, and exploring contemporary implications for faith-based approaches to rural development and food security.

Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative, historical research methodology. Primary sources include archival documents from missionary societies, local church records, and oral interviews with clergy, elders, and agricultural workers in Ekitiland. Secondary sources include books, journal articles, and theses on missionary activities and agricultural development in Nigeria. The data were analysed to trace patterns and evaluate the influence of the church's agricultural policies and practices over time.

The paper is grounded in the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), which considers how people utilise a combination of assets (natural, human, social, physical, and financial) to sustain their living. Anglican missionaries, by introducing education, values, and technical skills, enhanced these livelihood assets among Ekitiland communities. The SLF enables a nuanced understanding of the Church's contribution to food sustainability, not merely as a development actor, but as a socio-religious institution that shapes long-term resilience.

Literature Review

The intersection of religion and development has attracted increasing scholarly interest, especially within African contexts. Several studies have documented the contributions of

missionary enterprises to social transformation, although the agricultural dimension often remains underexplored. Historical studies on missionary activities in Nigeria generally emphasise the roles of missions in evangelisation, education, and healthcare. Pioneering works by Ajayi (1965) and Ayandele (1966) provide comprehensive narratives of the Christian mission in Nigeria, particularly in the 19th and early 20th centuries. They highlighted the efforts of the CMS and other Protestant missions in penetrating Yorubaland, including Ekitiland, through the establishment of mission schools and churches. However, while these studies provide invaluable insights into the religious and cultural impacts of missions, they offer limited analysis of agricultural or food-related missionary interventions.

Fadipe (1970) and Peel (2000) further enrich the historiography of missions by discussing the complex interplay between Christian missions and indigenous structures. Peel, in particular, emphasises how missionary engagement reshaped Yoruba cosmology, ethics, and labour patterns. These shifts often included new attitudes towards land use and agriculture, albeit indirectly. Recent literature has moved toward examining religion as a driver of development. Ter Haar (2011) argues that religion, far from being an obstacle to development, can be a resource for social transformation, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, Gifford (2015) asserts that Christian organisations often fill governance gaps by providing education, health services, and moral frameworks for civic engagement. These perspectives open space for considering how religious institutions may also influence food systems, though the link is not always made explicit.

Marshall and Keough (2004) also support the view that religious groups possess latent institutional capital that can be harnessed for development purposes. They note that churches enjoy deep trust within communities and possess extensive networks that can be mobilised for socio-economic projects, including agricultural initiatives. Emerging studies have begun to examine the specific role of religious institutions in addressing food insecurity. Binns and Lynch (1998) explore how churches in Africa have historically mediated knowledge and served as centres of innovation and social change. Their work indicates that faith-based institutions often act as conduits for agricultural knowledge dissemination, particularly in rural areas. In the Nigerian context, Adedibu (2020) highlights the role of Pentecostal and mainline churches in community development projects, agricultural cooperatives and food banks.

However, extant studies remain broad and neglect the historical specificity and regional dynamics that shape faith-based agricultural engagements. For example, Ekitiland's unique

agrarian history and the early presence of the Anglican Church make it a fertile ground for studying sustained church-community agricultural interactions. The relationship between missionary-introduced agriculture and indigenous farming methods is another relevant scholarly theme. Vaughan (1991) and Falola (1998) argue that missionaries often introduced Western agricultural practices that complemented or, at times, conflicted with indigenous knowledge systems. These encounters led to hybrid farming practices and new land-use ethics, some of which contributed to environmental sustainability.

Additionally, the role of mission schools in agricultural education has been explored by Osokoya (1987), who asserts that curriculum content in colonial-era mission schools often included practical agricultural training. This aspect is significant in understanding how Anglican missionaries embedded food sustainability principles into the formal education system. Scholars such as Adebayo (1993) and Ogunremi (1997) examine the economic and agricultural evolution of Yoruba subgroups, including the Ekiti people. These scholars highlight the predominance of subsistence and cash crop farming in Ekiti history, as well as the influence of colonial and postcolonial policies. However, they make only cursory references to religious influence, thereby necessitating more focused studies on the religious drivers of agricultural change.

The reviewed literature makes it clear that while the role of religion in development is gaining scholarly attention, there remains a significant gap in historical analyses of missionary contributions to food sustainability in specific Nigerian regions, such as Ekitiland. Moreover, most studies that address religion and agriculture focus on contemporary or policy-oriented terms, often neglecting the long historical arc of missionary influence. The current study addresses this gap by providing a longitudinal and context-specific investigation of Anglican missionary involvement in Ekitiland's food systems from 1894 to 2024.

Early Missionary Agricultural Interventions (1894 - 1930s)

The introduction of Christianity in Ekitiland also marked the beginning of mechanised agricultural exploration in Ekitiland. The main task of the pioneer Anglican Church evangelists in Ekitiland is to make Jesus Christ known, loved and obeyed both in homes and farms of all towns and villages in Ekitiland. As it was the practice of Jesus Christ, Christians should meet the people wherever they are (in the farms and villages). This was the practice of the Anglican evangelists when they returned home from slavery. They therefore permeated every

community in Ekitiland with evangelism and agriculture- the Bible in one hand and a plough in the other.

Before the advent of the Anglican Church, many farmers in Ekitiland concentrated on the cultivation of food crops, like cassava, yams, cocoyam, melon, and so on. On the arrival of Anglican missionaries, they introduced and encouraged the farmers to plant crops such as citrus, cashew, cocoa, oil palm, kolanut and others, which take a longer time to mature but bring bigger financial returns. They also gave the farmers in Ekitiland more useful information on livestock husbandry than what was obtainable to them before. Many Ekiti people keep their livestock, especially poultry, on free range and expect them to perform magic (Adesina, 2021). Information on housing, feed and feeding, disease prevention through hygiene and vaccinations, early diagnosis and treatment of diseases is essential to obtain growth from their livestock.

The Church also encouraged the Ekiti farmers to practice mixed farming, which is the production of crops and animals on the same piece of land. The farmers, therefore, need adequate information as to where they can obtain farm technological facilities. A trained person only passes the information accurately, either as an agricultural evangelist or a minister of their parish, especially in the villages. These were what many Anglican Church heroes and heroines have been doing for the farmers in Ekitiland to have their souls won for Christ (Omole, 2004).

Upon arrival in Ekitiland, CMS missionaries quickly observed the subsistence farming methods of the Ekiti people. Indigenous agriculture was largely reliant on traditional techniques such as slash-and-burn (swidden) cultivation, which, though sustainable in the short term, faced challenges under increasing population pressure and colonial economic demands (Adebayo, 1993). Missionaries, influenced by their European agrarian backgrounds, introduced systematic and more intensive farming techniques, including row planting, crop rotation, and the use of compost and manure as fertiliser. These methods aimed at improving yields and soil conservation (Peel, 2000). Mission compounds became centres for agricultural experimentation and demonstration. CMS stations such as those in Ado-Ekiti, Ilawe, and Iyin established mission farms where both staple and cash crops were cultivated. These farms provided food for the mission stations and served as models for indigenous farmers. The missionaries promoted crops such as cassava, yam, and maize for subsistence and encouraged the planting of cocoa and kola nuts for commercial purposes. Cocoa, in particular, became a

significant cash crop in Ekitiland by the 1920s, largely due to missionary and colonial promotion (Ogunremi, 1997).

In addition to introducing new farming techniques, missionaries imparted a religiously motivated agrarian ethics. Farming was portrayed not just as an economic activity but also as a divine vocation. The Christian message of diligence, stewardship, and providence was closely linked to agricultural labour. This spiritual framing encouraged a reorientation of work ethics, contrasting with some pre-Christian cosmologies that associated manual labour with social inferiority (Ajayi, 1965).

Another key innovation was the integration of agriculture into the missionary school curriculum. As early as the 1910s, mission schools in Ekitiland began to include practical agricultural training as part of their broader educational mandate. Following CMS policy directives and in cooperation with colonial administrators, school gardens and farms were established where students were taught how to cultivate crops, manage soil fertility, and engage in animal husbandry (Osokoya, 1987).

This pedagogical model served several purposes. It reinforced classroom learning through practical experience, contributed food and revenue to the schools, and prepared students for life in agrarian communities. In addition, it subtly challenged the dichotomy between mental and manual labour, thereby promoting a vision of education that valued the dignity of farming as much as intellectual achievement. Many mission school graduates became local agricultural extension officers, village teachers, and community leaders who propagate the values and techniques learned in these mission-based agricultural settings (Adedibu, 2020).

Mid-20th Century Expansion (1940s–1970s)

The period between the 1940s and 1970s marked a significant phase of expansion, institutional consolidation, and diversification of the agricultural contributions made by the Anglican Church in Ekitiland. During this time, the Anglican Church responded to post-war reconstruction efforts, growing population demands, and nationalist aspirations by intensifying its agricultural programmes and community development initiatives. The period is also noteworthy for the formalisation of church-state partnerships in education and rural development.

The aftermath of World War II witnessed increasing food insecurity and economic hardship in many parts of colonial Nigeria, including Ekitiland. The colonial administration responded by

encouraging agricultural intensification through community development programmes, farm settlements, and technical training (Watts, 1983). The Anglican Church, particularly through its Diocesan Agricultural Offices and missionary agents, became a key stakeholder in this endeavour. Church-led agricultural initiatives during this period expanded from the simple mission farms into more elaborate community-based programs. New varieties of crops such as improved cassava, hybrid maize, and early-maturing yams were introduced with assistance from missionary extension workers and agricultural officers trained in British and Nigerian institutions (Ogunremi, 1997). Anglican agricultural missions worked closely with colonial departments of agriculture, thereby facilitating the dissemination of technical knowledge through churches, schools, and local councils.

Furthermore, the Church established agricultural demonstration centres in towns such as Ikere-Ekiti, Ido-Ekiti, and Aramoko-Ekiti, where they taught soil management, composting, pest control, and crop spacing. These centres also hosted periodic agricultural exhibitions and farmer-training sessions, blending religious instruction with agronomic innovation (Ajayi, 1965). The message was clear: agriculture was not merely an economic activity but a divine calling with communal and moral responsibilities.

A key development during this period was the expansion of agricultural education at both the primary and secondary levels. Mission schools integrated agriculture more formally into their curricula, in line with both ecclesiastical vision and colonial educational policy. The Education Ordinance of 1952, for instance, required mission schools to include practical subjects such as agriculture, home economics, and manual labour (Osokoya, 1987). Anglican schools in Ekitiland quickly established school farms where students practised tilling, planting, and harvesting. By the 1960s, the Church was also involved in post-primary vocational training, often in partnership with government agencies. Schools such as Emmanuel School, Ado-Ekiti and Christ's School, Ado-Ekiti, offered specialised programmes in agricultural science. These institutions produced a cadre of Christian agricultural officers, extension agents, and teachers who later served in government and private sectors (Adedibu, 2020). Their training emphasised not only technical competence but also Christian ethics of stewardship, accountability, and service.

The Anglican Youth Fellowship (AYF) and Women's Guilds also contributed to vocational agricultural training. These church groups organised agricultural camps, seminars, and competitions that encouraged rural youth and women to see agriculture as a path to self-reliance

and spiritual fulfilment. Notably, women's groups took the lead in food processing, preservation, and cooperative marketing of farm produce, especially in the face of increasing rural-urban migration during the 1960s and 1970s (Ter Haar, 2011).

Another significant development in this period was the growing influence of indigenous Anglican clergy and lay leaders in agricultural mission work. By the 1950s, the missionary field had undergone a process of "Africanisation," with indigenous bishops, priests, and evangelists taking leadership roles in diocesan development programs (Ayandele, 1966). Many of these leaders had rural backgrounds and were deeply invested in community welfare and agrarian development.

These clergy emphasised community mobilisation, moral reform, and agricultural improvement. Sermons increasingly addressed themes such as land stewardship, environmental care, and the sin of laziness, all within the framework of Christian doctrine. Churches became venues for farmer education, seed distribution, and cooperative formation. Clergy like Ven. J. A. Adebayo of Ado-Ekiti and Rev. Akinrinade of Iye-Ekiti were known for promoting agricultural self-sufficiency alongside spiritual growth, often starting communal farms or leading food security initiatives during lean seasons.

Rural Cooperative Societies and Food Security Programmes

In line with broader socio-economic trends, the Anglican Church was involved in the promotion of rural cooperative societies. These cooperatives were aimed at improving access to credit, agricultural inputs, and markets for smallholder farmers. The Church encouraged its members to form cooperative societies, which were often affiliated with parish or diocesan structures. This innovation helped to reduce post-harvest losses, enhance food availability, and foster community solidarity. In particular, the Church organised bulk purchases of improved seeds and fertilisers through these cooperatives, making them more affordable for rural farmers. Women's groups organised bulk food storage systems and rotating loan schemes that increased household food security. These church-supported cooperatives also negotiated for better farm produce prices, which enhanced rural incomes and reduced poverty (Falola, 1998).

During the periods of food scarcity or price hikes, especially in the late 1960s during the Nigerian Civil War, the Anglican Church provided relief such as food distributions, communal harvests, and the creation of emergency food banks operated through parish councils (Gifford, 2015). These efforts underscored the Church's evolving role as both a spiritual and socio-economic institution within rural society.

The Anglican Church's agricultural mission in Ekitiland also intersected with national development policies after independence in 1960. The First (1962-1968) and Second (1970-1974) Nigerian National Development Plans emphasised rural development, agricultural modernisation, and community participation. Anglican missions aligned their agricultural programmes with these plans, receiving support from government agencies such as the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs). The Church often served as a local implementing partner for these initiatives. Anglican schools hosted extension workshops, and clergy acted as informal agents during rural mobilisation. In some cases, parishes received grants or technical aid to develop mechanised farming, poultry units, and small-scale irrigation schemes. These programmes contributed to food sustainability by improving productivity, stabilising food supply chains, and enhancing farmers' access to technology.

Late 20th Century to Present (1980s–2024)

The period between the 1980s and 2024 represents a complex era of transformation in the relationship between the Anglican Church and food sustainability in Ekitiland. It is characterised by structural adjustment, political instability, climate variability, and globalisation, all of which have had significant impacts on agricultural productivity and food systems. In response, the Anglican Church has recalibrated its mission to remain relevant in promoting food sustainability through strategic advocacy, community empowerment, institutional innovation, and environmental stewardship. This era reflects a shift from mission-dominated approaches to indigenous, locally driven initiatives grounded in theology, social justice, and sustainable development principles.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed profound economic and social crises in Nigeria due to the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), devaluation of the naira, subsidy removals, and reduced government investment in agriculture (Ojo, 2010). These challenges led to widespread rural poverty, food insecurity, and the collapse of several state-supported agricultural extension services. In Ekitiland, formerly vibrant farming communities experienced youth migration to urban centres, and the ageing farming population faced limited access to credit, fertilisers, and improved seeds.

In the face of this crisis, the Anglican Church in Ekitiland responded by reviving its commitment to grassroots agricultural development and food justice. The dioceses began to integrate rural development ministries into their ecclesiastical structures. For example, the

Diocese of Ekiti and later, all newly carved dioceses such as Ekiti West, Ekiti Oke, and Ekiti Kwara initiated agricultural units that coordinated faith-based responses to food insecurity (Adebayo, 2015). These units provided basic training in sustainable farming techniques, crop diversification, and low-cost irrigation, thereby promoting a theology of stewardship and environmental care.

By the early 2000s, Anglican dioceses in Ekitiland began implementing structured agricultural projects either as diocesan ventures or through parishes. One notable example is the Diocesan Agro-Mission Initiative (DAMI) launched by the Diocese of Ekiti West in 2008. DAMI established cassava and maize plantations, poultry farms, and palm oil processing facilities to train unemployed youths and generate funds for mission work. The initiative also promoted “Farm Sunday” events, where parishioners brought farm produce to church for dedication and communal sharing.

Similarly, Anglican secondary schools and theological colleges in the region, such as Archbishop Vining College of Theology, Akure (which serves Ekitiland), reintroduced practical agriculture into their curricula (Adesina & Olaniyan, 2021). This approach combined agronomic skill development with theological training, cultivating leaders capable of contributing to both food sustainability and spiritual nourishment.

Moreover, some dioceses acquired plots of land for diocesan farms that produced food not only for sale but also for use in church-run orphanages, hospitals, and schools. These efforts reduced dependence on market-sourced food and served as resilience strategies during inflationary periods and supply chain disruptions, such as those experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic (Aina & Aluko, 2021).

Women and Youth Involvement in Food Initiatives

Anglican women’s organisations, such as the Mothers’ Union and Women’s Guild, were involved in agricultural activities; they ran backyard gardening projects, and engaged in food processing enterprises such as gari-making, palm oil production, and yam flour packaging. These ventures were often tied to savings-and-loans schemes and supported women’s economic empowerment and household food security (Oladejo, 2018).

Youths, on the other hand, were targeted through vocational training and empowerment programmes such as the “Youth Empowered to Farm” initiative launched in parts of Ekiti between 2015 and 2022. These programmes emphasised Agri-entrepreneurship, greenhouse

farming, and climate-smart agriculture, often implemented in partnership with NGOs and government extension programs. Churches provided land, mentorship, and startup support, encouraging Christian youths to see farming as both a ministry and a profitable venture.

Challenges and Limitations

While the Anglican Church has played a significant and laudable role in enhancing food sustainability in Ekitiland, several challenges and limitations have hindered the full realisation of its agricultural and developmental objectives. These obstacles spanned across historical, institutional, socio-economic, theological, and environmental dimensions, each presenting a complex interplay that continues to shape the Church's mission in rural food security.

A major limitation to the Anglican Church's agricultural and developmental efforts in Ekitiland has been the persistent challenge of land tenure insecurity, rooted in colonial-era land policies and indigenous customary systems. Despite receiving land allocations from local chiefs during the Church's early missionary expansion in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, these grants were often informal and lacked legal backing or Certificates of Occupancy (Akinyemi, 2011). As population pressures mounted and urbanisation spread, church-held lands increasingly became targets of encroachment, disputes, and unauthorised appropriation. Without secure land tenure, the Church found it difficult to commit to long-term investments in agricultural infrastructure, diocesan farms, or food security initiatives. This land insecurity has not only disrupted sustainability plans but also eroded trust and cooperation in some communities where the Church was once a pivotal development actor.

One of the limitations has been the historical legacy of colonial land policies and the complex nature of customary land tenure systems in Ekitiland. Although Anglican missionaries were granted lands by local chiefs for evangelism and community development in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Church often lacked clear legal documentation or Certificates of Occupancy for these lands (Akinyemi, 2011). As the pressure for land increased with population growth and urbanisation, church lands were frequently encroached upon, disputed, or appropriated without compensation. This insecurity constrained the establishment of long-term agricultural projects or diocesan farms that required secure land tenure.

Financial and Institutional Limitations

Most Anglican dioceses in Ekitiland operate with constrained financial resources, heavily dependent on tithes, offerings, and limited grants. This financial limitation severely restricts

investment in modern agricultural infrastructure such as tractors, irrigation systems, greenhouses, or post-harvest storage facilities. Without these, the scalability and productivity of diocesan farms remain low (Adepoju & Afolabi, 2017).

Additionally, there is often a lack of dedicated agricultural experts within diocesan structures. While some dioceses have set up agricultural committees or rural development departments, these are frequently understaffed and lack professional agronomists, extension officers, or development economists. This institutional gap has made it difficult to design evidence-based food security programmes to attract donor partnerships for sustainable agriculture.

Youth Disinterest and Rural-Urban Migration

Despite targeted interventions such as agricultural youth empowerment programmes, many young people in Ekitiland continue to perceive agriculture as unattractive due to its physical demands, low profitability, and lack of technological appeal. The rural-urban migration trend, intensified since the 1980s, has drained farming communities of able-bodied youth, leaving an ageing population to continue subsistence farming practices.

The Church has struggled to make agriculture appealing through technological innovation or vocational branding. Many dioceses lack the digital platforms, market linkages, or agribusiness networks necessary to convert traditional farming into profitable ventures that could attract the younger generation (Aina & Aluko, 2021). As a result, church-initiated farms often suffer from labour shortages, poor mechanisation, and limited entrepreneurial development.

Climate Change and Environmental Degradation

In recent decades, climate change has emerged as a formidable limitation to food security in Ekitiland. Erratic rainfall patterns, prolonged dry spells, soil erosion, and pest infestations have adversely affected crop yields. Anglican farms and gardens, mostly rain-fed and without adaptive infrastructure, are particularly vulnerable to these climate disruptions (Okonkwo, 2020). Moreover, many churches have not fully embraced climate-smart agriculture or ecological theology. Tree planting campaigns, organic farming, and water conservation practices are not yet mainstreamed across parishes. This environmental unpreparedness undermines the Church's ability to act as a proactive catalyst for long-term food sustainability.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Knowledge Gaps

Finally, many church-led food initiatives in Ekitiland suffer from a lack of proper monitoring, evaluation, and documentation. Without clear metrics or periodic assessments, it is difficult to measure the impact of Anglican agricultural interventions on food security, income generation, or environmental conservation. Moreover, success stories and best practices from local parishes or diocesan farms are rarely disseminated in academic journals, church newsletters, or national conferences. This knowledge gap prevents scaling and replication, and reduces the visibility of the Church as a stakeholder in national food discourse.

Conclusion

This paper affirms that Anglican missionaries were not only spiritual leaders but also socio-economic agents who laid the groundwork for sustainable food practices in Ekitiland. Their legacy persists through church farms, educational curricula, and community mobilisation. The enduring presence of church-based agricultural projects demonstrates the potential of religious institutions to address food insecurity when aligned with community values and modern innovations.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and challenges identified in the historical and contemporary roles of Anglican missionaries in promoting food sustainability in Ekitiland, several strategic recommendations are proposed to strengthen the Church's impact. First, there is a need for diocesan authorities to formalise land ownership by securing legal titles and clear documentation for church-acquired lands. This would protect church farms from encroachment and enable long-term agricultural planning. Secondly, the Church should invest in building institutional capacity by employing professional agricultural officers, forming partnerships with agricultural research institutes, and training clergy and laity in sustainable farming practices. Integrating agricultural education into theological seminaries would also help future church leaders understand and promote food security as a theological and pastoral mandate.

Furthermore, diocesan programmes should engage the youth more intentionally through agri-tech initiatives, digital platforms, and entrepreneurial schemes that make agriculture appealing, innovative, and profitable. Anglican youth fellowships could serve as incubators for such empowerment programmes. To mitigate environmental threats, the Church should mainstream climate-smart agricultural practices, such as organic farming, agroforestry, and water harvesting, into its community farms and parish teachings. In addition, diocesan development

departments should actively seek collaboration with government agencies, NGOs, and international donors for technical assistance, equipment support, and policy advocacy. Finally, there is a need for robust systems of monitoring, evaluation, and documentation of church-based agricultural interventions. This will enhance transparency, promote learning across dioceses, and elevate the Church's contributions within national discourses on food security and rural development. Through these multi-pronged recommendations, the Anglican Church in Ekitiland can reaffirm its historical commitment to holistic mission, combining spiritual nourishment with practical sustenance for the flourishing of its communities.

References

- Adedibu, B. (2020). *Faith-based organisations and community development in Nigeria*. Langham Publishing.
- Adebayo, A. G. (1993). *Economic development and community change: The impact of colonial rule on Ekitiland, 1900–1960*. University Press PLC.
- Adebayo, R. O. (2015). *The role of the Church in sustainable community development in Nigeria: The case of the Anglican Church in Ekiti Diocese*. Nigerian Journal of Theology, 29(2), 53–71.
- Adepoju, A. O., & Afolabi, O. A. (2017). *Churches and rural development in Nigeria: A study of agricultural efforts in selected churches*. African Journal of Sustainable Development, 9(1), 95–113.
- Adeyemi, J. A (1966). *Towards a Better Life: The Role of the Anglican Church of Ekiti in the Rural Development*. Ibadan: Daystar Press, 15.
- Adeyeye, A. O., & Samuel, Z. J. (2019). *A study of the economic impact of the Anglican Church Communion on Nupeland*. Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies, 9(1).
- Adesina, D. O., & Olaniyan, R. A. (2021). *The transformation of theological education and rural development in Southwest Nigeria*. African Journal of Sustainable Development, 11(3), 115–129.
- Aina, A., & Aluko, O. (2021). *Faith-based responses to COVID-19 in rural Nigeria: Food security, health, and social protection*. Journal of Religion and Health, 60(5), 2487–2502. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-021-01282-9>
- Ajayi, J. F. A. (1965). *Christian missions in Nigeria, 1841–1891: The making of a new elite*. Longmans.
- Akinyemi, S. O. (2011). *Land and religion in Nigeria: Historical perspectives on church property in Yoruba land*. History Compass, 9(12), 1016–1029. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2011.00822.x>
- Ayandele, E. A. (1966). *The missionary impact on modern Nigeria, 1842–1914: A political and social analysis*. Longman.
- Binns, T., & Lynch, K. (1998). Feeding Africa's growing cities into the 21st century: The potential of urban agriculture. *Journal of International Development*, 10(6), 777–793. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1099-1328\(199809\)10:6<777:AID-JID603>3.0.CO;2-C](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-1328(199809)10:6<777:AID-JID603>3.0.CO;2-C)
- Falola, T. (1998). *Violence in Nigeria: The crisis of religious politics and secular ideologies*. University of Rochester Press.
- Fadipe, N. A. (1970). *The sociology of the Yoruba*. Ibadan University Press.
- Gifford, P. (2015). *Christianity, development and modernity in Africa*. Hurst & Co.
- Ilo, S. C. (2012). *The face of Africa: Looking beyond the shadows*. Paulines Publications Africa.
- Marshall, K., & Keough, L. (2004). *Mind, heart and soul in the fight against poverty*. World Bank.

- Ogunremi, D. (1997). *Agriculture and economic development in Ekiti region*. In D. Ogunremi & E. O. Faluyi (Eds.), *An economic history of the Ekiti people* (pp. 33–54). University Press PLC.
- Ojo, M. A. (2010). *Religion and rural development in Nigeria: Historical reflections and contemporary challenges*. In O. Vaughan (Ed.), *Religion and the making of Nigeria* (pp. 119–141). Duke University Press.
- Okonkwo, I. (2020). *Green theology and African Christianity: Ecological implications for sustainable development in Nigeria*. *Journal of African Christian Thought*, 23(1), 43–52.
- Oladejo, A. (2018). *Women's role in faith-based food security initiatives in Nigeria: A study of the Anglican Mothers' Union in Ekiti*. *Gender and Development Review*, 7(1), 70–89.
- Omole I, (2004). *The Role of Agriculture in the Development of Rural Area of Ekiti State*. Unpublished Thesis, Immanuel College of Theology, Ibadan.
- Osokoya, I. O. (1987). *An introduction to educational history in Nigeria*. Macmillan.
- Peel, J. D. Y. (2000). *Religious encounter and the making of the Yoruba*. Indiana University Press.
- Ter Haar, G. (2011). *Religion and development: Ways of transforming the world*. Hurst & Co.
- Vaughan, O. (1991). *Religion and rural politics in southwestern Nigeria*. Africa World Press.

Pictorial Language and Symbolism in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Devil On The Cross*

Princess O. Idialu, PhD.

Wesley University, Ondo, Ondo State

Email: idualuprincess72@gmail.com

08027706961; 08053498267

Abstract

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's 1975 novel, Devil on the Cross, examines neocolonialism, capitalism, and cultural identity issues in postcolonial Kenya. This paper examines Ngũgĩ's literary devices, particularly his use of vivid imagery and symbolism, to enhance emotional and thematic engagement with the story. The novel's pictorial language effectively shows the socio-economic inequalities of postcolonial government by sharply contrasting the wealthy elite with the impoverished masses. The paper uses ideas from postcolonial theory, semiotics, and Edward Said's critique of Orientalism to address missing areas in research about how visual language and symbols work in the story. Understanding the cultural identity complexity resulting from colonial dynamics requires Homi K. Bhabha's ideas of hybridity and mimicry, as characters in the novel mimic Western capitalist behaviours, exposing neo-colonial corruption. Scholars have investigated many facets of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's narrative strategies, thematic preoccupations, and sociopolitical critiques in Devil on the Cross. Still, there is a significant gap in the academic debate on the particular function of pictorial language and symbolism in enabling communication inside this text. Hence, the gap this work fills.

The approach adopted is the postcolonial theory. The methodology used was a combination of a careful reading of the text and content analysis with secondary sources offering analysis of Ngũgĩ's narrative techniques to augment understanding. The results show that Ngũgĩ's use of pictorial language and symbolism not only improves the aesthetic quality of the narrative but also acts as a strong weapon for socio-political criticism, promoting a better awareness of postcolonial identity and resistance.

Ngũgĩ's vivid imagery and symbolic components greatly enhance the narrative, providing strong socio-political commentary that clarifies postcolonial identity and resistance. Therefore, the study supports more studies on symbolism in African literature and the inclusion of Devil on the Cross in courses concentrating on postcolonial literature. Devil on the Cross shows, in the end, the ability of literature to offer deep social and political insights, pushing more investigation of Ngũgĩ's literary techniques in academic and public settings.

Keywords: Imagery, Pictorial Language, Symbolism, Communication, Devil on the Cross

Introduction

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's 1980 novel, *Devil on the Cross*, is considered a Kenyan and world literature masterpiece. It is known for effectively using pictorial language to criticise the forces of neo-colonialism, capitalism, and cultural identity throughout postcolonial Kenya. Ngũgĩ, a Kenyan author and activist, uses his story to reflect on the political reality of his country and also offers a moving story about oppression, stubborn resistance, and the search for freedom. Pictorial Language in literature refers to the exploitation of descriptive language that creates pictures in the reader's mind, adding to the emotional and thematic vitality of the narrative.

Pictorial language is found to exist in Ngũgĩ's *Devil on the Cross* in sentences which bring out the sharp contrast between the affluent, corrupt few and the teeming multitude of the impoverished, thus emphasising the lines of separation in the socio-economic spheres (Ngũgĩ, 1982). Doing so provides a view of the Kenyan landscape and a critique of the visual reality of postcolonial policies. Based on recent research, visual imagery in literature may potentially influence readers' conceptualisations of societal norms. Research indicates that readers are more likely to engage emotionally with texts that employ rich visual descriptions (Kosslyn, 2016).

Symbolism is a literary device where symbols are used to represent ideas and qualities beyond their literal sense. With symbols like the devil and the cross bearing deep significance, Ngũgĩ's use of symbolism in "Devil on the Cross" is multifarious. As Ngũgĩ himself puts it, "The devil is the symbol of the oppressor, of the capitalist system, of the foreign powers that plunder Africa's resources" (Ngũgĩ, 1982, p. 7); the devil represents the oppressive capitalist forces and foreign exploitation. On the other hand, the cross stands for hope for a free future and opposition. Symbolic interactionism, a theory positing that meaning results from social interactions and the use of symbols, helps to examine this duality of symbols (Blumer, 2019). Recent empirical studies have shown that symbolic interactionism remains relevant in understanding how literature reflects and influences societal values, particularly in postcolonial contexts (Denzin, 2020).

The novel also uses other symbols, including the river, which denotes change and the possibility of social rebirth. Not fixed, these symbols change throughout the story to mirror Kenya's dynamic socio-political situation after independence. Other African authors, like Chinua Achebe, reflect this symbolic usage in their writings and laud Ngũgĩ's narrative for its depth in addressing postcolonial concerns (Achebe, 1988).

Understanding the symbolic depth of "Devil on the Cross" depends on its historical and political background. Written during the political turmoil following Kenya's independence in 1963, the book captures the disappointment with the postcolonial government falling short of promises of equality and justice. Ngũgĩ's activism is well documented; his writings have been used for political criticism and mobilisation (Ngũgĩ, 1986). With Ngũgĩ's work serving as a clear example of literature as a form of resistance, recent research has emphasised how literature from this time reflects and influences political discourse (Gikandi, 2019).

Using close reading and content analysis, this paper takes a qualitative research method to examine how these symbols operate inside the story. This paper examines how Ngũgĩ weaves a story that is both a critique and a call to action by emphasising the interaction between

pictorial language and symbolism. The study aims to show that these literary techniques are essential for conveying the book's theme, improving its communicative power and involving readers in discussing postcolonial identity and resistance. Current researches support the analysis based on modern literary and sociological theories, setting the stage for a detailed look at how Ngugi wa Thiong'o uses images and symbols in *Devil on the Cross* to express complicated social and political ideas.

Statement of the Problem

Scholars investigating many facets of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's narrative strategies, thematic preoccupations, and sociopolitical critiques have done a great critical study of *Devil on the Cross*. Still, there is a significant gap in the academic debate on the particular function of pictorial language and symbolism in enabling communication inside this text. This work focuses on how Ngugi uses these literary tools to express complex socio-political messages in the setting of postcolonial Kenya. This study seeks to close this gap.

Mwangi's (2021) study on visual literacy in African literature indicates that pictorial language in works like *Devil on the Cross* helps with the emotional and ideological positioning of the reader as well as the visualisation of settings.

Conversely, while symbolism is a well-trodden road in literary criticism, its use in Ngugi's work, especially in "Devil on the Cross," has not been exhaustively investigated regarding its communicative role. Often with many meanings, literary symbols are shorthand for complicated concepts (Blumer, 1969). In postcolonial settings, symbols can reflect both the aspirations for freedom and the leftovers of colonial oppression. Though it does not explore the details of Ngugi's symbolic use in *Devil on the Cross*, Amoko's (2018) study on symbolism in postcolonial African novels shows that symbols are essential in conveying resistance and identity. This disparity is vital since Ngugi's symbols, such as the devil and the cross, are not only narrative components but deeply ingrained in Kenyan society's socio-political fabric, reflecting and criticising the postcolonial state.

The issue is the under-exploration of how these two components—pictorial language and symbolism—work together in *Devil on the Cross* to convey Ngugi's criticism of neo-colonialism, capitalism, and the fight for cultural identity. Although academics like Ogude (2019) have addressed Ngugi's use of narrative strategies, the particular emphasis on how these strategies enable the transmission of socio-political ideas remains underexplored. This study aims to solve this using a thorough analysis backed by empirical data from recent literary studies, stressing the need for visual and symbolic communication in comprehending postcolonial narratives.

Furthermore, the socio-political setting of postcolonial Kenya, characterised by corruption, economic inequality, and cultural decay, offers a rich background for such an investigation. Though it doesn't directly address *Devil on the Cross*, recent empirical studies by Gikandi (2019) on Ngũgĩ's works emphasise the need to know the historical setting to appreciate the symbolic depth completely. This paper will, therefore, add to the field by providing a nuanced knowledge of how Ngũgĩ's use of pictorial language and symbolism not only criticises but also conveys the complexity of Kenyan postcolonial life, thus closing a vital gap in the current literature.

Research Objectives

- i to analyse the types of pictorial language and symbols used in *Devil on the Cross*.
- ii to explore how these elements serve to critique and reflect on the socio-political environment of postcolonial Kenya, and
- iii to assess the effectiveness of these literary devices in enhancing the reader's understanding and engagement with the text's themes.

Significance of the Study

Examining the use of pictorial language and symbolism in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's "Devil on the Cross" reveals several facets of importance that influence literary research and socio-political debate. First, especially in African settings, this study shows how powerful a tool literature is for political criticism literature is. Through its symbolic richness, Ngugi's work critiques neo-colonialism and capitalism, providing a narrative space where political concerns are discussed and vividly depicted, accessible and powerful for a larger audience. Recent research backs this claim by suggesting that literature may be a driver of social change by giving underprivileged voices a platform.

Examining Ngugi's use of these literary techniques deepens the study of his work and greatly supports postcolonial literary research. Examining how Ngũgĩ uses symbolism and pictorial language to shape his story helps academics to better grasp the subtleties of resistance and identity in postcolonial literature. This method places Ngugi's work in the larger discussion of how postcolonial authors interact with issues of power, identity, and resistance and not only increases our respect for his skill.

Lastly, the transformation of cultural symbols into universal symbols within Ngugi's text provides critical insights into cross-cultural communication. Though deeply ingrained in Kenyan culture, symbols like the devil and the cross speak to people all around and help to start a conversation that crosses cultural borders. This part of the paper emphasises how literature can connect different cultures by providing symbols that, although particular in

origin, have universal or relatable meaning, as discussed in recent cross-cultural literary studies. This knowledge helps to promote cultural empathy and understanding by fostering a worldwide appreciation of African literature and its expressions.

Theoretical Framework

This paper's theoretical framework offers several prisms to examine Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* by combining postcolonial theory, semiotics, and components of Edward Said's critique of Orientalism. Articulated by Homi K. Bhabha in his 1994 book *The Location of Culture*, postcolonial theory provides critical ideas including hybridity, mimicry, and rebellion. Bhabha's investigation of hybridity underlines the development of new cultural forms from the interaction between coloniser and colonised, implying that these interactions generate a third space where identities are not fixed but are always changing. Ngugi's story is especially relevant to this idea, as it shows how traditional Kenyan culture interacts with Western influences to create a hybrid cultural identity that questions the purity of both. Another of Bhabha's tenets, mimicry, explains how the colonised might imitate the culture of the coloniser, sometimes in a way that subverts it and exposes the absurdity and power relations at work. Ngugi uses characters in *Devil on the Cross* to mimic Western capitalist behaviour, revealing the shallowness and corruption of neocolonial elites. Bhabha's concept of resistance fits with Ngugi's use of narrative to challenge and criticise the socio-political system of postcolonial Kenya since it includes not only overt opposition but also subtle subversions inside the colonial discourse.

The power of using Bhabha's postcolonial theory is in its capacity to reveal the multifaceted identities created in the wake of colonialism, therefore providing a nuanced knowledge of how Ngugi's people traverse their cultural terrain. Critics of Bhabha's work, meanwhile, tend to focus on its intricacy and occasionally abstract quality, which could cloud clear relevance to literary works. Although Bhabha's theories offer a rich interpretive framework for this work, they need to be applied judiciously to avoid eclipsing the inherent narrative and thematic issues of the text.

Empirical Review of Related Literature

Though particular empirical research on these features is still rather scarce, the investigation of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* through the prism of pictorial language and symbolism has generated mixed scholarly interest. But current studies offer a strong basis for grasping the larger thematic and stylistic subtleties of Ngugi's work, which can be directly connected to our emphasis on pictorial language and symbolism in communication.

In her paper *Religious Implications in Matigari*, Selamawit Seyoum (2020) provides an analysis of Ngugi's critical attitude towards Christianity, implying that he sees it as a barrier to Kenya's total liberation. Aiming to free their minds from what he considers the oppressive teachings of Christianity, Seyoum contends that Ngugi uses religious critique to inspire a revolutionary spirit among his readers. When one considers the symbolic use of the cross in *The Devil on the Cross*, where the cross not only signifies Christian salvation but also the fight against colonial and neocolonial oppression, this viewpoint is essential (Seyoum, 2020). Though centred on "Matigari", her study offers a background for grasping Ngũgĩ's symbolic criticism of religion in his writings.

Emenyonu, as quoted by Seyoum (2020), expands on this topic by saying Ngũgĩ views the Bible as a weapon of colonisation, used to spiritually and physically enslave Africans. "Devil on the Cross" by Ngũgĩ reflects this historical use of religious symbols as tools of oppression by depicting the devil and symbolising capitalist and neocolonial exploitation. Emenyonu's observations emphasise the symbolic richness Ngugi gives in his stories, where religious symbols are twisted to attack social systems (Emenyonu, 2021).

Sundy Deborah's (2019) dissertation, which relates to the symbolic use of landscape in Ngugi's novels, investigates how colonisation affects identity, especially via the prism of language and homeland displacement. She cites Loflin, who links the Kenyan terrain to the identity of the community, a subject Ngũgĩ investigates using pictorial language, portraying the physical and cultural landscapes as battlegrounds of identity and resistance (Deborah, 2019). Understanding how Ngũgĩ employs the environment as a symbol of both oppression and possible freedom depends on this link between land and identity.

Bethwell Allan Ogot (2021), emphasising the return to one's cultural roots as a form of resistance against colonial erasure, explores the idea of "Homecoming" in Ngugi's works. Like Gitutu's statement of his genuine home being where his family lives, people's ties to their land in "Devil on the Cross" represent the idea of home. Ogot's study offers evidence to back up Ngũgĩ's use of the home symbol to promote a feeling of belonging and defiance, therefore helping to grasp the pictorial depiction of Kenyan terrain in the book (Ogot, 2021).

Babu (2019) looks at Ngũgĩ's use of language as a weapon for justice and communication, pointing out Ngũgĩ's move to write in Kikuyu, which fits with the symbolic choice of language in "Devil on the Cross." Using the indigenous language to connect and resonate with the local population, Babu's work shows how Ngũgĩ's linguistic decisions constitute a kind of symbolic resistance supporting the criticism of neo-colonialism in the novel (Babu, 2019). This linguistic change reflects a larger cultural reclamation rather than just a stylistic choice.

Robert, Young (2019) addresses the difficulty of Ngugi's language choices, highlighting the conflict between writing in Kikuyu, a minority language, and Kiswahili, Kenya's official language. Young's study deepens our knowledge of Ngugi's symbolic decisions, where the rejection of English and the embrace of Kikuyu in "Devil on the Cross" represent a more general anti-colonial attitude but also challenge the narrative's reach inside Kenya's multilingual setting (Young, 2019).

Noting its presence in both his Gikuyu and English works, Eileen Julien (2020) and James Ogude (2019) investigate the integration of orality into Ngugi's narratives. Julien's treatment of orality as a present cultural quality rather than a simple historical tool fits Ngugi's use of pictorial language that calls oral traditions to mind, so improving the symbolic richness of the novel with traditional components like proverbs and seers (Julien, 2020; Ogude, 2019).

Though they don't emphasise the symbolic and pictorial elements, Simon Gikandi (2021) and James Ogude (2019) offer insightful analyses of Ngugi's thematic and narrative strategies. Gikandi's treatment of national identity through prophecy and conversion in Ngugi's English works, however, provides a perspective from which we can see the symbolic transitions in *Devil on the Cross* (Gikandi, 2021).

Although Killam (2024) admits symbols in Ngugi's work, his study lacks the depth into their communicative role that this paper intends to investigate. This gap in the literature underscores the significance of our study, which seeks to delve into how Ngugi uses pictorial language and symbolism not just for aesthetic purposes but as critical tools for socio-political communication in *Devil on the Cross*.

Setting the stage for a concentrated analysis on how *Devil on the Cross* uses pictorial language and symbolism to criticise and convey the complexity of postcolonial Kenyan society, this empirical review emphasises the thematic richness and symbolic depth of Ngugi's work.

Methodology

The main data source for this paper is Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novel *Devil on the Cross*, which offers a rich tapestry of text from which to extract and examine examples of pictorial language and symbolism. The narrative of the book is examined to show how these aspects are interwoven into the story to criticise postcolonial Kenyan society. Focusing especially on passages where symbols are most visible or where pictorial language deepens thematic investigation, I closely read the text.

A thorough backdrop for analysis was created by collecting secondary data from several different sources. This covers important essays that have addressed Ngugi's work, including those by Simon Gikandi (2019), who offers insights on Ngugi's literary techniques and

thematic concerns. Interviews with Ngugi, such as those gathered in “Ngugi wa Thiong’o Speaks”, edited by Karin Barber (2016), provide first-hand views on his goals behind the use of symbols, so enhancing the reading of the novel’s text. Also, academic papers, especially those on symbolism in African postcolonial narratives, were purposively examined. Furthermore, an article by Ogude (2019) in the Journal of African Cultural Studies, which addresses the development of symbols in African literature as instruments for political critique, which directly relates to Ngugi’s method, was used.

Additionally, examined were key symbols such as the cross, which represents both Christian salvation and the fight for freedom; the devil, who represents oppression and corruption; and several Kenyan cultural artefacts, which ground the story in local tradition and criticise modern society changes. Examined not only for their narrative role but also for their cultural relevance, these symbols were investigated to see how they connect local Kenyan settings with more universal ideas of resistance and identity in postcolonial discourse. This twofold approach clarifies how Ngugi uses these symbols to effectively convey intricate socio-political ideas.

Findings and Discussion

Pictorial language as a communicative tool in *Devil on the Cross*.

Ngugi wa Thiong’o brilliantly uses pictorial language in *Devil on the Cross* to deepen the story with several layers of meaning that criticise the socio-political fabric of postcolonial Kenya. The portrayal of Nairobi’s cityscape, which reflects the corruption and moral decline fostered by neo-colonial capitalism, is one particularly notable one. Ngũgĩ writes, “*The city was a forest of concrete and steel, where skyscrapers grew like giant mushrooms, overshadowing the slums that crept around them like unwanted undergrowth*” (Ngũgĩ, 1982, p. 56). This vivid picture contrasts the towering symbols of modern capitalism with the sprawling poverty of the slums, so stressing the sharp economic difference and the exploitation inherent in the urban transformation.

This pictorial depiction criticises the societal change from communal values to capitalist greed more than it merely describes a setting. While the ‘unwanted undergrowth’ of slums reflects the marginalised people left behind by this development, the ‘giant mushrooms’ of skyscrapers represent the fast, unnatural growth driven by foreign investment and local corruption.

Devil on the Cross, the title of the book, reveals yet another deep use of pictorial language that starts a strong metaphor right away. The cross, traditionally emblematic of Christian salvation and sacrifice, is repurposed by Ngugi to illustrate the suffering of the Kenyan populace under both colonial and neo-colonial oppression. “*The cross had become a symbol of our daily*

crucifixion by the forces of neo-colonialism,” he says (Ngũgĩ, 1982, p. 10). The cross here is a sign of continuous suffering, not of redemption.

Set on this cross, the devil is a strong indication of the corrupting impact of wealth and power. Ngũgĩ calls this devil “*a creature with horns and a tail, dressed in the best suits, holding a briefcase, symbolising the devil in the guise of modern capitalism*” (Ngũgĩ, 1982, p. 7). This image not only challenges religious iconography but also questions the moral inversion whereby society’s new economic order glorifies and sanctifies evil, symbolised by the devil. Ngugi not only depicts a scene but also challenges readers to view the moral and social decline through a critical eye using these vivid images, thus transforming the story into both a visual and intellectual experience.

Pictorial Imagery. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o starkly depicts the socio-economic inequalities and moral decay in postcolonial Kenya in *Devil on the Cross* using pictorial imagery. “Devil’s Feast,” a symbolic gathering where the rich indulge in luxury at the cost of the poor, is one of the most striking illustrations. Ngũgĩ paints this picture in great detail: “*The tables were laid out with an abundance of food and drinks, the air heavy with the scent of roasting meat and the clinking of glasses, while outside, the poor thronged, their skeletal frames a silent testament to their hunger*” (Ngũgĩ, 1982, p. 124). This picture not only creates a scene of terrible excess but also helps to criticise the systematic exploitation natural in Kenyan society at the time.

The sensory elements in this section are vital since they highlight the physical and moral decline by means of visceral response from the reader. Ngũgĩ adds to this even more with lines like, “*The laughter of the rich was a cacophony that drowned out the silent cries of the starving outside, their eyes hollow, reflecting the dim lights from within*” (Ngũgĩ, 1982, p. 125). The difference between the sensory richness inside the feast and the sensory deprivation outside clearly illustrates the social divide here. Ngugi wa Thiong’o was seen to carefully include pictorial language and symbolism as core narrative components in *Devil on the Cross*. Deepening the thematic investigation of neo-colonialism, capitalism, and cultural identity depends on these literary devices, which are not only cosmetic.

Furthermore, Ngũgĩ’s portrayal of personal battles through pictorial imagery deepens the story. For example, when discussing the protagonist Jacinta Wariinga’s journey, he says, “*Her feet, calloused from endless walks, trod the dusty paths, her eyes scanning the horizon for a sign of hope, her heart heavy with the burden of survival*” (Ngũgĩ, 1982, p. 56). This picture not only humanises the battle but also visually grounds the reader in the protagonist’s physical and emotional terrain, therefore making the socio-political criticism more obvious and interesting.

By means of such graphic imagery, Ngũgĩ not only narrates a tale but also paints a scathing picture of postcolonial Kenyan society.

Symbolism. Symbolism is quite important in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* to weave the socio-political criticism of the story. Central to this is the symbol of the cross, which functions on many levels. Traditionally, the cross denotes Christian salvation; Ngugi twists this to also reflect the great load of colonialism and neo-colonialism placed on Kenya. Ngugi states on page 102, "*The cross was heavy, but she bore it on her back, a symbol of her suffering under the weight of oppression*" (Ngugi, 1982). This twofold symbolism emphasises the irony whereby symbols of faith are appropriated to bolster repressive systems, therefore criticising the complicity of religious institutions in carrying on colonial legacies.

Another deep symbol in the book is the devil, which reflects not only religious evil but also moral decline and corruption in Kenyan society, particularly among the upper class. Gikandi (2000) points out that this depiction reflects a kind of internalised colonialism in which the local elite are now the oppressors. Ngugi shows how corruption has woven itself into the social fabric by means of the devil. Ngugi, for example, describes a corrupt businessman as "*He was like the devil, offering wealth in exchange for the soul of the nation*" (Ngũgĩ, 1982, p. 154), linking personal greed with national betrayal.

Beyond these main symbols, character names and settings in the book provide depth to the symbolic story. Wariinga, whose name means "she who will not be denied," is typical of the fight for justice and resistance. Her path through the book, from oppression to empowerment, reflects the larger fight for freedom. Ngũgĩ writes of her change, "*Wariinga stood firm, her name now a prophecy of her defiance against the chains of exploitation*" (Ngũgĩ, 1982, p. 201), so supporting her symbolic function.

A powerful indicator of hidden corruption is the cave where illegal activities take place. Away from public scrutiny, it reflects the secretive and sinister dealings of the ruling class. Ngũgĩ calls this scene "*The cave was a den of thieves, where the rich plotted the nation's downfall in the shadows*" (Ngũgĩ, 1982, p. 130), which not only vividly depicts but also represents the moral darkness of those in authority.

Using literary symbolism to involve readers in a deeper awareness of the topics of oppression, resistance, and corruption, these symbols taken together create a rich tapestry that challenges the socio-political situation of postcolonial Kenya. Ngugi's use of these symbols is not only for aesthetic improvement but also as a deliberate weapon to express the depth of social problems, therefore connecting the story with local and worldwide audiences.

Cultural Symbols. Ngugi wa Thiong'o uses cultural symbols, including the Gikuyu homestead in *Devil on the Cross*, to explore ideas of cultural critique and preservation. More than just a backdrop, the homestead, a traditional symbol of family and community in Gikuyu culture, becomes a dynamic component reflecting the change and conflict in Kenyan society. Ngugi, for example, says, "*The homestead was no longer a place of peace and harmony but had become a battleground for the forces of tradition and modernity*" (Ngugi, 1982, p. 45). This passage reflects the larger society changes where traditional values battle with the effects of capitalism and Western culture by showing the homestead's transformation from a symbol of stability to one of conflict.

Ngugi also uses the homestead to attack the loss of cultural identity under neo-colonial pressure. He paints a picture of "*the old man sat under the fig tree, a symbol of wisdom and continuity, now overshadowed by the new house built by his son with foreign money*" (Ngugi, 1982, p. 67). This contrast emphasises the generational and cultural divide, with the new house representing the invasion of foreign values endangering traditional Kenyan knowledge.

Ngugi's depiction of the homestead as a site of resistance emphasises the dynamic character of these symbols even more. At a turning point, a character says, "*The homestead, once a symbol of our subjugation, has now become our fortress of resistance*" (Ngugi, 1982, p. 123). Here, the homestead changes from a symbol of colonial oppression to one of freedom, showing how cultural symbols can change to fit new roles in the narrative of resistance and identity reclamation.

Ngugi uses these changing symbols to express a rich, dynamic cultural identity that is both praised for its resilience and adaptability and criticised for its susceptibility to outside influences (Ogude, 2019).

Communication through Symbol. The use of symbols in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* is a powerful means of expression that lets one convey complicated socio-political issues with great simplicity. The shift from rural to urban environments, which captures the larger topic of cultural identity loss under the weight of modernity and neo-colonialism, is one of the most striking symbols in the book.

When Jacinta Wariinga, the main character, travels from the village to the city, this journey is full of symbolic significance. Ngugi vividly depicts this change: "*She had left the village with its thatched roofs, its communal spirit, and its traditional values, and now she was in Nairobi, where concrete and steel had replaced the warmth of the earth, and individualism had supplanted community*" (Ngugi, 1982, p. 150). This section not only shows a physical move but also represents a major cultural change. While the city reflects the alienating, capitalist-

driven modernity destroying these traditional identities, the village symbolises a link to traditional Kenyan life, steeped in communal values and legacy.

Ngugi's description of the urban environment underlines this symbolic act of crossing: "*The city was a jungle of steel and concrete, where people were lost in the maze of their greed and ambition, far removed from the simplicity and purity of rural life*" (Ngũgi, 1982, p. 151). Criticising the neo-colonial impact that drives such a change, the city is shown here as a place where the quest for material wealth and Western ideals dilutes, if not destroys, the core of Kenyan cultural identity. The study showed how Ngũgi's use of symbols fit with symbolic interactionism, whereby social interactions create meaning. The symbols in the book are shown to change, reflecting the dynamic character of Kenyan society after independence.

Ngugi effectively conveys, through these symbols, the conflict between maintaining cultural legacy and yielding to the seduction of modernity, a topic that speaks to the postcolonial experience. The symbols of rural versus urban life thus become a narrative tool that succinctly critiques the socio-cultural erosion under the guise of progress, so prompting the reader to consider the price of such changes on individual and group identities.

Rhetorical Reading. A rhetorical interpretation of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's "Devil on the Cross" shows how the writer uses literary devices to convince readers to see and empathise with the suffering of the oppressed, therefore supporting social and political change. Ngũgi's story framework is carefully designed to lead the reader on an awakening trip to the injustices in Kenyan society. The book, for example, opens with a thorough description of the setting where the story takes place, one that is both literal and symbolic: "*Ilmorog was a small ridge, a forgotten outpost, a place of poverty and degradation*" (Ngũgi, 1982, p. 1). This beginning not only establishes the scene but also rhetorically places the reader to grasp the marginalisation of Ilmorog, reflecting the more general marginalisation of the Kenyan peasantry.

The socio-political critique is embodied by means of a rhetorical device in the novel's characterisation. Pivotal are people like Jacinta Wariinga, who moves from oppression to defiance. Her story arc from a victim of sexual exploitation to an empowered person is meant to speak to the reader, as seen when she states, "*I am Wariinga, daughter of the soil, and I will not be silenced*" (Ngũgi, 1982, p. 214). This change not only emphasises personal empowerment but also acts as a metaphor for group resistance against neo-colonial powers. Complex socio-political concepts are represented using key symbols such as the devil, the cross, and the river. The devil represents the repressive capitalist and neo-colonial forces; the cross denotes resistance and hope for liberation; the river suggests transformation and possible social change. This symbolic portrayal helps to criticise the postcolonial Kenyan society.

Ngũgĩ's use of language is equally compelling; he uses vivid imagery and direct address to emotionally and intellectually involve the reader. For instance, in his comments on the exploitation by the affluent, he says, "*The rich suck the blood of the poor like vampires, leaving them dry and lifeless*" (Ngũgĩ, 1982, p. 105). This metaphor not only highlights a sharp image of economic inequality but also elicits a visceral response that forces the reader to reflect on the moral consequences of such exploitation. The book's use of vivid visual imagery critiques the socio-economic inequalities in Kenya. The imagery not only establishes the setting but also emphasises the disparity between the oppressed people and the corrupt elite, thus improving the emotional involvement of the reader with the topics of the text.

By means of these rhetorical devices, Ngugi not only narrates a tale but also builds a case for transformation, employing the story as a vehicle to provoke consciousness and action against the socio-political injustices in postcolonial Kenya.

Historical and Political Contextualisation. The results underline how the historical and political setting of post-independence Kenya, with its corruption and authoritarianism, shapes the symbolism in the book. These symbols reflect Ngugi's activism as well as the larger fight for justice in Kenya, therefore offering a multi-faceted criticism of the political scene.

These results would together show the great influence of Ngũgĩ's literary methods in "*Devil on the Cross*," highlighting how they function both as narrative devices and as platforms for socio-political debate.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* shows the great power of pictorial language and symbolism in literary communication. This paper has shown how Ngugi deftly interlaces these components into the texture of his story to criticise the socio-political situation of postcolonial Kenya. His use of visual imagery and symbolic representation not only deepens the story but also enhances the text, therefore providing a rich ground for literary study. These literary techniques' efficacy is in their capacity to emotionally and intellectually involve readers, therefore promoting a discussion on postcolonial identity and the need for resistance against systematic oppression.

Ngũgĩ's use of symbols such as the devil and the cross offers a multi-faceted criticism of capitalism, neo-colonialism, and cultural identity that speaks to readers and inspires thought and maybe action. This involvement emphasises the strength of literature as a weapon for social and political commentary, therefore stressing the ongoing relevance of Ngugi's work in modern discussion on postcolonial topics. Therefore, this article contends that Ngũgĩ's calculated use of pictorial language and symbolism is not only aesthetic but also a crucial channel for

expressing complicated socio-political ideas, thus strengthening the communicative power of his criticism.

References

- Achebe, C. (1988). *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays*. Heinemann.
- Amoko, A. (2018). *Postcolonialism in the Wake of the Nairobi Revolution: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and the Idea of African Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Babu, A. R. (2019). Right and Justice: A Quenchless Quest in Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's *Matigari*. *International Research Journal*, 1(3).
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. Routledge.
- Bethwell Allan Ogot, & William Robert Ochieng. (2021). Part Three: The First Nyayo Decade 1978-88: The Construction of National Culture. In *Decolonisation and Independence in Kenya, 1940-93*, eds. London: James Currey Ltd.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. University of California Press.
- Gikandi, S. (2021). *Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o*. Cambridge University Press.
- Julien, E. (2020). African Novels and the Question of Orality, 1992. Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992. Page 180. Cited in Ogude, James. *Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation*. London: 2019.
- Killam, D. (2024). *The Writing of East and Central Africa*. Heinemann.
- Kosslyn, S. M. (2016). *Image and Mind*. Harvard University Press.
- Mwangi, E. (2021). "Visual Literacy in African Literature: A Study of Imagery and Its Impact." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 33(2), 145-160.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. (1982). *Devil on the Cross*. Heinemann.
- Ogude, J. (2019). *Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation*. Pluto Press.
- Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.
- Seyoum, S. (2020). *Religious Implications in Matigari*. Senior Essay.
- Sundy, Deborah. (2019). Mother Tongue: the use of another language and the impact on identity in *Breyten Breytenbach's Dog Heart and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Matigari*. University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- Young, Robert J.C. (2019). English and the language of others. *European Review*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 203–212 r 2009. doi:10.1017/S1062798709000660

Gender, Racial, and Social Discrimination in *Straw* (2025): Portraying the Struggles and Mental Health Challenges of Black Women

Michael Olamide Okekunle

*Department of Languages and Literary Studies,
Babcock University,
Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State.
Email: okekunle0805@pg.babcock.edu.ng,*

and

Yvonne Ikpemhinoghena Ewedemi

*Department of Languages and Literary Studies,
Babcock University,
Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State.
Email: ewedemi0120@pg.babcock.edu.ng*

Abstract

*This study examines the portrayal of gender and race in Tyler Perry's *Straw*, primarily through a feminist film theory lens, drawing on Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality and Laura Mulvey's feminist film theory, with Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory and Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory providing a secondary interpretive layer. The paper explores how *Straw* powerfully critiques workplace discrimination, housing instability, and law enforcement bias, and how these systemic injustices devastate Janiyah's mental health and agency. It considers how Taraji Penda Henson's raw performance both challenges and risks reinforcing the "strong Black woman" stereotype, as the film's reliance on sensationalist plot elements occasionally undermines narrative authenticity.*

*The study highlights *Straw*'s contribution to mental health discourse and calls for more nuanced storytelling, community collaboration, and policy reforms to amplify Black women's voices and address systemic inequities.*

Keywords: *Black women, Feminist film theory, Intersectionality, Mental health, Psychoanalytic theory, Social cognitive theory.*

Introduction

Gender and race are interwoven axes of identity that significantly shape the lived experiences of Black women, particularly in contexts marked by systemic inequality, cultural marginalisation, and socio-political exclusion. Contemporary cinema has increasingly emerged as a critical medium for exploring and representing the complexities of Black womanhood, often shedding light on the intersectional struggles faced by Black women in a racially stratified society.

The intersection of gender and race in contemporary cinema provides a vital lens for examining the intricate dynamics of identity, systemic inequity, and resilience in modern society. Also,

the portrayal of Black women in film serves as a powerful medium to explore their unique lived experiences, shaped by the confluence of systemic racism, sexism, and socio-economic challenges. These narratives illuminate the multifaceted struggles Black women endure, including workplace discrimination, gendered violence, stereotype perpetuation, and the constant negotiation of societal expectations while striving for self-definition, agency, and empowerment (Collins 67). Contemporary cinema, through its evolving storytelling techniques, acts as both a mirror reflecting the realities of Black women's lives and a critique of the structural forces that shape their experiences, offering audiences a deeper understanding of the complexities of their identities.

Furthermore, the psychological and emotional toll of systemic inequities on Black women is a recurring theme in modern films. Research highlights that Black women are disproportionately impacted by intersecting forms of oppression, such as racialised gender discrimination and limited access to economic and social resources, which contribute to heightened stress, mental health challenges, and a pervasive sense of marginalisation within dominant cultural narratives (Crenshaw 140). These experiences often manifest in feelings of invisibility or hypervisibility, where Black women are either overlooked or stereotyped in ways that diminish their humanity (Harris-Perry 29). As it stands, cinematic representations of these struggles provide a platform to confront such injustices, employing visual and emotional storytelling to foster empathy and challenge audience perceptions. By centring Black women's voices and experiences, films disrupt traditional narratives, offering nuanced portrayals that highlight both their vulnerabilities and their resilience in navigating oppressive systems (Hooks 115).

Moreover, the depiction of Black women in contemporary cinema reflects broader societal issues, including the enduring legacy of historical oppression, economic disparities, and the ongoing struggle for racial and gender equity. Social cognitive theory posits that media representations significantly influence audience attitudes and behaviours, underscoring the importance of authentic and multidimensional portrayals of Black women (Bandura 45). Films that focus on Black women's stories, whether through fictional narratives, biographical accounts, or documentaries, shed light on their strength, creativity, and resistance while critiquing the systems of power that seek to constrain them. For instance, portrayals of Black women in films often explore themes of community, sisterhood, and self-determination, illustrating how they navigate and challenge oppressive structures to carve out spaces of agency and joy (Davis 88). These cinematic works also engage with the historical context of Black women's marginalisation, from the era of slavery to modern-day systemic inequities, providing a continuum that connects past injustices to present-day struggles.

The power of cinema lies in its ability to transcend mere documentation, catalysing dialogue and social change. Scholars argue that visual storytelling in films creates a visceral emotional connection with audiences, making it a potent tool for raising awareness about the intersectional challenges Black women face (Williams 256). By presenting authentic narratives that avoid reductive stereotypes, such as the “strong Black woman” trope, contemporary films challenge viewers to reconsider preconceived notions and engage with the complexities of Black women’s lived experiences. Moreover, these films often propose pathways toward empowerment, advocating for systemic change through narratives that emphasise resilience, solidarity, and the pursuit of justice. Through their compelling storytelling, contemporary movies not only illuminate the struggles of Black women but also call for transformative societal shifts, urging audiences to confront issues of race, gender, and power in meaningful ways.

Although existing scholarship has examined the representation of black women in film, there is limited concentration on how modern cinema engages with mental health struggles as it intersects with race and gender, especially through the lens of psychoanalytic and feminist film theories. This study aptly addresses this gap through the analysis of *Straw* in illuminating how movies can complicate and simultaneously challenge strong narratives about mental health, black womanhood and systemic oppression, thus adding to ongoing discourses about gender, race and social justice.

Synopsis of the Movie

Straw (2025) is a psychological crime drama directed by Tyler Perry, starring Taraji Penda Henson as Janiyah Wiltkinson, a single mother facing overwhelming challenges. Living in a run-down apartment with her frequently ill daughter, Aria, Janiyah struggles to make ends meet. Her day spirals into chaos as she faces a series of unfortunate events: a threatening landlord, a demeaning boss, a distant school administrator, and a road-raging off-duty police officer. After stopping a robbery at the grocery store where she works, Janiyah becomes entangled in a bloody crime scene. In a desperate attempt to cash a paycheck, she accidentally triggers a bank standoff, making her a suspect in a crime she did not intend to commit. The film builds to a shocking twist, revealing the depths of Janiyah’s emotional and mental strain. Exploring themes of systemic oppression, mental health, and desperation, the movie showcases Henson’s powerful performance alongside a cast including Sherri Shepherd, Teyana Taylor, Sinbad, and Glynn Turman. Released on Netflix on June 6, 2025, *Straw* is a tense, emotionally charged thriller about a woman pushed to her breaking point by an indifferent society.

Related Literature

Several contemporary studies explore the intersectional realities of Black womanhood, emphasising the combined effects of gendered and racialised oppressions on Black women's psychological, social, and emotional experiences. These studies resonate with the themes in *Straw* (2025), a film that portrays the emotional and structural challenges Black women face while navigating trauma, marginalisation, and identity in an inequitable society.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's foundational work reaffirms the importance of intersectionality in understanding the compounded impacts of racism and sexism on Black women. She argues that traditional social justice frameworks often overlook the unique experiences of Black women, whose identities are shaped by overlapping systems of oppression (Crenshaw 134). Although Crenshaw's theory is critical in one's understanding of intersectional oppression, most of the existing literature has yet to completely explore how these dynamics are articulated both in visuals and narration of contemporary cinema. This is a gap that this study aims to address through *Straw*.

In a media-focused analysis, Hutchinson and Jackson examine how mainstream media often reduces Black women to stereotypes such as the "strong Black woman" or the "angry Black woman." Their study underscores how these tropes obscure the emotional vulnerability and psychological complexity of Black female characters (Hutchinson and Jackson 45). But their work majorly addresses earlier media portrayals and actually lacks consideration of the latest shifts that are being influenced by modern social movements and the changing expectations of audiences. *Straw* diverges from this tradition by presenting a nuanced portrayal of its central characters, emphasising their trauma, inner conflict, and resistance to dehumanising societal narratives. Hutchinson and Jackson's findings support the film's effort to humanise Black women beyond conventional cinematic stereotypes.

Also, Berry (2021) explores how modern media, particularly post-2020, continues in its struggle with the trope of the "strong black woman", heavily critiquing how these narratives erase mental health struggles as well as vulnerability. In this study, the conversation is extended as the researchers have examined how *Straw* resists such tropes through characterisation and its focus on mental complexity.

Recent psychological research also contributes to this discourse by exploring the impact of systemic trauma on Black women's mental health. Carter et al. investigate the psychological toll of structural racism and intimate partner violence, concluding that Black women often experience compounded trauma that is underdiagnosed and undertreated (Carter et al. 78). Though their work showcases vital clinical concerns, there is restricted research on how these

psychological realities are transformed into narratives in films. This study responds to this gap as it analyzes *Straw*'s portrayal of mental health struggles and bridges cinematic representation with psychological theory.

More so, Johnson and Osei (2022) opine that the response of recent films to universal social movements has tried to visualise Black trauma not as mere spectacle but as a way of fostering advocacy and empathy. *Straw* is in vivid alignment with this recent trend as it uses visual storytelling in engaging the emotions of audiences while simultaneously critiquing systemic failures.

In terms of cinematic representation, Smith and DuVernay advocate for the transformative potential of Black feminist filmmaking in challenging dominant narratives and offering counter-hegemonic portrayals of Black women's lives. Their research emphasises how Black women directors and storytellers redefine visual storytelling by focusing on themes of survival, community, and intergenerational trauma (Smith and DuVernay 112). Although directed by a male filmmaker, *Straw* adopts a Black feminist visual aesthetic and narrative approach, using camera work, fragmented storytelling, and symbolism to centre lived realities and inner voices of Black women. Note that the nuanced appropriation of Black feminist aesthetics is a representation of the vital contribution that broadens the reach of feminist film discourse.

Additionally, Okafor and Mensah explore how urban environments characterised by poverty, surveillance, and systemic neglect serve as backdrops for racial and gender-based violence. They argue that media representations in such settings should not only depict suffering but also offer pathways for empowerment (Okafor and Mensah 203). In the movie, the protagonist's turn to activism and storytelling serves as a means of reclaiming agency amid structural violence, aligning with Okafor and Mensah's call for socially responsible storytelling that acknowledges trauma while envisioning resistance. Though their work provides a crucial framework for a good understanding of spatial narratives, little attention has been placed on how films like *Straw* utilise both storytelling and activism as modes to reclaim agency. This paper aims to advance the discourse by showcasing these strategies within the narrative of the film.

While these studies provide a robust foundation for understanding Black women's struggles in visual narratives, there remains a need to further examine how race and gender intersect in post-2020 cinema, particularly in the context of global social movements like #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName. Most people depend on pre-2020 sources as they do not completely interact with the essential cultural shifts that have been spurred by the latest global movements, such as the ones mentioned above. However, there is a more pressing need

to examine how post-2020 cinema engages with gender and race-based trauma, mental health and systematic injustice in ways that serve as a reflection of the developing discourses.

This study seeks to contribute to the existing literature by analysing how *Straw* (2025) engages with contemporary discourse on racial and gender-based trauma and employs visual storytelling to challenge reductive portrayals of Black women, asserting their humanity and voice in an increasingly polarised world.

Theoretical Framework

It must be noted that this study adopts an interdisciplinary approach in examining the film's portrayal of race, systemic oppression and gender. Primarily, feminist film theory offers a principal lens for the interrogation of the narrative and visual strategies used in the movie. It is duly complemented by intersectionality theory, which basically foregrounds how social identities that overlap bring about other discriminatory forms.

More so, other perspectives are drawn from psychoanalytical theory and social cognitive theory as they help in the illumination of character psychology and the mechanisms through which societal biases and norms are first internalised, then reproduced. All these theoretical frameworks guide the paper's analysis of how *Straw* not only builds up but also challenges the representation of black women.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's Intersectionality Theory

Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory, introduced in 1989, provides a framework for understanding how multiple forms of oppression, such as race, gender, class, and sexuality, converge to shape unique experiences of discrimination, particularly for marginalised individuals. Rather than viewing inequalities in isolation, Crenshaw argues that these identities intersect, creating compounded disadvantages that single-axis analyses overlook. For instance, a Black woman may face challenges distinct from those of a white woman or a Black man due to the interplay of racism and sexism. This theory critiques simplistic approaches to social justice and calls for inclusive policies that address overlapping systems of power. Widely applied in sociology, law, and cultural studies, intersectionality helps unpack systemic inequities and informs efforts to create equitable solutions.

Laura Mulvey's Feminist Film Theory

Laura Mulvey's feminist film theory, articulated in her 1975 essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, examines how cinema reinforces patriarchal ideologies through the concept of the "male gaze." Mulvey argues that mainstream films often position women as passive objects of male desire, viewed through a heterosexual male perspective that caters to male audiences. This gaze reduces women to visual spectacles while men assume active roles as

protagonists or viewers. Rooted in psychoanalytic and feminist thought, the theory highlights how such portrayals perpetuate gender inequality in media. It has influenced film studies by inspiring critiques of gender representation, encouraging feminist filmmaking, and prompting broader discussions about how visual media shapes societal perceptions of gender roles.

Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory

The paper draws on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory (Freud, 1900), which was articulated in "The Interpretation of Dreams" and lays emphasis on how the unconscious shapes emotional responses and behaviours. Note that this theory is used in exploring the psychological aspects of Janiyah's trauma, especially in how her desires are repressed and her internalised conflict.

This theory was developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, explores how the unconscious mind drives behaviour, emotions, and personality. Freud posited that the mind comprises the id (instinctual desires), ego (rational mediator), and superego (moral conscience), with conflicts among them shaping psychological development. Unresolved issues, often from childhood experiences like the Oedipus complex, manifest in dreams, neuroses, or slips of the tongue. Techniques such as free association and dream analysis aim to uncover these hidden drives. Though criticised for lacking empirical support, psychoanalytic theory remains influential in psychology, literature, and cultural studies, offering insights into unconscious motivations and symbolic expressions in art and behaviour.

Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory

Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory, formulated in the 1960s, explains how people acquire behaviours, skills, and attitudes through observation, modelling, and environmental interactions. Originally called social learning theory, it emphasises the dynamic interplay of personal factors, behaviour, and environment. A key concept is observational learning, demonstrated in Bandura's Bobo doll experiment, where children mimicked aggressive actions after watching adults. The theory also highlights self-efficacy, or one's belief in their ability to succeed, as a driver of motivation. Applied in education, psychology, and media studies, social cognitive theory informs strategies for behavioural change, such as reducing violence, and analyses the influence of role models and media on individual actions.

Discussion and Findings

This study employs a qualitative approach in analysing the *Straw* through close observations of key scenes, informed by intersectionality, feminist film, psychoanalytic, and social cognitive theories.

Race is a central lens through which the movie examines Janiyah's experiences, portraying her as a Black woman navigating a world structured by systemic racism. The film underscores how Janiyah's racial identity shapes her interactions across multiple domains: workplace, housing, and law enforcement. As a Black single mother, Janiyah embodies Crenshaw's description of the "intersectional" nature of oppression, where race intertwines with gender and class to amplify marginalisation (Crenshaw, 1989). For instance, Janiyah's job at a grocery store exposes her to racial microaggressions, such as a customer throwing a bottle at her after a dispute over a WIC card, an incident that reflects the dehumanisation Black women often face in service roles. This scene highlights how race informs the hostility directed at Janiyah and shows how Black women are disproportionately employed in low-wage, high-stress jobs where they encounter racialised aggression.

Moreover, the film critiques racial bias in law enforcement, particularly through Janiyah's encounter with an off-duty police officer and the impounding of her car over minor documentation issues. These interactions reflect a broader pattern of systemic racism, where Black individuals face disproportionate scrutiny and punishment, often described as a "no investigation, all conclusion" approach. The protest scene outside the bank, with a supporter holding a sign reading "Nevertheless she persisted," connects Janiyah's struggle to collective racial justice movements, emphasising race as a structural rather than individual issue.

However, the film's use of a sensationalist plot device, a toy mistaken for a bomb, risks diluting its racial critique. Tyler Perry effectively uses race to frame Janiyah's struggles, highlighting how systemic racism permeates her life and drives her to a breaking point.

Additionally, discrimination in *Straw* is depicted as a multifaceted force, targeting Janiyah's intersecting identities as a Black woman and single mother. Intersectionality theory illuminates how discrimination operates not as isolated incidents but as webs of oppression shaped by race, gender, and class (Crenshaw, 1989). In the workplace, Janiyah faces overt discrimination from her boss, Richard (Glynn Turman), who dismisses her concerns (her ill daughter) and fails to support her against hostile customers. Another critical aspect is the issue of housing discrimination as Janiyah faces eviction from her dilapidated apartment due to unpaid rent, a threat exacerbated by her landlady's lack of empathy. This scenario mirrors real-world data showing Black women, particularly single mothers, face higher eviction rates due to economic disparities rooted in discriminatory housing policies. Desmond posits that eviction is not simply a consequence of poverty; rather, it is a cause, stating that single black women are most likely to get an eviction notice (Desmond, 2016). The film's portrayal of Janiyah's desperate attempts

to maintain a home for her daughter, Aria, underscores how discrimination compounds economic precarity, limiting her options and agency.

Law enforcement discrimination further intensifies Janiyah's plight. The impounding of her car and the aggressive response from an off-duty officer illustrate how Black women are often criminalised for minor infractions, reflecting systemic bias in policing. Bandura's social cognitive theory explains how societal stereotypes—such as the “angry Black woman”—shape these interactions, as officers' preconceptions escalate minor situations into crises (Bandura, 1977).

Social injustice in *Straw* is portrayed as a systemic force that permeates Janiyah's life, pushing her toward a mental health crisis and a dramatic standoff. The film critiques structural inequities across employment, housing, and law enforcement, framing them as interconnected systems that disproportionately harm Black women. For instance, Janiyah's low-wage job and inability to afford rent reflect economic injustices rooted in racial and gender disparities, as Black women earn significantly less than their white counterparts and face higher poverty rates (Collins, 2000). The eviction threat she faces is not merely a personal failure but a microcosm of broader housing inequities, where Black families are more likely to face unstable housing due to discriminatory lending and rental practices.

The film also addresses social injustice through its depiction of law enforcement bias, which escalates Janiyah's situation into a public crisis. The “no investigation, all conclusion” mentality of the police, as described by reviewers, reflects a justice system that often fails Black individuals, particularly women, by assuming guilt rather than investigating context. The protest movement outside the bank, coupled with social media reactions praising the film's resonance with real-world issues, underscores its commentary on social injustice as a collective struggle.

Straw further critiques the societal expectation of resilience embodied in the “strong Black woman” stereotype, which dismisses Black women's vulnerability and mental health needs. Janiyah's breakdown challenges this trope, highlighting the injustice of expecting Black women to endure systemic oppression without support. However, the film's sensationalist plot—particularly the toy-bomb misunderstanding—risks reducing these injustices to cinematic exaggeration, as critics argue it prioritises drama over systemic critique. Despite this, the film explores sisterhood and communal empathy, as seen in the performances of Sherri Shepherd and Teyana Taylor, and offers a vision of resistance against social injustice.

Mental health is a central theme in *Straw*, depicted through Janiyah Wiltkinson's (Taraji Penda Henson) psychological unravelling under the weight of systemic pressures. The film portrays

Janiyah's mental health crisis marked by hallucinations, emotional outbursts, and a descent into a standoff with law enforcement as a direct consequence of her compounded struggles with workplace discrimination, housing instability, and police bias. Freud's psychoanalytic theory provides a lens to understand this, as Janiyah's hallucinations and "ugly cry, silent rage, and numbness" reflect repressed trauma surfacing under extreme stress (Freud, 1917). Her breakdown humanises the often-ignored mental health struggles of Black women, who face disproportionate barriers to care due to systemic racism, sexism, and economic precarity.

The film's focus on mental health highlights Taraji Penda Henson's raw and commanding performance as a powerful depiction of mental health challenges, emphasising the need for awareness in marginalised communities. In Tyler Perry's *Straw*, an enigmatic plot twist shocks viewers as he addresses dissociation. Throughout the film, viewers see Janiyah begin her day with Aria, running her bath, preparing her for school, and even dropping her off. However, the devastating plot twist revealed that Aria had been dead all along. This twist certainly exposes a more significant mental health crisis, as Janiyah's inability to process her grief led to dissociation. She mentally preserves Aria's presence as a means of surviving the trauma.

The plot thickens when Nicole, the bank manager, appears to support Janiyah's delusion. She agrees to take Aria in when Janiyah is sent to prison for her boss's murder. Nonetheless, it is revealed much later that Nicole had been told all along that Aria was dead. This revelation underscores how sometimes people enable dissociation. It can be out of fear, compassion, or even helplessness, thus adding complexity to the portrayal of mental illness in the movie.

Furthermore, the sensationalist plot device of a toy mistaken for a bomb risks trivialising Janiyah's mental health crisis by framing it within a melodramatic hostage scenario, potentially reinforcing stereotypes about Black women's instability. Despite this, *Straw* contributes significantly to mental health discourse by highlighting the psychological toll of systemic oppression and advocating for resources and empathy.

Straw actively challenges the "strong Black woman" stereotype, which expects Black women to endure hardship without complaint, often at the expense of their mental and emotional well-being. Janiyah's character subverts this trope by openly displaying vulnerability—her mental breakdown, emotional outbursts, and desperate actions reveal the unsustainable burden of resilience imposed on Black women. Intersectionality theory underscores how this stereotype is rooted in the intersecting oppressions of race and gender, as Black women are socially conditioned to suppress their pain to navigate systemic inequities (Crenshaw, 1989). The film's depiction of Janiyah's unravelling, described as "gut-wrenching" by viewers, challenges this expectation, presenting her not as unbreakable but as humanly fragile under relentless pressure.

Henson's performance is pivotal in dismantling this stereotype, with critics noting her ability to convey "silent rage" and "numbness" that defy the stoic archetype. Social media reactions echo this, with posts emphasising how Janiyah's story reflects the real-life struggles of Black women forced to "hold it together" despite systemic barriers. However, the film's melodramatic climax, where Janiyah's breakdown culminates in a hostage crisis, risks undermining this critique by sensationalising her vulnerability, potentially aligning with stereotypes of Black women as erratic under pressure. A more restrained narrative could have strengthened the film's challenge to this harmful trope.

Agency and resistance are prominent themes in *Straw*, as Janiyah's actions, though extreme, reflect a form of rebellion against systemic oppression. Despite her victimisation, Janiyah exercises agency by taking a stand—literally and figuratively—in the bank standoff, demanding recognition of her humanity and the injustices she faces. Laura Mulvey's feminist film theory (1975) is relevant here, as Janiyah subverts the traditional "male gaze" by positioning herself as an active subject rather than a passive object; her defiance challenges the systemic forces that seek to silence her. The protest outside the bank, with a supporter's sign reading "Nevertheless she persisted," symbolises collective resistance, aligning Janiyah's struggle with broader movements for racial and gender justice.

However, the film's portrayal of agency is complicated by its sensationalist elements. The toy-mistaken-for-a-bomb plot device transforms Janiyah's resistance into a spectacle, which critics argue risks reducing her agency to a plot-driven caricature rather than a grounded act of defiance. Bandura's social cognitive theory (1977) suggests that Janiyah's resistance is shaped by her environment, where societal cues of powerlessness push her to extreme measures as a last resort. Social media reactions praise the film's depiction of Janiyah's defiance, with viewers noting its resonance with Black women's fight against marginalisation. Yet, a more nuanced portrayal of agency, focusing on everyday acts of resilience rather than cinematic escalations, could enhance the film's authenticity.

Sisterhood and community support emerge as vital themes in *Straw*, offering a counterpoint to Janiyah's isolation and systemic oppression. The performances of Sherri Shepherd (as a compassionate coworker) and Teyana Taylor (as a supportive figure) highlight the importance of communal bonds in mitigating the effects of systemic inequities. These relationships provide Janiyah with moments of empathy and understanding, contrasting with the hostility she faces from her boss, landlady, and police. The film's emphasis on sisterhood aligns with intersectionality theory, which recognises the role of community in empowering Black women to navigate interlocking oppressions (Crenshaw, 1989).

The protest movement outside the bank further underscores community support, framing Janiyah's struggle as part of a collective fight for justice. Social media posts highlight the emotional impact of these communal moments, with viewers praising the film's message of "togetherness" as a source of hope. Reviewers also note the film's collaboration with The Smartan House, a real-world initiative supporting underprivileged communities, as evidence of its commitment to community-driven solutions. However, the film's melodramatic tendencies occasionally overshadow these moments of connection, as the focus on the hostage crisis diverts attention from the quieter, more authentic portrayals of sisterhood. A stronger emphasis on these communal bonds could have reinforced the film's hopeful vision for addressing systemic challenges.

Conclusion

The film's compelling critique of systemic injustices faced by Black women uses Janiyah's story to highlight workplace discrimination, housing instability, law enforcement bias, and mental health challenges. Through the lenses of intersectionality and feminist film theory, the study reveals the compounded oppressions shaping Janiyah's life, while psychoanalytic and social cognitive theories illuminate the psychological toll of her experiences. Taraji P. Henson's powerful performance challenges the "strong Black woman" stereotype, contributing to mental health discourse in marginalised communities. However, the film's reliance on melodramatic tropes, such as implausible plot devices and exaggerated pacing, risks undermining its authenticity and perpetuating stereotypes.

Despite these limitations, the movie's focus on sisterhood, empathy, and communal support gives a hopeful vision for addressing systemic inequities. By projecting Black women's voices, *Straw* contributes to a growing cinematic discourse on race, gender, and mental health, but its impact could be strengthened through more subtle and refined storytelling.

Recommendations

1. Filmmakers should commit to realistic portrayals of Black women's experiences, steering clear of sensationalist plot devices that risk reinforcing stereotypes or reducing characters to caricatures. Collaborating with Black women writers, directors, and producers is crucial for crafting narratives that resonate with the nuances of lived realities.
2. Partnering with Black community organisations and mental health advocates can foster the development of films that not only raise awareness but also offer tangible resources and support. These collaborations ensure cultural competence and community-centred storytelling.

3. Films can be a powerful platform to advocate for policy changes addressing systemic issues such as workplace discrimination, housing insecurity, and law enforcement bias. Promoting affordable housing, equitable healthcare access, and mandatory anti-bias training for the police are essential steps toward dismantling the systemic pressures depicted onscreen.
4. It is vital to amplify mental health initiatives tailored to Black women, especially those that confront stigma, cultural mistrust, and barriers to access. Storytelling can play a transformative role in normalising mental health care and encouraging the utilisation of supportive services.

Works Cited

- Bandura, Albert. *Social Learning Theory*. Prentice Hall, 1977.
- Berry, D. T. (2021). "Black women and the burden of resilience in media narratives." *Journal of Black Studies*, 52(4), 345-361.
- Carter, J. Kameron, et al. "The Psychological Effects of Systemic Racism and Intimate Partner Violence on Black Women." *Journal of Trauma Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2023, pp. 70-85.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Black Women*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2000.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, vol. 1989, no. 1, 1989, pp. 139-67.
- Davis, Angela Y. *Women, Race, & Class*. Vintage, 1983.
- Desmond, Matthew. *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. Crown, 2016.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. 1917. Translated by A. A. Brill, Macmillan, 1913.
- Harris-Perry, Melissa V. *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*. Yale UP, 2011.
- Hooks, Bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. South End Press, 1992.
- Hutchinson, Janelle, and LaToya Jackson. "Stereotyping Black Women in Media: An Analysis of Cinematic Tropes." *Journal of Media Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2022, pp. 40-55.
- Johnson, M. & Osei, A. (2022). "Visualizing Black trauma: Post-2020 cinema and the politics of empathy." *Journal of Contemporary Media*, 14(2), 112-130.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3, 1975, pp. 6-18.
- Okafor, Chinyere, and Kwame Mensah. "Urban Poverty and Gendered Violence in Media Representations." *African Studies Review*, vol. 66, no. 4, 2023, pp. 190-210.
- Smith, Tanya, and Ava DuVernay. "Black Feminist Filmmaking: Reclaiming Narratives in Cinema." *Film Quarterly*, vol. 75, no. 3, 2022, pp. 105-20.

Straw. Directed by Tyler Perry, performances by Taraji P. Henson, Sherri Shepherd, Teyana Taylor, Sinbad, and Glynn Turman, Netflix, 6 June 2025.

Williams, Linda. "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess." *Film Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4, 1991, pp. 2-13.

Niger Delta Poetry: Trauma, Blues and Bibliotherapy

Stephen Kekeghe, PhD.
Delta State University, Abraka
stephenkekeghe@delsu.edu.ng

and

Emmanuel Babatunde Omobowale, PhD.
University of Ibadan
ebomobowale@yahoo.com

Abstract

*Poets from the Niger Delta region of Nigeria explore the devastating effect of oil capitalism and its traumatic manifestations on the emotions and psyches of the region's indigenes. Beyond the depiction of psychological trauma, some of the poets deploy a characteristic rhythm that is capable of facilitating psychotherapy. Although studies on Niger Delta poetry have acknowledged issues of minority discourse, ecological despoliation and the politics of dispossession, they seem to overlook the exploration of the people's psychological responses to the destructions induced by the oil companies. This study, therefore, examines the psychotherapeutic merit in the blues-like rhythm of Niger Delta poetry within the ambit of bibliotherapy. Poems in three poetry collections were selected through purposive sampling and were critically analysed. The collections, Ibiwari Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta*, Ebi Yeibo's *The Forbidden Tongue* and Ebinyo Ogbowi *Song of a Dying River*, were evaluated using the Trauma Model.*

Keywords: Poetry therapy, Niger Delta poetry, Trauma studies, Bibliotherapy

Introduction

The exploration of traumatic experiences in Nigerian poetry underscores the poets' consciousness of the prevailing psychosocial challenges in their communities. As a regional poetic expression, modern Nigerian poetry, of which Niger Delta poetry is an integral part, portrays the sociological and psychological conditions of the people to whom it is attributed. In response to the human existential realities, the poet plays a multiple role of information, entertainment and healing. In essence, art, to both the creator and consumer, has a spiritual and transcendental function as a redeemer of the soul (Bamidele, 2003:26). Rhythm plays a vital role in asserting the redemptive value of literature, because the transition of life, the breath that keeps up such transition involves beats that promote one's physical and mental rejuvenation (Kekeghe, 2014: 60). Poetry, like music, pleases with beats, visual and other sensory images, which serve as vehicles that convey the poet's thoughts and emotions. The poet, therefore, demonstrates artistic commitment in double credit— first, as an entertainer with rhythm and second, as a voice of vision in society. The sing-song qualities of poetry and other resources

such as versification of form are common qualities of music, which are utilised to convey human experiences, thoughts and feelings.

Poetic and musical forms have been increasingly recognised to offer unique healing to the human mind and body. This is what makes these related art forms applicable in the field of psychotherapy. Pioneering ideas on the medicinal import of music are traceable to Phoebus Apollo, the Greek god of the sun, poetry and medicine. Shelly's poem, "Hymn of Apollo", clearly portrays the intersections of poetry, music and medicine. Words conveyed through rhythm have been proven to carry therapeutic import, which is beneficial to the human psychological composition. Carroll (2005) examines the "potential of poetry to heal" (p. 161) and argues that the process of articulating traumatic experiences through poetry brings about therapeutic import. Like Carroll, Chavis (2011) opines that in the course of relating the human condition, the expressive art of poetry elicits healing. According to Chavis, rhythm, sounds and free verse, which are common features of poetry, can offer some therapeutic effects.

The concept of bibliotherapy was coined by Samuel Crothers in 1916 to capture the restorative value of literary works on the human mind. The term "biblio" means books, and by extension, literature. The word "therapy", on the other hand, is derived from the Greek word "therapeia", meaning "to serve or help medically." Bibliotherapy, therefore, refers to the use of literature to promote mental health (Gillam, 2018). Rottenberg (2022) regards bibliotherapy as "an integrative psychotherapeutic channel" (p.27). Like scriptotherapy, bibliotherapy means writing creative works to restore the mind from different forms of psychological distress such as melancholia, depression and anxiety conditions. However, scriptotherapy focuses mainly on the medical value of writing on the psychology of the writer, as his/her repressed feelings are brought to the surface, fully explored and laid to rest, giving room for ventilation of such emotions (Owonibi, 2008, p. 89). The terms, poetry therapy and bibliotherapy, are often used interchangeably to depict the use of poetry and literary works generally for mental healing. The potency of the bibliotherapeutic technique has been affirmed by writers, readers, book administrators and librarians (Fanner & Urquhart, 2008; McCulliss, 2012). Poetry has been known as a potent literary form for psychiatric treatment (Oyebode, 2009). In this study, the blues-like melancholic rhythm of Niger Delta poetry is investigated as invigorative.

Blues is the name given to a characteristic melancholic musical form or genre that originated in African-American communities of primarily the "deep south" of the United States around the end of the 19th century from spirituals, work songs, field hollers, shouts and chants, and rhyme (Lomax, 1993; Herzhaft, et al, 1997; Bowman, 2008). An early use of the term is found

in George Colman's one-act farce, *Blue Devil* (1798), which is said to mean a melancholy and sadness. Paradoxically, the characteristic slow-paced, melancholic tone that constitutes the blues musical form has inspired musicians and their audiences. There is a sense of mental rejuvenation or catharsis, which blues offers to the human psyche. The peculiar rhythm deployed by the poets under study agrees with the features of the blues musical form. Despite the despondent tone with which the poems are rendered, there is a characteristic pleasing pulsation which is remedial to the mental composition of the writer and the audience alike. The researcher argues that the blues-like rhythm, which involves pleasant sounds, a melancholic and sombre tone, is capable of penetrating the soul and psyche of the audience, thereby eliciting mental benefit. These features in the examined poems qualify them to be studied under the ambit of bibliotherapy.

This study argues that the poets express the traumatic experiences in the plundered Niger Delta region through a rhythm that is cathartic and revitalizing. For instance, in an interview, Ogbowei affirms that the lines of his poems, examined here, "touch mind and soul and point us to the right direction of social correctness and healthy relationship" (Kekeghe, 2012: 23). Yeibo adds that the issues he highlights in his poems "call for soberness and even sadness" adding that "the tone or rhythm of the poems is reflective of the magnitude of the issues at stake" (Kekeghe, 2012: 24). The study contends that through such invigorating rhythms, the poets and their repressed audiences transcend the trauma.

Trauma is a psychological and emotional response to a distressing experience, which is caused by several disturbing factors like war and violence, accident, fire outbreak, social injustice, loss of loved ones, spousal betrayal, sexual and domestic violence. Through the resources of language, writers convey manifestations of psychological trauma in literature. Trauma studies started in the 1990s, and it was pioneered by scholars like Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Geoffrey Hartman and Dominick LapCapra amongst others (Caruth, 1996 and Buelens and Craps 2008). According to Mambrol (2020), trauma studies relate the impact of trauma in literature and society, and it emphasises the psychological, rhetorical, and cultural dimensions of trauma. The nexus between trauma and literature has been acknowledged by different scholars of trauma studies. Buelens and Craps (2008) examine postcolonial trauma novels, showing how the repressive postcolonial realities impact traumatic experiences which are recreated in novels. Caruth (2014) argues that literature memorialises the traumatic experiences which she regards as the 'ashes of history.'

Trauma studies in Nigerian literature tend to pay closer attention to prose fiction. The interface between trauma and bibliotherapy has not received significant attention in Nigerian poetry, particularly the regional poetry of the Niger Delta. From the angle of scriptotherapy, Owonibi (2008) examines *A Stroke of Hope* as Tayo Olafioye's effort to stimulate self-healing through poetry when he was subjected to surgical operations. Owonibi portrays the connection between depression and healing but his research is not specifically on bibliotherapy in Niger Delta poetry. Kekeghe (2017) investigates melancholic depression in the poetry of Wumi Raji and demonstrates that creative writers, especially poets, explore distressing feelings in their works. Though Kekeghe acknowledges the possible therapeutic implication of poeticizing agonizing memories and thoughts, the study is not on Niger Delta poetry. Adewusi (2019) examines depictions of trauma in Niyi Osundare's poetry, but his study does not investigate the poet's attempt to negotiate healing through the narration of traumatic memories. This current study, therefore, examines the interplay of trauma and bibliotherapy in Niger Delta poetry.

The Niger Delta region comprises the six states of the South-South geopolitical zone including Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa-Ibom, Cross Rivers and Edo as well as Ondo, Imo and Abia States (Darah, 2014: 37). Since the discovery of oil at Oloibiri, Bayelsa state in 1956, and later in other parts of the Niger Delta in commercial quantities, the Niger Delta region became a troubled landscape. The restless quest for the oil has worsened the poverty in the region, such that the common Niger Deltan believes that the Nigerian state has employed every available tool in systematically emasculating the Niger Delta region and depriving it the benefits of its natural resources. Oil and gas from the Niger Delta region account for over 90% of Nigeria's export earnings, yet the region wallows in abject poverty, and its environment suffers degradation as a result of oil exploration activities (Okaba 2005:6). Expectedly, these experiences have left the Niger Deltans embittered. The above injustices meted out on the people birthed a poetic tradition that is melancholic like the traditional blues. This study pays critical attention to Ibiwari Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta*, Ebi Yeibo's *The Forbidden Tongue* and G. Ebinyo Ogbowei's *Song of a Dying River*.

Sounds and Emotion: Locating Trauma and Psychotherapy in the Cadences of Poems

In the examined poems, the poets do not merely reflect the traumatic memories of the Niger Delta natives, they do so through a somber and intriguing combination of sound devices. Through the deployment of sound resources of sounds, the poets convey pleasant rhythms that are restorative and energising. In spite of the technology of printing, poets have effectively managed the tradition of song that is associated with poetry through the appropriation of cadences of sounds. Walter Peter's declaration that poetry "constantly aspires to the condition

Let the eloquent sun
Sing harvest songs
In the rumbling stomachs
Of sulky saints
That drowsy dreams may awaken
To the dialect of dawn

(*The Forbidden Tongue*, 25).

For the realisation of the despondent but delightful rhythm, Yeibo utilises different sound devices such as alliteration, consonance, assonance, repetition, refrain, parallelism, and onomatopoeia. The weaving together of these poetic tools enhances the accomplishment of invigorating, melancholic verse which bears the texture of blues. Like the other poets whose works are examined in this study, Yeibo interlaces stylistic resources with a rhythm of anguish that appears recuperative. This is in agreement with Ojaide's observation that in the works of the new poets "simplicity, chanting, repetition and incantatory rhythms are common techniques" (Ojaide, 2002, p.143).

Alliteration is an aural stylistic cadence that is utilised in the examined poems. Alliteration is the repetition of consonantal sounds at the initial position of words in a line of poetry. James Reeves regards alliteration as "an essential... element in the sound pattern of poetry" (Egudu, 1979, p. 53). The infusion of the device of alliteration encourages the sing-song quality of poems. In Yeibo's "Silent Sorrow", for instance, the use of alliterative sound gives birth to a grief-stricken rhythm that stimulates psychological releases:

We sleep supine /s/
On bedbugs of sorrow
Awake all night

To stinging song of the season /s/

Dawn bristles with soulful saviours /s/
Showing us whining whetstones/w/

That only blunt our spirits

Dawn bristles with drizzling dews /d/

Disfiguring forest of fun /f/
Foiling foliages of fanfare /f/

And even *fanciful flowers* /f/
On loamy soil
Flaunt *petals of patrimony* /p/
Here, dawn bristles with
With *hollow helmet of hope* /h/
Cornering us to *closed contours* /k/
Crashing us on *stoneless soils* /s/
Dawn bristles
With a *fiery flame of fraud*/f/
Burning up *blossoming barns* /b/
Like brittle forest
In the *heart of the harmattan* /h/
(*Forbidden Tongue*, 31)

The poetic lines above relate the pitiable condition of the people who have lost their means of continuous existence, like farming, fishing and hunting, to the intractable oil multinationals. Yeibo uses the poem to communicate the psychological trauma caused by the extractive industry of oil and gas. As characteristic of the lamentatory tone on which the poem is pitched, most of the repeated consonantal sounds here are hissing sibilants such as /f/ and /s/. These hissing sounds foreground the psychological pains and anguish that the people are subjected to. Therefore, the infusion of alliteration helps to relate the poet's psychological and emotional state to the audience. Despite the agony relayed in the poetic lines, the liveliness of the rhythm and sounds is meant to enliven the mind of the audience. In other words, what the Niger Delta poets 'sing' of is remedial because the audience participates in the poetic recreation of their agonies. Again, in Yeibo's "Sighs", we are confronted by the poet's appraisal of the irresponsive political elite that persistently shatter the dream of the people. Remarkably, we experience the stirring lament of the poet, which is realised through alliteration:

We who sow *drizzling dreams*/d/
In the *fertile fields of reforms* /f/
This season of *surplus* /s/
Know not the *hem of harvest's apron* /n, h/

...

Of their crimson connivance/k/
May the sanctimonious smile /s/

...

Haunt the howling horror/h/

...

of suppressed sighs /s/
(*Forbidden Tongue*, 52-53).

Beyond the anguished tone, we perceive the confident tone of hope where the poet boldly deals with every instrument of oppression and repression unleashed on the people, including the despoliation of their lands and water bodies, as well as their marginalisation and repression. This is woven together through the device of alliteration. For instance, the glottal sound /h/ involves the free-flow of air through the glottis— its use here suggests the ventilation of the poet's anguished mood which is representative of the moods of the Niger Delta indigenes. Such sibilant fricatives that suggest hissing sounds as /s/ and /f/ help to make vivid the agony that runs through the verse. The researchers argue that this melancholic tone is capable of spellbinding the mind of the reader and inspiring some psychotherapeutic benefits. The /d/ and the /k/ sounds foreground the rhythm of anguish and reinforce the discontentment of the persona. Yeibo's use of the hissing fricative /s/ dominates his poem— it is paradoxically suggestive of agony and recuperation. In "Dawn Song", he croons:

Let sprawling seas /s/
Stem the surge/s/
Of sententious saints /s/
Stabbing our sun /s/
With serrated sermon /s/
(*The Forbidden Tongue*, 22)

From the foregoing rhythm, one enjoys the melancholic tone of the persona. It is evident that the poet is openly confronting the tormentors of their land, including the greedy political elite, the desperate hydro-engineers and hydro-physicists that manifest all forms of suppressive and oppressive tendencies to doom the people's collective aspirations. However despondent the

poetic tempo is, it energises the reader like the traditional blues. This is because it is pleasant to the ear and the mind.

In Ogbowei's "For Gabriel Okara", he weaves alliterative sounds to comment on different problems affecting his people. He regards the Niger Delta region as a "bruised boulevard" that is in urgent need of redemption. The general issues of corruption and insensitivity of our leaders is brought to the fore through this poem:

The bawling infant's dream
Reveals *hoary heads* /h/
Dexterous drummers /d/
Dancing down a bruised boulevard /d/, /b/
To *discover* a new *dawn* /d/
In the *mambo massage* /m/
Where potbellied balogun
Squanders *police pension funds* /p/

On *plump prostitutes* /p/
(*Song of a Dying River*, 20).

Lamenting the spillage on the people's water bodies, Ogbowei recounts with titillating choices of alliteratives:

His *blackened beaches* /b/
Reeking river and *coated creeks* /r/, /k/
Casualties of a cursed marriage /k/
Contrived for convenience /k/

(*Song of a Dying River*, 30).

The striking rhythm generated by the repetitive use of the alliterative sounds above intensifies the revitalising benefit of the poem on the reader. Ogbowei's vitriolic voice is aimed at giving birth to a society that is physically, psychologically and ecologically healthy. Furthermore, Ogbowei employs alliterative sounds to unfold the contradictions and paradoxes of life. He sings of a society where misery becomes a routine; a society where criminality is legalised. In such a situation, according to the poet, it is difficult for someone to stand out and tell the others to cheer up:

What therapeutic *tale trinya* /t/
Does the *leaking leper* /l/
Tell the *tearful teacher* /t/
Breached on a *bench* /b/
Before her *puling pupils* /p/

(Song of a Dying River, 30).

The melancholic rhythm above suggests the despondent mood of the poet, who impersonates the trauma of his folks. Despite the anguished tone that pervades the poem, the pitch is pleasurable. This is because music is enjoyed not necessarily for the thought or feeling it suggests, but for the auditory pleasure it generates. Similarly, Yeibo, in “The Poet”, unfolds his healing mission as one who measures “the mood of men” through an impressive use of alliteration. He sings:

The *prescient poet* /p/
Courts a *trillion tempests* /t/
Measuring the mood of men /m/
with *parameter of piety* /p/

(The Forbidden Tongue, 29)

Yeibo’s submission above foregrounds the mission of the Niger Delta poets, who deploy poetry to relate the social devastations and the ensuing psychological trauma caused by the obliteration of the Niger Delta lands and water bodies by the oil extractors and capitalists. In reflecting on the people’s suffering, the poets offer the reader beautiful cadences of songs such that one will be held spellbound. It is this anguished tone that is concretely expressed in Ogbowei’s “Your Yowl”:

I’ll drink the *wine you weep* /w/
Eat the *bread you bake* /b/
...
Roasted over *fires of communal conflicts* /k/
Mercenaries of the market /m/
Profiteers in fatigues of freedom /f/
Assaults the *ramparts of reason* /r/ (54).

While the poets employ alliteration to weave an appealing rhythm, it is wise to argue here that the consonantal choices are aimed at birthing a soothing pulse that generates a cathartic force. The poets, under study, have fashioned sounds that correspond to the mood and should adequately help to suggest a feeling of wholeness.

Repetition is another resource of music that is utilised by the poets to convey an exhilarating rhythm. As the musician repeats some musical tones in certain combinations, patterns or melodies, so does the poet repeat certain sound combinations to create an appealing effect to the reader. Repetition is the commonest feature of rhythm (Egudu, 1979: 34). The creativity that is inherent in the successive repetition of words or lines generates a special auditory impact. The deployment of repetition promotes the musical effects of the poems under investigation. According to Okpewho (1992), “the repetition of a phrase, a line or a passage does have a certain sing-song quality to it” (p. 71). Through the resources of repetition, we notice the enthralling narration of grief that resonates in Ikiriko’s “Remembering Saro-Wiwa”. The despondent, elegiac tone of the poem, like the characteristic melancholy of blues music, creates an auditory entanglement in the audience’s mind:

Let’s not forget
That Saro Wiwa
Was a writer
A writer
Let’s not forget
 That Saro-Wiwa
 Was a righter
A righter
Let’s not forget
That the cause
Of his hanging
Is still clinging
 To the bottom of oil wells
And let’s not forget
 That his hanging
Is still sticking

To the remains of our conscience

Like sludges on mud-flat
(*Oily Tears*, 24).

The poem above laments the death of Ken Saro-Wiwa, a writer and activist who was extrajudicially hanged by the dictatorial regime of Sanni Abacha in 1998 to end his struggle for the emancipation of his Ogoni people from the despoliation of their land by Shell. The death of Ken Saro-Wiwa is a major tragedy because he was the people's leading actor in the fight for liberation. The tragic execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa unfolds the repressive manifestations of the Federal Government and the multinational oil companies on the natives of the oil belt area of the Delta. The poet's lamentation creates a liberating measure for the reader who shares in this loss.

Ikiriko goes further to express in "Odi", a wailing rhythm that unfurls the massacre of Odi by the Federal Government. This is realised through a masterly blend of repeated lines, phrases and words. The music that is derived from this repetition brings to the fore the anguish of the natives as harboured by the persona. Apart from the message which is derivable from the poem, the audience receives a special auditory effect from this melancholic lilt. The emotional benefits generated from the sound will further enhance the reader's intense reflection on the message. This is why Kreuzer (1995) notes that in the business of dealing with sound in poetry, "the larger part is discovering what the function of the sound pattern is in terms of the poem as a whole" (67). The intense reflection of the magic music created by the sounds and the sorrowful or hopeful message they generate could bring about a remedial effect on the reader's psyche. Again, Ikiriko declares:

Odi

Odi
Odi o odi

Did Odi do the deed?

Odi

O damn it

Odi o Odi

...

Did Odi do the deed

That caused the remainder

To be razed defunct and
Natives homeless and borrow villages
To mourn the dawning millennium?

(Oily Tears, 63).

From the lines above, the device of repetition helps to generate an auditory pleasure. The most valid function of the music of poetry is not to suggest thought but to beautify thought and make it aesthetically pleasing. A poem that does not have much thought to communicate can still qualify as poetry mainly because of its organised sound pattern that spawns a pleasing melody. This is because the central point of music is the emotion evoked by the rhythm, not necessarily the thought communicated (Egudu, 1979: 63-66). Like Ikiriko, Yeibo deploys repetition in his poem, "Rage of the Delta," which underscores the distress and anger of the persona. He does much to express a confrontational rhythm which unfolds the pains of the natives that have been facing several years of deprivation and dispossession:

Dwellers of the delta

Wax wild on the wings of wreckage

Who wouldn't whose paradise

Becomes a prostitute's rag

Whose brooks brim

With bilious black blood

Whose dream host rabid jiggers?

...

Whose savoury swamps

Are cauldrons of chemicals

Whose patrician pockets

Hoist Harmattan flag

Whose hallowed virginity

Is stolen the wrong way

...

When a hawk swoops on chicks

The mother goes wild

(The Forbidden Tongue, 28)

Anyone with ear for music will appreciate the sonorous rhythmic beauty that is created by the poet through the repetitive use of “whose” in the poem above. In “Our Home Is Hurting”, Ogbowei also deploys the technique of repetition. In this poem, what confronts the reader is the shrillness of wailing that sinks deeply into the mind, capturing thoughts and feelings:

It's one week now

Since I heard mummy sing to me

It's one week now

Since I heard daddy holler at me

...

They've come to console us

Who have no peace to give

They've come to console us

Who have no joy to share

They've come to console us

To toll the knell

Sad eyes stunned eyes

Eyes with poison in their depths

(Song of a Dying River, 90).

As this rhythm sinks into the readers' minds and souls, they will be enlivened by the expressional and musical beauty. While expressional beauty is concerned with the aesthetic use of words and images in the poems, musical beauty refers to the sensory pleasure generated by the combination of sounds. The employment of images of pain and hatred in the poem above conveys an expressional beauty, while the repetitive use of words depicts musical beauty. The

musical beauty, therefore, reinforces the expressional beauty. This tone is also evident in “Hurricane Turai”:

hurricane turai
pummeling the pauperised province
...
the bridge of faith quakes goes down
the singing school bus goes down
the promise in the song of striplings
drowns in a roaring river

(Song of a Dying River, 25)

Hurricane is a powerful, rotating oceanic storm that possesses maximum sustained winds. In the poem above, Ogbowei reflects on the ravages which this natural disaster causes to human lives. Faced with such tragedy, Ogbowei creates an outlet for the collective trauma of his people, which he embodies. Despite the agonising atmosphere in which these poems are pitched, the beauty of the rendition, through the device of repetition, is enthralling. The immediate result of this beauty is pleasure, which is mental satisfaction. It is this gratification that brings remedial effects to the mind.

Refrain is another element of music that promotes the blues-like throb in the examined poems. Refrain is a form of repetition, which occurs at regular intervals in a poem. In Vulgar Latin, refrain is derived from the word, *refringere*, “to repeat”; and later from Old French *refraindre*, is the line or lines that are repeated in music or in verse. Like ordinary repetition, refrain makes for sonorous beauty and special auditory appeal. As in music, the refrain performs an emotive function in poetry. In Yeibo’s “Dawn Song”, an appealing rhythm is generated through the refrain, which is energising:

Let sprawling seas
Disgorge the swelling sewage
That gaily farts on us

O let sprawling seas

Stem the surge
 Of sententious saints

Stabbing our sun

With serrated sermons
Let sprawling seas
Mop up trumped-up-mornings
That hides the titillating treasures
Of dawn
(*The Forbidden Tongue*, 22-23)

The refrain, “let sprawling seas”, which appears at the beginning of every stanza, reinforces the trauma and tone of disenchantment in the poem. Beyond conveying the traumatic experiences of the people, the musicality created by the refrain is pleasing to the ears, and it elicits invigorating energy. The lines of the poem convey a tone of optimism that there will be an end to the pathetic condition of the people. This reassuring rhetoric is capable of inspiring positive energy. He croons:

I lie waiting at the crossroads
For the return of those renegades

Who barter a basket of yams

For a healthy bowl of beetles
...

I lie waiting at the crossroads
For the return of those renegades
Who counsel compromise
When conniving crows swoop
On our hapless sacrifice
...

I lie waiting at the crossroads
For the new lords of the land
Who murder the new moon
Right on our lap
(*The Forbidden Tongue*, 21)

The poem depicts a message of hope, which serves as a therapy for the collective trauma of the poet’s homeland. The choice of language and the pulse have a powerful impact on the masses’ mental composition. The language of the poem embodies the trauma and therapeutic mission of the poet. Scholars of trauma studies have recognised that trauma impacts the texture of language (Caruth, 2014). First, Yeibo identifies the people’s enemies and the activators of their

trauma; second, he lights up their minds. The melancholic way in which these lines are rendered provokes thoughts and feelings.

The deployment of refrain is also evident in Yeibo's "Tsunami Reminds Us". In a cautionary tone, Yeibo employs the refrain, "Tsunami reminds us" at the beginning of every stanza, to caution the Delta against an imminent natural disaster, which may be caused by the plundering of the Delta landscape by the oil extractors. The sing-song effect created by this admonitory tone is pleasing:

Tsunami reminds us
Of the mixed palette
 Suckling nature's undying shrubs-
 ...
Tsunami reminds us

Of the serenity of white clouds
Suddenly overturned

By thunder's deafening cannons-
 ...
 Tsunami reminds us
 We stand in the middle of a maelstrom

Weaving unpredictable waters

To eke out a world-
 (*The Forbidden Tongue*, 37)

Refrain is a common quality of music which the Niger Delta poets under study utilize in order to produce a blues-like rhythm. With the harrowing experiences in the Niger Delta environment, the poets must croon songs of hope to placate the traumatized natives of the Niger Delta whose only means of income and living have been plundered and despoiled by the oil capitalists in connivance with the Federal Government.

Parallelism is another cadence of voice that is employed in the poems. Like other sound devices discussed above, parallelism enhances the rhythmic flow of the verse. Parallelism resembles repetition, but unlike lexical and structural repetition, parallelism is concerned with semantic repetition. Like repetition, it also emphasises themes and helps to achieve musicality. A good example of parallelism abounds in Ikiriko's "Evening Already":

I had listen
To the voices within me

To the voices around me

That I am a time bomb
Now I realize

That I am only a land mine
I had listened
To the voices within me
To the voices around me

That I am an oil bean seed
Now I realize
That I am only a coconut
I cannot detonate
Without external pressure
I cannot disperse
Without external agency
(*Oily Tears*, 11)

The phrases “voices within” and “voices around” convey the same meaning, but the poet has used them in such a repetitive structure to generate some sing-song effects. Again, Ikiriko deploys a set of parallel lines:

And let this houselessness
This homelessness
This total dispossession

They visited on others
Be their lot

Let it be
The lot of their children
Let it be
The lot of their children's children

(*Oily Tears*, 17).

In this dramatic monologue, we could feel the distress and disenchantment of the poet. Through the revolutionary rhythm conveyed by the use of parallelism, the audience is left to experiment with the somberness and distressing feelings of the repressed Niger Delta people as embodied by Ikiriko. By speaking up for the people, Ikiriko bears the hope and assumes a messianic image. Again, Ikiriko expresses the trauma of the people whose sources of fishing occupation have been sullied by the pillaging effects of oil:

You see a pollution-stricken sea-sky
Bereft of the gull's intricate flight-dance,
Parabolic over-head sign of plenty for the fishermen

You see tankers,
Yes, jumbo tankers
Forever pipe-loading

(Oily Tears, 22).

In spite of the oil deposit and the phenomenon of spillage and gas flaring that the people are made to face by the oil companies, the profits from the oil business do not manifest in their lives. In Ogbowei's "The Lingo of a Rolling Rabble", we are confronted by the vulnerability of the peasants' condition in the creek who live in delicate structures. The traumatic state of those whose structures are razed by the wind is also unveiled here. Ogbowei expresses amidst laments:

Cruel wind
Lash the lawless lowlands
Wicked winds
Thresh the mindscape
A howling storm

Tears through the ticklish coast
Defenceless defeated
Structures fall
The mind's screens

Are taken down
Blown away

(Song of a Dying River, 46)

Through the use of parallelisms, this poem expresses the vulnerable condition of the indigenes of the oil-belt areas of the Niger Delta. The vulnerable atmosphere painted in the poem underscores the negative effect that the turbulent environment has on the people's minds. This implies that the physical and ecological challenges impact the collective trauma narrated by Ogbowei in his poem. The semantic repetition in phrases like "cruel wind," "wicked wind" and

“howling storm,” creates a sing-song quality and emphasises the pathetic condition of the people. Parallelism in poetry, as has been demonstrated above, involves the arrangement of coordinate thoughts to the effect that the relationship between them is emphasised and their meaning highlighted. Parallelism is an oral stylistic feature that is utilised to create pleasurable sounds in the poems.

The Nexus between Rhythm and Emotion in the Poems

Rhythm is comparable to beat or pulse. There is rhythm in all human activities because all the actions of humans are exhibitions of different movements. Egudu (1979:34) accentuates this notion when he illustrates: “any action in which motion is involved therefore has some rhythm. For example, the pounding of an engine shows some rhythm. Also, the rise and fall of the water in the ocean is rhythmical”. Like the rhythm of life, poetic rhythm implies beat, movement, recurrence, variation or fluctuation. Rhythm in poetry is the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of poetry; meter is the number of feet in a line of poetry; while scansion is the description of the rhythm of poetry by dividing the lines into feet, marking the locations of stressed and counting the syllables. Thus, when we describe the rhythm of a poem, we ‘scan’ the poem and mark the stresses ['] and absence of stress [~], and count the number of feet. The following are the major feet in English: iamb [~'], trochee ['~], anapest [~~'], dactyl ['~~], spondee [""], pyrrhic [~ ~].

Iambic and anapestic meters are called rising meters because their movement rises from unstressed to stressed syllable; trochaic and dactylic meters are called falling meters because their movement falls from stressed to unstressed syllable. Spondee and pyrrhic are constant feet, and they are never used as the sole meter of a poem, but they can lead emphasis and variety to a meter when inserted. A frequently heard metrical description is iambic pentameter, a line of five iambs. This is a meter especially familiar because it occurs in all blank verse, such as Shakespeare’s plays, heroic couplets and sonnets. The musicality in a poem is greatly influenced by the effects of metrification. The following are lengths of meter: monometer (one foot); pentameter (five feet); dimeter (two feet); hexameter (six feet); trimeter (three feet); heptameter (seven feet); and octameter (eight feet).

The rhythmic flow of poetry is an expression of the emotional beats or pulse. Since rhythm implies movement, it can indicate the kind of feeling or emotion which is the background of that movement. In life, it is common to determine the mood of an individual through their movement. An anguished or numb individual moves wearily and sluggishly. On the contrary,

a happy and relaxed individual moves in a leisurely fashion. Thus, if an individual is moving very fast, we can suspect that he is excited, overjoyed, frantic, or even angry (Egudu, 1979:40). Similarly, the connection between rhythm and mood is common in music. Rhythm in poetry, therefore, serves as the force that propels emotion. Rhythm involves the “natural accompaniment of strong emotion” (Egudu, 1979: 41). This implies that in appreciating the rhythm of poems, the emotions of the poets are highly involved. In Yeibo’s “Silent Sorrow,” we perceive the anguished tone of the poet, which is conveyed through the mixture of a regular and an irregular rhythm:

We sleep I supine
 On bedbugs of I sorrow
 Awake I all night
 To stinging song I of the season

The tone in the foregoing lines is that of despondency, which is expressed through a relaxed rhythm. There is a seemingly regular foot in the poem. In some cases, the regular rhythm signifies sorrow and boredom. The regularity of the rhythm prepares the scene for the play of another kind of mood—that of meditation or reflection. The first line is made up of one spondaic foot of two stressed syllables and one iambic foot of one stressed syllable preceded by an unstressed one. But as the poet meditates on his miserable condition, the tempo of the poet’s discontentment rises to a crescendo. The irregular rhythmic expression of his trauma is evident in the following lines:

Dawn bristles with drizzling dews
 Disfiguring forest of fun
 Foiling foilages of fanfare
 And even fanciful flowers
 On loamy soil
 Flaunt petals of patrimony (31)

The rhythm in the poetic lines above relates to the emotions of the poet. Like music, poetry stirs feelings through rhythm. If the subject matter of a poem is emotional, words are used to depict such a situation. This implies that before one determines the rhythmic pattern of a poem,

one must first ascertain the level of emotion being communicated by the poem through the words. Ogbowei's "Our Home's Hurting" expresses a somber rhythm, which reflects the agony of the Niger Delta natives. The idea of loss conveyed in the poem is redolent of the incessant militarization and dehumanization in the Niger Delta region. Ogbowei laments:

They 've I còme tō I cōnsòle I us'
 Whò hāve I nò pèace I tō give
 They 've I còme tō I cōnsòle I us'
 Whò hāve I nò jòy I tō shàre (90)

The deployment of the trochaic meter in the first two feet in the first line of the extract of the poem shows the regularity in the poet's numb mind. The trochaic meter of one stressed syllable followed by a stressed one is succeeded by an iambic foot. However, the last stressed syllable stands on its own. But as the poem progresses, the rhythm becomes irregular. This kind of tone is also evident in Ikiriko's "Baseless Compass", where the rhythm captures emotional fragmentation provoked by the miserable circumstances in which the poet finds himself. He laments this emotional and psychological agony in the following lines:

We' āre I ādrift
 Ōn ā spāce I ship
 Wīth āll I ōur rīghts
 Ānd bē I nēfīts I sūspend I ēd
 Hòpe lèaks I ōut
 Fřom ōur I ĩn I sīde
 Lèavīng I ūs èmplīty
 Ās ā I bàskēt I ōf wāītē

(Oily Tears, 21)

The first line of the poem above is made up of one foot each of trochee and iamb. It is wise to dissect the little observance of the regular rhythm of anapest in the second line, where there is a mixture of one foot of two unstressed and one stressed syllable. However, there is a stressed syllable that stands out on its own. However, there is a perceived temporary steadiness in the rhythm in the poems that depict the image of hope. This confident and relaxed rhythm is evident in Yeibo's "Hope". Yeibo opens the poem with the vision of hope. The first line, which is made up of two feet of iamb, is regular; the second line is made up of two regular trochee feet. This regularity is short-lived as the emotion of the poet is further troubled by the thought of anguish that undulates the current of hope. Yeibo croons:

F̃or whenI t̃he mòon
Mòunts t̃heI sky-stāge
...
Stārs sàveI t̃heir òil
F̃or ānIòth̃erI ðay

Therefore, in the third line, there is a mixture of one foot of spondee and one foot of iamb. In the fourth line, there is a mixture of one foot of trochee and one foot of iamb, while the last stressed syllable stands alone. Though the meter in the poem is varied, the rhythm is generally fast-moving and it signals a joyful feeling. A poem with such a racy rhythm has little time for thought or reflection. The reader is first carried along by the rhythm, which arouses in him the feeling of joy that the poem conveys. Equally, in Ogbowei's "The morgue", we notice a similar tone:

T̃he mòrg̃ue
Ìs ā Iplace òfI p̃eace
Wh̃ere t̃heI t̃ig̃er
Ñò mòreI stalks
(*Song of a Dying River*, 106)

The foregoing analysis of rhythm in the poems under investigation justifies the conception that the rhythms of the poems encourage the full emotional impulse of the verse to both the reader and the writer. In that case, the therapeutic tendency of the sonorous flow of the poems, like musical blues, is made possible through the rhythmic variations. While the rhythm describes emotions, it reinforces meaning and generates pleasure. In that case, it unifies and harmonises thoughts and feelings. The remedial effects of poetry is made possible through rhythm.

Conclusion

The analysis in this study shows the interface between trauma and therapy in Niger Delta poetry. The researchers have located trauma and bibliotherapy in three poetry collections from Nigeria's Niger Delta region, which are: Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta*, Yeibo's *The Forbidden Tongue* and Ogbowei's *Song of a Dying River*. Through a sombre and melancholic language, the poets convey the collective trauma of the natives of the oil-belt area of the Delta, whose means of income and existence— lands and water bodies— are despoiled by the oil extractors. Beyond the poetic-narration of the agonies faced by the people, the poets generate

mentally pleasing rhythms, which are made possible by the deployment of sound devices and metrification. The study, therefore, finds that there is a nexus of relationships that manifests through sounds, rhythm and emotions in the poems. Since the poets embody the agony and hope of the masses, the language of their poems shows the impact of trauma and therapy. The tones of the poems read like those of a traditional blues; and since blues has proven to be invigorating to the human psyche, the poems are considered therapeutic. What makes this pleasing rhythm palpable is the deployment of different devices of sounds such as alliterations, consonance, repetitions, refrains and parallelisms. The entangling throb of the poetic lines affects the minds of the writers and the audience. Besides the examination of the poetry of Ikiriko, Yeibo and Ogbowei on the concept of bibliotherapy, the researchers go as far as to establish interview sections with some of these poets, particularly Yeibo and Ogbowei, to assess the healing import of their verses.

References

- Adewusi, Adebussyi, Rotimi. (2019). "Representation of the Traumatic in the Poetry of Niyi Osundare." Ph.D Thesis, Department of English and Literary Studies, Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti.
- Bamidele, L. O. (2003). *Literature and Society*. Ibadan: Sterling-Horden, 26-39
- Blanton, S. (1960). *The Healing Power of Poetry*. Mishawaka, USA: Crowell
- Bowman, R. (2008). "Blues". *Microsoft(R) Encarta(R) 2009(DVD)* Redmund, WA: Microsoft Corporation
- Buelens, G. and Craps, S. (2008). "Introduction: Postcolonial Trauma Novels". In *Studies in the Novel* 40. 1-2.
- Carroll, R. (2005). "Finding the Words to Say It: The Healing Power of Poetry". In *Evidence Based Complement Alternative Medicine* 2(2): 161-172.
- Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press
- Caruth, C. (2014). *Literature in the Ashes of History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press
- Chavis, G. G. (2011). *Poetry and Story Therapy: The Healing Power of Creative Expression*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers
- Craps, S. and Buelens, G. (2008). "Introduction: Postcolonial Trauma Novels". *Studies in the Novel* Vol 40; 1/2. John Hopkins University Press.
- Darah, G. G. (2014). *The Niger Delta: Resource Control and the Quest for Justice*. Ibadan: Kraft Books, Print
- Egudu, R. N. (1979). *Introduction to Poetry*. Ibadan: University Press
- Fanner, D.; Urquhart, C. (2008). "Bibliotherapy for mental health service users Part 1: a systematic review". *Health Information & Libraries Journal*. **25** (4): 237–252.
- Gillam, Tony (2018), "Creative Writing, Literature, Storytelling and Mental Health Practice", *Creativity, Wellbeing and Mental Health Practice*, Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 101–116

- Herzhaft, G. et al, (1997). *Encyclopedia of the Blues*. Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, an Illustrated Survey of the Blues
- Ikiriko, I. (1999). *Oily Tears of the Delta*. Ibadan: Kraft Books
- Kekeghe, E. S. (2014). "The Paradox of Loss and Hope in Ibiwari Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta* and G. Ebinyo Ogbowei's *Song of a Dying River*". *Abraka Humanities Review: A Journal of the Faculty of Arts, Delta State University, Abraka Vol. 6 No.2*. Ed. A. E. Anigala. Abraka: Grace Communications. 60-75. Print
- Kekeghe, S. (2016). "Poetry and medicine: a Critical Examination of Verbal Placebos in the Poetry of Tanure Ojaide and Ebi Yeibo". In *Connecting Paths: Essays in Honour of Stephen Efe Ogude*. Ed. Ogaga Okuyade. Lagos: Bahiti & Dalila Publishers. 389-405.
- Kekeghe, S. (2017). "Creativity and the Burden of Thoughts: Deconstructing Melancholia in Wumi Raji's *Rolling Dreams*". In *Matatu*, 49. 2. 293-306.
- Kekeghe, S. (2017). "Creativity and the Burden of Thoughts: Deconstructing Melancholia in Wumi Raji's *Rolling Dreams*," *Matatu* 49: 293- 306
- Kekeghe, Stephen E. (2012). "Bibliotherapy: A Study of the Poetry of Tanure Ojaide, Ibiwari Ikiriko, Ebinyo Ogbowei and Ebi Yeibo as Niger Delta Blues". MA project. Dept. of English, University of Ibadan.
- Kreuzer, J. R. (1955). *The Elements of Poetry*. New York: The Macmillan Company
- Lomax, A. (1993). *The Land Where the Blues Began*. Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press,
- Mambrol, N. (2020). 'Trauma Studies'. *Literary Theory and Criticism*
<https://literariness.org/2018/12/19/trauma-studies/2018>. Retrieved June 22, 2025.
- Mayaki, J. (2017). "Grief, Creativity and Scriptotherapy in the Poetry of Malika Lueen Ndlovu and Niyi Osundare". Postgraduate Seminar, University of Ibadan.
- McCulliss, D. (2012). "Bibliotherapy: Historical and research perspectives". *Journal of Poetry Therapy*. 25 (1): 23-38.
- Ogbowei, G. E. (2009). *Song of a Dying River*. Ibadan: Kraft Books
- Okaba, B. (2005). *Petroleum Industry and the Paradox of Rural Poverty in Nigeria*. Benin City: Ethiope Publishing Corporation
- Okoko, K. et al. (2006). "Poverty Reduction in the Oil Producing Communities". *The Politics of Oil and the Development of Underdevelopment in the Niger Delta*. Port-Harcourt: University of Port-Harcourt Press
- Okpewho, (1992). I. *African Oral Literature*. Bloomington and Indianapolis
- Omobowale, E.B. (2008). "Literature and Medicine in Nigeria: A Case for a New Discipline". *Ibadan Journal of English Studies*. Vol.4, Vol.5,
- Owonibi, S. (2008). "Tayo Olafioye and Scriptotherapy: A Study of a *Stroke of hope*". *The Mines of the Mind*. Eds. Beth L. Virtanen & Sola Owonibi. AWP: Asmara, ERITREA, 85-102
- Oyebode, Femi (2009). "Poetry and Psychiatry". *Mindreadings: Literature and Psychiatry*. Ed. F. Oyebode. London: RPsych Publications. 55-67
- Rottenberg, Biri (2022-01-02). "Bibliotherapy as an integrative psychotherapeutic channel". *Journal of Poetry Therapy*. 35 (1): 27-41.
- Yeibo, E. (2005). *The Forbidden Tongue*. Ibadan: Kraft Books.

Proverbs As Tapestry: Pragmatic Analysis of Conflict-Motivated Proverbs in Stephen

O. Solanke's *Alaafin Aole Arogangan*

Ayodabo Joel Olatunde, PhD.
*Faculty of Humanities,
Department of English Language,
Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo*

Ayinuola, Ojo Akinleye PhD.,
*Faculty of Humanities,
Department of English Language,
Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo.*

and

Ajayi Enoch Siyanbola,
*Department of Primary Education,
Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo*

Abstract

This paper examines the pragmatics of conflict-motivated proverbs in Stephen O. Solanke's play, Alaafin Aole Arogangan. Solanke's play revolves around the conflict between the Alaafin, Afonja and the Oyomesi (the kingmakers) in the old Oyo Empire. The paper is motivated by the ingenious deployment of proverbs to facilitate effective communication and interaction in the play. This study examines how characters employ proverbs to negotiate power dynamics to justify their actions and manipulate others. The study draws on existing research on pragmatics, proverbs and conflict resolution, highlighting the significance of cultural context and language in shaping social relationships. Through qualitative analysis of the selected proverbs used in the play, and grounded in Mey's pragmatic acts theory, which posits that language is used to achieve specific goals and create social effects. The study reveals that proverbs are used in the selected plays for different pragmatic purposes, including supporting, warning/cautioning, questioning/querying, reassuring, defending, and accusing, which exploit contextual features such as relevance, reference, metaphor, inference, shared situation knowledge, shared cultural knowledge, and voice. The study reveals that proverbs are used as a form of pragmatic act to achieve specific goals, such as justifying actions, manipulating others, and negotiating power dynamics. The findings also highlight the importance of considering cultural context and background in understanding the meaning and function of proverbs. The paper submits that the context of culture and situation helps to inform the true meaning of proverbs when used in interactions

Keywords: *pragmatics, motivated proverbs, conflict resolution, Alaafin Aole Arogangan*

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

Proverb is part of our everyday language that mirrors the worldview of a people. It is the embodiment of values and worldview. Proverbs have been defined by many scholars. Adegbola (2018) defines proverbs as a short, well-known sentence or phrase that gives advice or says something is generally true in life. Proverbs are among the most cherished rhetorical expressions in human societies. In the context of language usage, proverbs remain the ready tools for thinking and communicating, not only because of their aesthetic exquisiteness, but also because of their being a way of life in African culture. (Coker and Coker, 2009). Proverbs are indispensable in conflict resolution and crisis management. As an oratory and linguistic tool, when proverbs are applied to conflict situations, they can function as ice breakers in relieving tension, as therapeutic tools in facilitating trauma healing, and in promoting introspection, which brings about change (Ajiboye, 2012). It is a known fact that if peace is to reign, there must be management of crisis and reconciliation, which would not be of value to one party in a dispute, but to all parties involved. Human beings are different, hence, the nature of individual differences. What one person may accept as a logical issue, other person might turn it down completely and therefore, care must be taken in making sure that such issues do not result into conflict and disagreement as such are subject to be influenced by the natural causes of conflict among humans which may include such things as; differences in needs, values, opinion and other components of human interaction. These differences often lead to conflict. Conflict, according to Egenti and Okoye (2021) can be described as a condition in which an identifiable group of human beings whether tribal, ethnic, linguistic, religious, socio-political, economic, cultural or otherwise is in opposition to one or more other identifiable human group because these groups are pursuing what appears to be incompatible goals. They also assert that, more importantly, conflict arises from the interaction of individuals who have partly incompatible ends, in which the ability of one actor to gain his ends depends to a great degree on the choices or decisions that other parties will take. Conflict could be violent, uncontrollable, dominant or recessive, resolvable or insolvable under various sets of circumstances (Emenike and Agu 2021). A proverb can perform different acts with different meanings depending on the context of the situation. Ik-Iloanusi (2014) observes that the meaning of proverbs is contextual, which makes it violate compositionality and thereby contributes to their various interpretations. This is in line with what Mey (2008:94) says with

regard to speech act. Mey asserts that “the language we use and in particular the speech acts we utter are entirely dependent on the context of the situation in which such acts are produced”.

Furthermore, proverbs draw from the holistic daily experience of life of language users (Ehineni 2022). They could convey the past, comment on the present and connect the future. This implies that proverbs are a very central part of a people’s beliefs and culture, and as a result, reflect the totality of their culture. Proverbs give expression to culture. The Pragmatics of conflict-motivated proverbs will be the central idea in this study. There is a popular adage among the Yoruba, which reads thus: “Òwe l’ eṣin ọ̀rọ̀; bí ọ̀rọ̀ bá sọ̀nù, ọ̀we làá fí ń wa” ‘Proverbs are horses of conveying words; if the word is lost, it is the proverb we use to find it. Conceptually, this implies that words are not just to be spoken, but they must be well embellished, garnished, and duly conveyed through proverbs. Omoniyi Adewiye (nd) translates the above saying as “Proverbs are the vehicle of thought: when the truth is elusive, it is proverbs that we employ to discover it.” Also similar to the interpretation of the Yoruba adage about proverbs is Kwesi Yankah’s rendition that “the proverb is the horse of conversation; when the conversation droops, the proverb picks it up” (Emenike and Agu, 2021). Proverbs are therefore “horse-footed” by words. That is, they are vehicles that convey words to their destinations. Proverbs, most times, make communication more effective and successful in the sense that they help to convey deep thoughts and ideas. Among the Yoruba people, proverbs are seen as valuable vessels of effective communication especially to drive home one’s points. They are also regarded as the ancient wisdom lore of the race and are often regarded as a preserve of the elders seen as the repository of knowledge. This is why the Yoruba people say: **Enu àgbà l’ obì tíí ń gbó** It is in the elder’s mouth that the Kolanut becomes ripe. Thus, proverbs are considered the language of the elders; the words of wisdom, knowledge, and counsel. Agbaje (2002: 243) observes that proverbs are introduced among the Yoruba people during significant moments which could be occasioned by certain situations in the society. Hence, proverbs are very important linguistic resources for the Yorùbá people. Characteristically, Yoruba proverbs are brief, precise, and metaphorical, yet strongly address a point to be decoded by the hearer. Adeeko (1998: 34) underscores that “proverbs being short and witty and widely known to all ideal members of the speech community to communicate very efficiently” He further elucidates that they are meaning-governed expressions whose main function in a conversation is to give cultural depth to a speaker’s thought. The brevity and communicative quality in the proverbs are accentuated in the popular Yoruba adage: **Ààbò ọ̀rọ̀ làá sọ̀ fún ọ̀mọ̀lúàbí; tí ó bá dénú rẹ̀ yóò di odindi.** Half a speech is enough for a well-

nurtured person; when it gets to his inside, it becomes whole. Yorùbá proverbs are naturally brief but communicatively loaded with deep meanings to be decoded by the hearer who also belongs to that shared community of usage. Thus, the hearer engages in the meaning decoding process of the Yoruba proverbs by relying on the context and shared linguistic knowledge as a member of the speech community. The present study, however, discusses the pragmatic uses of conflict-motivated proverbs in Stephen O. Solanke's play, *Alaafin Aole Arogangan*. Solanke's play in this study is a suitable quintessential set of play to describe the character, theme, or element that perfectly represents the play's essence or message. The play is suitably set within a Yoruba socio-cultural setting and is characterised by an ingenious deployment of rich Yoruba proverbs to facilitate effective communication among characters in the text. This study is, thus, motivated by the need to explore the pragmatic uses of the Yoruba proverbs employed in the text. Significantly, the study seeks to foreground the pragmatics of Yoruba proverbs that are peculiar to conflict-motivated texts and to provide more insights into the contextual uses of Yoruba proverbs in general.

1.2 Statement of Problems

Proverbs play significant roles in conversational and communicative contexts and have become part of the linguistic resources deployed in most African literary texts for the achievement of effective discourse tasks. Indeed, several studies have examined the use of proverbs in African literary texts. African proverbs have been relevantly explored from different scholarly viewpoints. Some of such studies include Obeng (1996), Adeeko (1998), Raji-Oyelade (1999), Odebunmi (2007), and Emike (2012), Mensah (2013), Michael (2014), Adeiyongo (2017), Ogbalu (2021), Omotunde (2022), Ogbuehi and Olashehinde (2025), among others. These studies have discussed proverbs from Igbo, Akan, Efik, and Yorùbá discourse perspectives. Essentially, these studies foreground the significant uses, functions, and forms of African proverbs in discourses, texts, and contexts. Obeng (1996) explores proverbs as a mitigating and politeness strategy in Akan discourse. He opines that proverbs serve as 'mitigations' and also function in maintaining a person's face, which is capable of being threatened by his or her utterance (1996: 521). Odebunmi (2007) examines the pragmatic functions that crisis-motivated proverbs play in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame*. He analyses the pragmatic roles of these proverbs that are ultimately necessitated by the crisis-oriented situations in the text. Emike (2012) underscores the use of Afenmai proverbs by the Afenmai people to facilitate communicative competence in interactions. Also, Ogbuehi and Olashehinde

(2025) present in their study on the pragmatic function of Igbo proverbs by looking at it from the area of dialect and communication about the people of Ihioma in the South East of Nigeria.

The use of proverbs in conflict situations is a significant aspect of Yoruba communication and other Nigerian cultures. Yet, there is a gap in understanding how these proverbs are used to negotiate relationships, convey meaning, and shape social interactions in the context of crisis-motivated proverbs, and this is the reason why this paper uses Solanke's play, *Alaafin Aole Arogangan*, to drive home the contextual angle through pragmatics. This study aims to investigate the pragmatics of motivated proverbs in this play, exploring their role in conflict resolution, social commentary and cultural expression. This study is expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on pragmatics, conflict resolution, and Yoruba cultural studies of the pragmatics of proverbs. By analysing the use of proverbs in the play, we will provide insights into the cultural significance of proverbs in Yoruba society and their role in shaping communication and conflict resolution strategies. There is a notable gap in existing studies on the pragmatics of motivated proverbs in Solanke's play, *Alaafin Aole Arogangan*. Specifically, there is limited scholarly attention paid to how proverbs are used in the play to negotiate relationships, convey meaning, and shape social interactions in conflict resolutions. Based on the task at hand, this study is set to fill some potential gaps, which include: a comprehensive analysis of the pragmatics of motivated proverbs in the play, exploring their meanings, functions, and roles in conveying themes and ideas. This study will also look at the pragmatic functions of proverbs in the play, including their use in conflict resolution, persuasion and social commentary.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study aims to investigate the pragmatics of conflict-motivated proverbs in Solanke's play, *Alaafin Aole Arogangan*. However, the study is guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To identify discursive issues in Stephen O. Solanke's *Alaafin Aole Arogangan*.
2. To identify and analyse pragmatic acts in Stephen O. Solanke's *Alaafin Aole Arogangan*.
3. To discuss pragmatic functions in Stephen O. Solanke's *Alaafin Aole Arogangan* using a relevant theory.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What discursive strategies are employed in Stephen O. Solanke's *Alaafin Aole Arogangan* to convey meaning and negotiate power dynamics?
2. How do characters in Stephen O. Solanke's *Alaafin Aole Arogangan* use pragmatic acts to achieve their goals and shape relations?
3. What pragmatic functions do proverbs, idioms, and other figurative language serve in Stephen O. Solanke's *Alaafin Aole Arogangan* and how do they contribute to the play's themes and character development?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is multifaceted. This is because it covers many areas of human and societal knowledge, which can seriously contribute to the existing knowledge in literature. This study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the pragmatics of proverbs. It will provide insights into the cultural significance of proverbs in Yoruba society and their role in shaping communication and conflict resolution strategies. This study is significant, particularly to arbitrators in conflict resolution. To the people, it would form a document that preserves the genre from possible extinction. To future arbitrators, it can serve as a reference material that they can fall back on for reference to know the appropriate proverbs when dealing with cases before them. This study will make a good instrument for teaching people African proverbs and encourage them on the need to preserve the genre. It would add to the existing works in African proverbs and also encourage further research in the area.

2.0 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Empirical Review

Some works have been done on proverbs and especially proverbs of conflict and crisis management in African culture by different scholars. Among these works are Adeiyongo (2017), who works on Tiv proverbs in solving conflicts and sees them as a means of instruction in the traditional society. He considers proverbs as an effective linguistic medium through which teaching and moral instructions can be carried out in the traditional Tiv society. The work emphasises the educational role of proverbs in the traditional education system, which he sees as an educational practice with the use of proverbs and which is a common practice in almost every language community and it culminates in good moral upbringing that makes a better society through crisis management. Mensah (2013) analyses the morphological and

syntactic structure of proverbs in the Efik language. He describes proverbs as morpho-syntactic constructions of different kinds, structures and functions, with their unique grammatical peculiarities. The study investigates the internal structure of Efik proverbs and highlights their grammatical relevance in an attempt to accentuate an aspect of the Efik language and culture which is daily put out of prominence and active use, as Efik proverbs mainly thrive in oral tradition. They specify what should or should not be done and lay conditions for certain actions and attitudes and equally remind the people of the possible consequences of some actions, reactions, omissions, and commissions; and sometimes remind the people of some responsibilities as members of a society. Some cultural values are peculiar to a particular culture, as well as others which are common or shared by different cultures. The peculiarity in culture gives the people a sense of uniqueness, which makes it imperative that matters involving the people, like conflict resolution, should not be addressed with a foreign cultural context. Makami (2012) confirms that conflict management should incorporate local cultural practices. He expresses that the individualistic cultures (e.g. the United States, England, etc.) use coercive ways of resolving conflict, the collectivist cultures (e.g. Africa, etc.) give preference to withdrawing, compromising in problem solving. This, we believe, depends on belief or cultural practices. Proverbial expressions can be negative, positive, but always rich in traditional concepts. The negative expressions usually assert what things are not or should not be done, while the positive ones assert the reverse. This often embodies a moral or practical precept or a rule of conduct aimed at ensuring a harmonious society.

Ashiru and Amende (2013) see proverbs as a circumstantial language that constitutes one of the major linguistic activities of an unwritten culture. They further argue that proverbs are circumstantial speech acts frequently used in conversations, public speeches and oratory to embellish, conceal and adorn such speeches. Thus, they posit that for effective understanding of language use in traditional societies, proverbs should be incorporated into the study of discourse analysis, pragmatics and semantics of African languages. Similarly, Michael (2014) investigates the literal structure of proverbial idiophones in Anaang. The study reveals that proverbial idiophones in Anaang are rich in the use of style, literal and contextual techniques and any user requires the knowledge of the socio-cultural background of the people. Furthermore, the study gives a general overview of the use of proverbial idiophone in Anaang as a model for socio-cultural communication, daily interactions and experience defined by the choice of words in speech. Adeyemi and Balogun (2014) work on proverbs as a veritable instrument for development. The work looks at the valuable nexus between language and development with particular emphasis on how the use of proverbs could help to revive morals

and thus be used as an instrument of development. Aragbuwa and Omotunde (2022) examine the metaphorization of women in the proverbs in the Yoruba language. 100 proverbs were used to address the major themes of female gender in the area of procreation and domestic conflicts among spouses. The proverbs show that women are marginalised and negatively represented and subordinate to men and if care is not taken, it might lead to conflict and divorce, especially in today's generation.

Obiajulu (2022) sees the exploration of proverbial conflict and resolution in Rotimi's play and reveals a deep understanding of the human condition and societal structures. His characters navigate complex relationships and historical contexts, often embodying proverbial wisdom that reflects communal values. Through the lens of pragmatism, Rotimi illustrates that while conflict is inevitable, the pathways to resolution involve dialogue, compromise, and a willingness to adapt, an essential lesson for both individuals and societies at large. Each of his plays invites the audience to reflect on the consequences of their choices, underscoring the enduring relevance of proverbs within the narrative of conflict and resolution. In a similar vein, Idegwu (2022) examines the concept of conflict, its causes, and effects and how to minimise it in human relationships. He employs Ahmed Yerima's "The Angel" as the illustrative text of the study. The study reveals that selfishness, greed, inappropriate and or unhealthy competition create dissension among siblings and members of society. These things create discord, which undermines the family bloodline and goes on to consume everyone. It also shows that the survivors, if there are any, are usually concerned with how to maximise the moment for selfish gains, rather than brooding over the monumental waste of lives, among other things. He notes that, though conflict is prevalent in all societies, siblings and human beings in general could minimise it to the bare minimum. This is possible if they refuse to allow greed and avarice to influence them.

Igwebuike (2020) examines how proverbs drafted from body parts and animals are deployed in literary discourse on war/conflict context to perform specific acts and functions. Drawing insights from Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts, the paper argues that proverbs used in a conflict context are ideological and perform specific pragmatic acts and functions. Using purposively sampled proverbs from Tony Ubesie's two novels, which focus on the Nigerian-Biafran war of 1967 – 1970: namely, *Juo Obinna* and *Isi Akwu Dara N'ala*, the findings show that the proverbs perform five pragmatic functions of advising, warning, inciting, criticising and harmonising for peace. While the animal-based proverbs perform directive acts of warning, criticising and inciting violence, the body parts-related proverbs perform representational acts of advising and harmonising for peace. All acts perform two-fold functions of escalating and

de-escalating the tense conflict situation. The study concludes that proverbs used in conflicts need to be carefully deployed to aid peaceful resolutions of conflict.

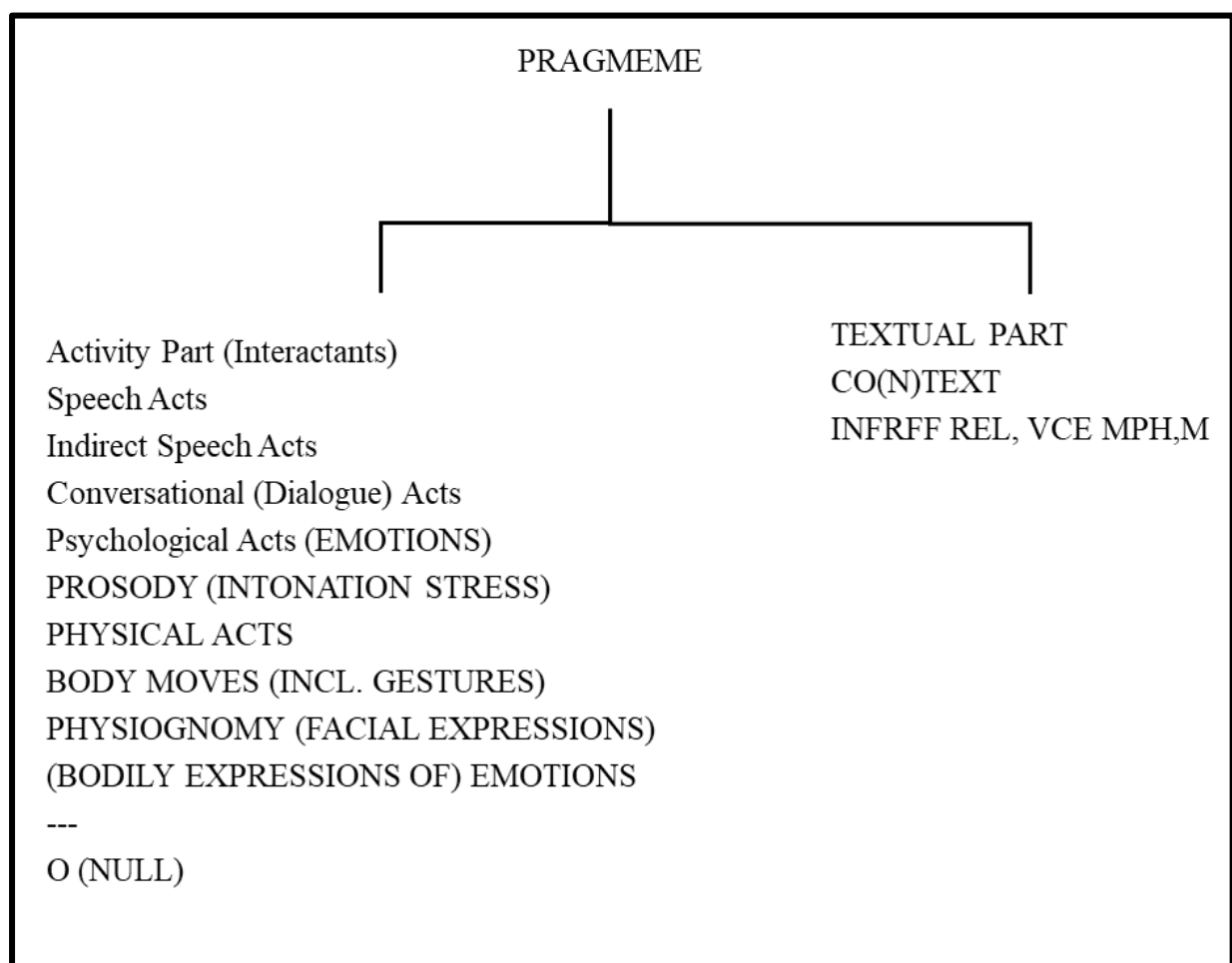
The reviews above provide some evidence that across cultures and languages, studies on proverbs, and for that matter, those undertaken from sociolinguistics and pragmatics perspectives are enormous. However, Solanke's works seem to be given little attention in the areas of pragmatics of proverbs, especially in the area of conflict-motivated proverbs, and cultural communication and literary interpretation. This will make this study relevant to the understanding of proverbs in performing many actions socially, economically, politically, religiously, culturally, etc., as the case may be. It is for this reason, therefore, that this study is undertaken to fill the gaps in studying the areas of Solanke's usage of proverbs in his texts, which can be useful in resolving conflicts in the language community. If proverbs can be used to revive good morals, they can also be used to bring about peace when appropriately used to resolve conflicts. Both good morals and peace are prerequisites to development in society.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Pragmatic Acts will be employed in this study. This theory came up to cater for the lapses of the speech act theory, which has been criticised by scholars (Fairclough 1989, Mey 2001). Fairclough (1989: 9) refers to the speech act theory as being 'atomistic' and as 'thought wholly emanating from the individual'. Similarly, Mey (2001: 214) argues that it lacks 'a theory of action'. Pragmatic acts, therefore, unlike speech acts, cater for not just utterances but 'action' and the situation that influences these utterances. This theory deals with how people use language within their limitations, situations and the 'affordances' of the immediate context. Therefore, the pragmatic acts theory is aptly selected for this study based on its suitability. Proverbs are not just mere ordinary linguistic expressions, but they carry underlying and deep cultural meanings beyond the surface level. Hence, this theory is adequate to uncover and navigate the different interpretations of the contextual uses of proverbs in the selected text. Mey (2001) explains the concept of a pragmeme with the model below: According to Mey (2001), the theory focuses on "the environment in which both speaker and hearer find their affordances, such that the entire situation is brought to bear on what can be said in the situation, as well as what is actually being said". The diagram indicates two parts to a pragmatic act and consisting of the activity part and the textual part. The activity part refers to the interactants, while the textual part refers to the context of use. In pragmatics, meaning construction and comprehension depend on a number of variables, which include the speaker, hearers and their Shared Background Knowledge (SBK), Shared-Cultural Knowledge (SCK), Shared Socio-

Situational Knowledge (SSK), Common Ground and the context (Ayodabo and Ayinuola, 2025). This means that context is the spine of meaning and the confluence of language and society. The Pragmatics of conflict-motivated Proverbs shows interactants communicate by exploiting the different speech act types classified as indirect speech acts, conversational ('dialogue') acts, psychological acts, prosodic acts, and physical acts under the activity part. The various acts are communicative options available to users, speakers or interactants to use for communication. Also, as explained by Mey (2001: 222), interactants draw on these acts about contextual features consisting INF (inference), REF (reference) REL (relevance), VCE (voice), SSK (shared situation knowledge), MPH (metaphor) and M (metapragmatic joker). Hence, the interaction between activity part and textual part makes up the pragmeme as pointed out by Mey (2001).

Pragmatic Acts by Mey2001



PRACT ALLOPRACT

PRAGMEME, PRACT, ALLOCRACT

3.1 Methodology

The proverbs in this study were randomly selected from Stephen O. Solanke's *Alaafin Aole Arogangan*. Eight proverbs were randomly selected since all the proverbs used in the texts generally played different significant parts in the interaction between the interlocutors. The proverbs were subjected to pragmatic analysis using Mey's theoretical approach. Both the context of the situation, culture as well as the status/identity of the interlocutors are put into consideration in analysing these proverbs. From the theoretical background, this paper discusses the pragmatic uses of Yorùbá proverbs in the texts to reflect both the interactants using the proverbs and the contextual features they exploit for effective communication and adequate understanding of the proverbs. Context is crucial to the understanding of and decoding of meaning from proverbs. 'Proverbs are sometimes semantically ambiguous, especially when cited in isolation.' Hence, contextual information is needed in navigating proverbial meanings. This study seeks to identify the contextual features within the texts which are responsible for effective communication of the proverbs.

4.1 Brief Synopsis of the Play in this Study

Solanke explores the theme of conflict and resolution, reflecting the complexities of human relationships, political turmoil, and cultural identity within the context of Nigerian society. His play, *Alaafin Aole Arogangan*, provides rich insights into the proverbial pragmatics of conflict-motivated proverb strategies, revealing deep societal truths. In the play, Solanke chronicles the story of one of the Alaafins who had ruled in the Old Oyo Empire, in the person of Alaafin Aole. The king was so powerful to the extent that he hardly changed his mind after he had given a verdict on some issues in his kingdom. According to historical accounts, Alaafin Aole's reign was marked by controversy and power struggles, which ultimately led to the decline of the Oyo Empire. The play explores themes of power, governance, and conflict between the King and his Chiefs: Afonja, Basorun, Saamu and some others. The play draws out the rich cultural heritage of Yoruba history and traditions. Alaafin Aole's story serves as a cautionary tale about the consequences of poor leadership and the importance of accountability. Without doubt, Solanke's play is rooted in Yoruba history and culture, offering valuable insights into the region's past and its ongoing relevance to contemporary society.

4.2 Data and Analysis of Proverbs in Solanke's *Alaafin Aole Arogangan*

4.2.1 The Pragmatic acts strategies used in Solanke's play will be examined based on the prominence of acts as well as how these strategies resonate with pragmatic acts in legitimising

and perpetuating the discursive issues as raised in the play. The pract of the discursive are: Proverbs of Condemnation and Vengeance; Caution or Warning; Boasting and Inciting; Courage and Assertion; Pacifying and Advice; Destruction and Rebellion. The following pragmatic acts will be used in the analysis of this study: Reference henceforth (REF), Shared Cultural knowledge (SCK), Metaphor (MPH), Shared Situational Knowledge (SSK), and Inference (INF).

Datum 1: Here, there is a Pragmatic act of “Condemnation as well as Vengeance”. Despite the pleading from Lafianu to Alaafin Aole on the offence committed by Gboye, the king objected to the plead vehemently and stood his ground that Gboye must be killed. Gboye who mistakenly killed his rival over a woman and he fled away after a death sentence had been passed on him by the Alaafin that ruled before Alaafin Aole (this is an act of “REF”, because, there was a reference to the message being passed here) When Gboye came back, thinking that his sentenced must have been waved away, because of the influence he has with Lafianu. There was a conversation that erupted and proverbs were drawn to accentuate Alaafin’s points (there is an act of SSK here, because the situation is known to both interlocutors).

Aole: *Lafianu! The powers we gave you, arbitrary you use. With impunity, you step on Alaafin, A man cannot from his shadow run. The sin of the fathers, on the children shall be visited.*

The Pragmatics of conflict-motivated Proverbs is used. The proverb here is one involving the (MPH) metaphor of the word ‘shadow’, meaning that one cannot escape their nature, characteristics, or circumstances. Just as a shadow is an extension of the person or object it represents, our problems or characteristics are inherent to us... The voice here is cultural and the (SCK) shared cultural knowledge between Alaafin Aole and Lafianu. The proverb assumes that the listener understands the concept of a shadow being an inseparable part of the person or object it was used to depict the action of Gboye, who escaped but was later captured. The meaningfulness of the proverb is also premised on its (REL) relevance to the present discourse. Hence, Lafianu understands by (INF) inference that Alaafin Aole wants him to describe his exact dilemma to him. The pragmatic effect on the King’s proverb by extension represents allusion (to biblical scripture meaning that the consequences of the actions of parents or ancestors will be borne by their children or descendants. There is a (SK) shared knowledge which assumes that the Lafianu is familiar with the concept of intergenerational consequences and the idea that the actions of one generation can impact subsequent generations. The proverb may be used in situations where someone is experiencing the consequences of their ancestors’ actions, such as family legacies, historical injustices and others. Therefore, the proverbs are meaningfully interpreted by Lafianu based on contextual features of shared knowledge, voice,

relevance and inference. Both proverbs touched on themes of the inevitability of facing one's problems or characteristics, while the second proverb emphasises the inevitability of consequences for actions. These proverbs offer insights into the human experience and the importance of acknowledging and addressing the consequences of our actions.

Datum 2. Here, there is a pract of Caution or Warning.

Ashipa, Afonja and Basorun were discussing the excessive power of the Alaafin Aole, and the rationale for defending the muslim religion in Oyo (INF). Afonja was told by Ashipa that he was not supposed to be the Aare Ona Kakanfo (An Army General) because he is from a royal bloodline (SCK). Through the conversation, the following proverb was used to convey a point:

Basorun: *I questioned Aole's rationale for defending a muslim in our land...*

Ashipa: *And he listened to you, Basorun?*

Basorun: *... But he usurped my power and told his soldiers to go and retrieve the property from my store...*

Ashipa: *... but remember that you are royal blood and should not be the Army General. **The sheep that follows the dog will one day eat faeces.** But you deserve the position...*

The figure of speech used in the proverb above is (MPH) metaphor and an idiomatic expression. The proverb is voiced by Ashipa, who is likely a wise and experienced individual who understands the dynamics of power and loyalty in the kingdom. The proverb means that if you follow or associate with someone who is considered inferior, unwise, or troublesome, you will likely suffer the consequences of their actions or behaviour. The (SK) shared knowledge of the proverb assumes that the listener understands the cultural significance of sheep and dogs in Yoruba culture, where sheep are often seen as gentle and innocent, while dogs are considered inferior or unclean (SCK). The situation that warrants the proverbs was cautioned by Ashipa. He cautioned Afonja against following Basorun's treacherous acts and challenging the king's authority. The (INF) inference here implies that Afonja should be careful not to get entangled in Basorun's schemes, lest he suffer the consequences of Basorun's actions. In addition, the proverb references the common knowledge that dogs are often associated with dirt and filth, and that sheep are generally considered clean animals.

The use of this proverb in this context serves several purposes: 1. Cautionary advice by Ashipa to Afonja to avoid getting involved in the treacherous act of Basorun. 2. The proverb draws on (CREF) cultural reference by (SCK) sharing cultural knowledge and values, emphasising the importance of associating with wise and virtuous individuals. 3. Warning is another area that the proverb serves to warn Afonja about the potential consequences of his actions, and encourages him to reconsider his loyalty to Basorun. By using this proverb, Ashipa can convey

a nuanced message that is both culturally relevant, prudent and memorable. This draws on shared cultural knowledge and values to persuade Afonja to make a wise decision.

Datum3: In this case, there is the use of the Pract of Boasting or Inciting

Lafianu: *It is Kabiyesi. Gboye... has been killed on his orders.*

Afonja: *Aole steps on our toes. The lion, relying on its teeth, thinks he can handle the elephant because he has never felt the weight of the elephant, who shakes the forest with his trumpeting alone!*

The aggrieved Afonja made use of the proverb to query the excessive power of the Alaaḡin in the land. Lafianu reported to Afonja that Alaaḡin Aole had given the order for the killing of Gboye. This did not sit well on the part of the Aare Ona Kakanḡo Afonja, hence, he made use of the proverb. The figure of speech used is (MPH) Metaphor and hyperbole (HPB), meaning that someone confident in their abilities or strengths may underestimate the power or abilities of someone else, simply because they have not experienced it firsthand. With the (SK) shared knowledge, the proverb assumes that the listener understands the cultural significance of lions and elephants, where lions are often seen as powerful predators, but elephants are massive and formidable creatures. In this context, the situation of this proverb is likely used to caution Alaaḡin Aole against underestimating the power and authority of the Aare Ona Kakanḡo Afonja at the same time, Afonja boasts of his power and position as a General... The proverb infers (INF) that Afonja's confidence in his abilities and his association with Basorun may not be enough to take on the king, who has greater power and authority. The proverb (REF) references the physical characteristics and abilities of lions and elephants, emphasising the significant difference in their strength and power. The use of the proverb in this context serves several purposes: 1. Cautionary warning; the proverb serves as a warning to Alaaḡin Aole about the dangers of underestimating the power of the Generalissimo. (2). The proverb encourages humility on the part of the language used by Afonja to the action taken by the King. It shows that there is a limit to abilities and strengths. (3). The proverb also emphasises the importance of respecting those in positions of power and authority. By using this proverb, the speaker is able to convey a nuanced message that is both culturally relevant and memorable, cautioning Afonja against taking on the king without fully understanding the consequences of his actions.

Datum 4: There is a pract of Courage and Assertion of Authority through bravery

Another example of a pragmatic conflict-motivated proverb is seen in the words of Afonja, where he showed bravery after he was challenged by Alaaḡin Aole on his mission to go and capture Apomu, a town under the supervision of Ile Ife. He knew that the town would not be easy to capture because of the hills that surrounded the town. He said, "You know how

impregnable Apomu is. What with its mountains and hills? Send me to an honourable death and I will gladly go. All the chiefs rejected this mission except Saamu. (SCK) There is shared cultural knowledge here because, culturally, if Are Ona Kakanfo should go to war and fail to win, he dares not return to Oyo.

Aole: *Apomu we have chosen. Apomu it will be. No Are Ona Kakanfo has ever refused his liege's directive. No Are Ona Kakanfo has ever returned from a defeat alive. Or is our Are Ona Kakanfo afraid?*

Afonja: *This Are Ona Kakanfo is afraid of nobody. When the lion roars, all the animals in the forest scamper for safety. If Ogun decides to kill, where shall the condemned run to?*

In the proverb above, there is the use of metaphor (MPH) and rhetorical question (RQ). Metaphor is used to compare the lion's roar to the power of Ogun, a Yoruba deity associated with iron, war, and hunting. A rhetorical question is used from Afonja's question, "Where shall the condemned run to?" This emphasises the inevitability of fate.

The (INF) inference here is that Afonja is not afraid of going to war, but he is aware of the dangers and uncertainties involved. Afonja knows that if Alaafin has decided to eliminate him, there is no escape or refuge. The situation here is that Afonja is responding to the challenge of being afraid and refusing to go to war. The proverb is used to convey his understanding of the situation and the potential consequences of his actions. Under the (SCK) shared cultural knowledge, the use of the lion and Ogun as symbols of power and danger reflects the Yoruba cultural context. The proverb assumes that the listener is familiar with the Yoruba mythology and the significance of Ogun. The proverb is (REL) relevant to the situation because it highlights the idea that some forces are beyond human control. Afonja is using the proverb to convey his acceptance of fate and the inevitability of consequences.

There is the use of voiced (VCE) opinion by Afonja. Afonja is using indirect language to convey his message, avoiding confrontation with the Alaafin. There is the use of cultural reference (CREF) in the use of the proverb and the reference to Ogun demonstrates Afonja's cultural knowledge and sophistication. In addition, the use of rhetorical questions emphasises the futility of resistance and the inevitability of fate. The implicature here is that Afonja's response implies that he is aware of the Alaafin's true intentions and is resigned to his fate. The proverb suggests that Afonja is not naïve about the dangers of the situation and is prepared to face the consequences. By using this message, Afonja is able to convey a nuanced message that is both culturally relevant and memorable, highlighting the inevitability of fate and the dangers of underestimating the power of those in authority.

Datum5: Here, there is the practice of Pacifying or Advice

Modeke: *Oyo is no longer what it used to be. A land of unified people all going about their duties.*

Samu: *We are not the cause. Some circumstances, sometimes, are beyond the control of humans...if the Alaafin cannot see eye to eye with the Oyomesi, and the Oyomesi do not want to reason with him, then, it is not only us that will suffer...*

Modeke: *But the Kabiyesi is doing his best.*

Samu: *Yes. And the Oyomesi is doing its best too. Both trying to ruin Oyo.*

Chorus: *Ija de, orin d'owe. Ote de, oro di wahala. (Within the presence of a fight, songs become proverbial. Within the coming of the plot, words become problematic.*

In this context, Ajani and Agbaje are friends and they both met at a joint where they both played games. Ajani is a Prince while Agbaje is the son of Basorun, the King's second in command. While playing the game, Ajani was defeated and he scattered the game, and this led to a fight between them. Samu, one of the Oyomesi, saw them and rebuked them. He asked them to go to their various homes. At this setting, Modeke was with Samu and he was advising Samu to call the Basorun to order and advise him to nail the problem before it gets to a situation where the handshake will go beyond the elbow. Thus, the above proverbs were used. There is (INF) inference here because the two people in the picture here, are fully aware of the situation at hand in the Empire.

The proverb, "Within the presence of a fight, songs become proverbial. Within the coming of a plot, words become problematic." The figure of speech here is (MPH) metaphor and an idiom. Meaning that in times of conflict or crisis, words and actions can be misinterpreted or have unintended consequences. It highlights the importance of being cautious with one's words and actions during difficult situations. The (INF) inference here is that the conflict between Ajani and Agbaje is not just a simple disagreement, but rather a symptom of a larger issue. Modeke is advising Samu to be cautious and to involve Basorun, the head of the Oyomesi, to settle the differences between the two parties before the situation escalates. The situation here is that the conflict between Ajani and Agbaje has the potential to escalate and involve more people, including those in positions of power. Modeke is trying to prevent further conflict and promote a peaceful resolution.

The proverb reflects the Yoruba cultural value of caution and diplomacy in times of conflict. The use of the proverb assumes that the listener is familiar with the importance of careful communication and conflict resolution in Yoruba culture, which is (SCK). The proverb is relevant (REL) to the situation because it highlights the potential consequences of not addressing the conflict in a timely and peaceful manner. The proverb is used for peace to reign

between the Alaafin and the Chiefs. However, there is a cautionary advice from Modeke to Samu, encouraging him to be careful and proactive in resolving the conflict. The use of the proverb demonstrates Modeke's diplomatic language and approach to conflict resolution. The proverb reflects the cultural significance of careful communication and conflict resolution in Yoruba society. By using this proverb, Modeke can convey a nuanced message that is both culturally relevant and memorable, highlighting the importance of caution and diplomacy in times of conflict.

Datum 6: There is the pract of Destruction or Rebellion here. Afonja aimed at destroying the Oyo Empire and forming his kingdom at Ilorin.

Afonja: We shall still conquer them; the sons of slaves are themselves slaves...

Opele: Urge the men on? To what Lafianu? ... Why have you not attacked it with your regiment? Are you not of the royal regiment?

Afonja: ... I do not intend to die the death of a coward. If one cannot go forward, Adegun, our fathers say one should retrace one's footsteps...

Adegun: ... Instead of attacking Apomu, let us turn our arms against Alaafin Aole. "Kaka ki eku ma jese, a fi se a wa danu." (What we can't appropriate, we destroy).

The figure of speech used in this proverb is (ID/MPH) idiom and metaphor... The meaning is that if they cannot achieve their goals or gain what they want, they will destroy it so that no one can have it either. The (INF) inference here is that Adegun and Afonja's war followers are planning to revolt against the Alaafin, and they are willing to take drastic measures to achieve their goals. The (SSK) situation is that Afonja's mission to conquer Apomu has failed, even though the King of Apomu later committed suicide. So, his plan with his cohorts is to attack Alaafin Aole and claim independence from Oyo. The fact that if he returns empty-handed to Oyo without the head of the King of Apomu, it will be so disastrous to him. The situation has led to a turning point where Afonja and his followers are considering rebellion.

The shared cultural background (SCK) in this act of proverb reflects the Yoruba cultural value of determination and resilience in the face of adversity. The use of a proverb assumes that the listener is familiar with the importance of perseverance and strategic thinking in Yoruba culture. The proverb is (REL) relevant to the situation because it highlights the desperation and frustration felt by Afonja and his followers. Adegun's use of the proverb emphasises the idea that they would rather destroy everything than submit to Alaafin's authority. Adegun's use of a proverb demonstrates subservient language, as they are planning to revolt against the Alaafin. The proverb reflects the cultural significance of determination in the face of adversity. The use of a proverb serves as a rhetorical strategy to persuade others to join their cause and to justify

their actions. Finally, the implications of the proverb suggest that Afonja and his followers are willing to take drastic measures to achieve their goals, which could lead to further conflict and instability. The use of the proverb highlights the complexity of the situation and the potential consequences of their actions.

Findings and Conclusion

This study on the pragmatics of motivated proverbs in Stephen O. Solanke's *Alaafin Aole Arogangan* has demonstrated the significant role of proverbs in conflict resolution, negotiation, and power dynamics. The study highlights the importance of considering the context and cultural background in understanding the meaning and function of proverbs in conflict situations. The use of proverbs like "when the lion roars, all the animals in the forest scamper for safety" and "what we can't appropriate, we destroy" reveals the complex power dynamics at play and how characters use language to negotiate and manipulate their relationships.

In light of Mey's pragmatic acts theory, this study demonstrates how proverbs are used as a form of pragmatic act to achieve specific goals and create social effects. The use of proverbs in the play serves as a form of praxis, where characters use language to shape their social context and relationships.

The tragic outcome of the play, where Afonja and the Oyomesi's actions lead to the downfall of the Alaafin and ultimately to Afonja's demise, highlights the importance of considering the long-term consequences of our actions and words (Law of Karma). The study contributes to our understanding of the role of language in shaping social relationships and conflict resolutions, and highlights the importance of cultural context in understanding the meaning and function of proverbs. This study has implications for conflict resolution and negotiation in various contexts, highlighting the importance of considering cultural background and context. The use of proverbs as a form of pragmatic act can be applied to various fields, including linguistics, anthropology, history and communication.

References

- Achebe, C. (1958). *Things fall apart*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Limited.
- Adegbola, O.F. (2021). Conceptualisation of the women: A critical analysis of selected Yoruba Proverbs. *Journal of Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 11(13) pp. Pp 44-58
- Adegoju, A. (2009). 'Rhetoric of conflict-related Yoruba proverbs: guide to constructive conflict resolution in Africa.' *African Study Monographs*, 30(2): 55 – 69.
- Adeiyongo, J. A. (2017). Anzaakaa: A reflection of Tiv socio-cultural norms and worldview" in T. Adejoro & T. Udu (Eds.). *Tiv Language, culture and political economy: Issues, challenges and prospects Katsina-Ala: Gold Ink Company.*

- Ademowo, A. J., and Balogun, N.O. (2015). Proverbs, value and the development question in contemporary Africa: A case study of Yoruba proverbs. *Omniscience: A multidisciplinary Journal. Vol. 4 (2)*.
- Adeyemi, J. A. & Balogun, N. O. (2014). Proverbs, Values and the Development Question in Contemporary Africa: A Case Study of Yoruba Proverbs in www.anthroserbia.org/.../pdf. Accessed 23/3/2025.
- Ajala, A.T. (2017). *A pragmatic analysis of Olusegun Obasanjo's Memoirs* (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation). Department of English, University of Ilorin, Ilorin.
- Ajiboye, E.M. (2012). Proverbs and the management of conflicts in Oum Ndimele (Ed.). Language is interactive and communication in a dynamic world. *A festschrift for Chinyere Ohiri-Aniche. Vol. 9:1 pp.305-317*.
- Alabi, T. A. (2017). The poetics of Yoruba proverbs in Nigerian literature in Nigeria. *International Journal of literature, language and linguistics. Vol. 6 (3)*
- Aragbuwa, A.C and Omotunde, O.O. (2022). Examination into the metaphorization of women in proverbs in Yoruba language. *Clarep Journal of English and Linguistics (C-JEL) Vol. 4 (1)*
- Ayodabo, J.O. and Ayinuola, O. A. (2025). "Lexical constructions of emi lokan strategies in political campaign speeches of Bola Ahmed Tinubu." *Arusha Working Papers in African Linguistics, 7(1): 79-94*.
- Cohen, A. (1996). Speech acts. In S.L. McKay and N. H. Hornberger (Eds.), *Sociolinguistic and language teaching*. Cambridge: University Press. (pp. 383-420).
- Coker, O. and Coker, A. (2009). Cultural Exploration as Alternative Route to National Development: Insights from Yoruba Verbal Arts. KEMANUSIAAN. Retrieved Online From: [www.http://web.usm.my/kajh/kajh16/KAJH1Coker](http://web.usm.my/kajh/kajh16/KAJH1Coker) 20th June, 2012.
- Dixit, M. (2014). Theories of Conflict Resolution: An Analysis. Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS). www.ipcs.org/article. Accessed 30/3/2025
- Egenti, M.C. & Okoye, A.N. (2021). On the role of Igbo proverbs in conflict resolution and reconciliation. *AJOL Journal of Literature and Linguistics. Vol. 8 (2)*
- Ehineni, T.O. (2022). The pragmatics of Yoruba proverbs in Ahmed Yerima's Igatibi, Ajagunmale, and Mojagbe. *International Journal of Intercultural Communication. (Vol. 4; 1)*
- Emenike, A. O. and Agu, K. (2021). The potency of pragmatic theoretical frameworks in the analysis of female literary writings in Northern Nigeria. *Journal of Bulletin Advanced English Studies (BAES). Vol 6(1) pp14-22*
- Idegwu, O.O. (2022). Concepts of conflict, its causes, effects and to minimize it in human relationship. *Clarep Journal of English and Linguistics (C-JEL) Vol. 4 (1)*
- Igwebuike, E. (2020). Pragmatic acts and functions of proverbs in Igbo novels on conflict. *Journal of linguistics and language in Education. Vol. 6: 1*.
- Ik - Iloanusi A. 2014. Proverbs – A Speech Act Analysis. An unpublished Master's thesis submitted to the Department of Linguistics. Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Akwa
- Makami, R. (2012) African Proverbs and Conflict Management: A Study of selected Shona, Oshivambo, Yoruba and Swahili Proverbial Expressions. [https://ir/polytechnic.edu.na/bitstream/handle](https://ir.polytechnic.edu.na/bitstream/handle). Accessed 28/3/2025
- Mensah, E. (2013). Proverbs in Nigerian Pidgins in *Journal of Anthropological Research* 69(1) 87 - 115.
- Mey, J. L. (2008). "Impeach or exercise?" or what's in the (common) round? In Istvan, K.& Jacob, M. (Eds.), *Intention, common ground and the egocentric speaker-hearer*. (pp. 255-275). New York: Deutsche: Nationalbibliothek.
- Obeng, S.G. (1996). The proverb as mitigating and polite strategy in Akan discourse. *Anthropological Linguistics, 38(3), 521-549*.

- Obiajulu, A.T. (2022). Protests and conflicts arising from selected plays by Zulu Sofola and Tess Onwueme.”. *Clarep Journal of English and Linguistics (C-JEL) Vol. 4 (1)*
- Odebunmi, A. (2008). Pragmatic functions of crisis-motivated proverbs in Ola Rotimi: The Gods are not to blame. *Linguistik Online*, 1(33).
- Ogbuehi, P.N. and Olasehinde, C.C.O. (2025). Pragmatic functions of Igbo proverbs: A study of Ihioma Dialect and Cultural Communication.
- Ojumah C.O. (2022). Importance of silence in a conflict changes situation in Chimamanda Adichie’s *Purples Hibiscus*. *Clarep Journal of English and Linguistics (C-JEL) Vol. 4 (1)*
- Raji-, Oyelade, A. (1999). Post-proverbials in Yoruba culture: A playful blasphemy. *Research in African literature*, 30(1), 74-82.
- Solanke, S.O. (2024). *Alaafin Aole Arogangan*. Ibadan: Crafted and Bound Works.
- Yankah, K. (1989). Proverbs: The aesthetics of traditional communication. *Research in African Literatures*. 20 (3) Indiana University Press.
- Yankah, K. (1989). The proverb in the context of Akan rhetoric: A theory of proverb praxis. New York: Diasporic African Press.
- Zakariah, M. (2018). Proverbs and Conflict Management: A Sociolinguistic Approach in Abdulsalam, S. et al (ed). *Bringing our Culture Home: Festschrift for Bade Ajayi at 70*. Department of Linguistics & Nigerian Languages, University of Ilorin, Ilorin. Pp 277 – 235.

Kenya's Rural Landscapes and Colonial Destructive Will in Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*

Timi Oyabara, PhD.

Department of English and Literary Studies

Niger Delta University

Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State

kurotimioyabara@gmail.com

Abstract

For over five decades, scholars and critics have subjected Ngugi's A Grain of Wheat to different interpretations. Most of the studies centre on Ngugi's adaptation of Joseph Conrad's Under Western Eyes, the stylistic devices, the political, structural and historical thrusts of the novel. This paper shifts from these previous ways of reading to engage with Ngugi's representation of Kenya's rural landscape in the novel. In so doing, the paper looks at the aesthetic, social or recreational, economic, political and spiritual values of landscape to the Kenyans as well as the lifestyle of the people of the countryside before the destruction of the landscape and the people by the colonialists. The paper argues that it is not the drive towards modernity, but colonial destructive will that informs this destruction. The paper uses the post-colonial theory and the ecocritical approach to literary criticism. The article is analytical and is organised in four sections. The first section is the introduction, while the second explores the landscapes of Thabai and other villages in the novel. The third section deals with the importance of land in the life of the characters, while the final section focuses on the destruction of the rural landscapes and the people by the Europeans. The paper finds that, like his other novels, landscape is a dominating presence in A Grain of Wheat. It concludes that Ngugi uses the landscape to show the relationships between the Kenyans or the Gikuyu people and the natural world.

Keywords: *Kenya, Thabai, landscape, colonialists/Europeans, Ngugi.*

Kenya is ... well known for breathtaking landscapes and wildlife.

- *CARE International*, 12.

Much of East Africa has a mild tropical climate made cool and beautiful by hills.

- Ime Ikiddeh, "Introduction," *Weep Not, Child*, vii.

Introduction

For decades, several writers such as William Wordsworth, Thomas Hardy, D.H. Lawrence, Niyi Osundare, Nadine Gordimer, Chinua Achebe, Legson Kayira, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and many others have used landscape as an aspect in their works. In writing about the landscape, writers use it for various purposes, namely to show its beauty and human relationships to it, to foreground nature or represent the natural world and how it is sometimes destroyed by human or natural agents. Landscape also provides a background or setting for the story for writers. As Christine Loflin puts it, landscape provides a "picture as a backdrop to the action of the novel"

“African Arid Landscapes”, 1) and according to Fred Langman, landscape is used as “setting for the action or an accompaniment of the mood [of a work]” (35). In addition, landscape writers focus their attention on the ideal countryside or ruralscape as well as the moral and social character of the people, for as Louis James remarks, “landscape in literature is a view, not only of the countryside, but of the moral and social milieu of the writer and readers” (61). According to Amanda Hammer, in post-colonial literature, “much attention” of landscape writers is “in the construction of postcolonial identities and nations” (132).

In African Literature, Ngugi is perhaps the most prominent representative of landscape, for he frequently injects Kenya’s rural landscapes into his novels. In doing this, he uses the landscape to show the social, recreational, aesthetic, economic, political and spiritual values of his tribe – the Gikuyu, and the subsequent destruction of the landscape by colonialist and neo-colonialist forces. As Loflin avers, “[i]n Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s novels, the importance of landscape is paramount, as the landscape of Kenya is intimately related to the community’s spiritual, social and political identity” (“Visions of Africa”, 76). Commenting also on Ngugi’s use of landscape in his novels, Adrian Roscoe says that Ngugi has “a feeling for landscape and paint[s] it well [171]. As Roscoe argues, although “other African writers” also represent landscape in their works, “one’s sense of landscape’s beauty and its meaning for an author and his people are vitally more present in Ngugi than in most,” adding that “landscape is a palpable influence on the physical and spiritual lives of the characters. It is, in a sense, a part of character” (171). Furthermore, in describing the landscape, Ngugi does not separate it from the characters, but following “African patterns of description”, he makes the landscape “an integral part of the daily life and experiences of the people who live within it” (Loflin, “African Arid Landscapes,”1).

In exploring the landscape in his novels, Ngugi usually evokes the landscape of his village, Limuru, for as Ime Ikiddeh points out, “[w]hatever names he gives to the location of his novels – Mukuyu and Kameno, Kipanga or Thabai – the landscape remains that of the hilly country around Limuru, his own home” (75). About this, Roscoe also adds his voice, saying that in representing the landscape, Ngugi usually “portrays a particular people in a particular locale. His canvas is restricted to Kenya’s Central Province ... Only the upland ridges and valleys of Gikuyuland are chosen for evocation” (178).

In all his novels, landscape manifests in the ways Ngugi consistently and compulsively recreates or describes features of Kenya or Gikuyu’s landscapes like hills, rivers, mountains, valleys, forests, trees, prairie, caves, land and so on to show the connection between the people and the natural world. Against the foregoing backdrop, this paper explores Ngugi’s

representation of Kenya's rural landscapes and their destruction by the colonialists in *A Grain of Wheat*. In doing this, the paper focuses on a description of the functions the landscapes perform about the characters, namely the aesthetic, social or recreational, economic, political and spiritual functions, as well as the destruction of the landscapes by the colonialists and neo-colonialists.

II

In *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi evokes the landscape of Thabai and other ridges. Like Hardy's Wessex, like Lawrence's Eastwood, the landscape of Ngugi's literary topography is very beautiful. Ngugi himself underscores this in a 1993 interview with Charles Cantapulo. Pressed by his interviewer whether he makes use of landscape in his novels, Ngugi replies: "It's a lot in my novels. Certainly, in *A Grain of Wheat*, the landscape is very beautiful; I am very conscious of landscape" (350). This beautiful landscape is portrayed in various sections in *A Grain of Wheat*. One occurs at the novel's very beginning in the author's description of the landscape of Thabai in the following terms:

Thabai was a big village. When built, it combined several ridges: Thabai, Kamandura, Kihingo, and parts of Weru. And even in 1963, it had not changed much from the days in 1955 when the grass-thatched roofs and mud walls were hastily collected together, while the white man's sword hung dangerously above people's necks to protect them from their brethren in the forest. Some huts had crumbled a few had been pulled down, yet the village maintained an unbroken orderliness; from a distance it appeared a huge mass of grass from which smoke rose to the sky as from a burnt sacrifice. (4)

This excerpt describes the beautiful landscape of Thabai, showing the reader the prominent features of the landscape in the manner of landscape painting. Evoking a rustic setting, the features of the landscape are the ridges; a description of the houses: "grass-thatched roofs and mud walls", then "the forests" and finally the orderly nature of the village despite its ravaged nature.

The climate, one of the components of the landscape of Kenya, is also beautiful, cool and absorbing, and it is partly this climate that attracts the white characters such as Dr. Lynd, John Thompson and his wife Margery to Kenya. When Dr. Lynd, the colonial plant pathologist at the Githima Forestry Station, arrives in Kenya, it is the beautiful climate that attracts her: "She [Dr. Lynd] liked the country and the climate and so had decided to stay" (41). Thompson, the

colonial administrator, for his part, is also thrilled by the beautiful climate of Kenya. He first came to East Africa as a soldier during the Second World War and was fascinated by the climate of Kenya. On his second and present visit to Kenya as a colonial administrator, Thompson remains so thrilled by the climate that when he arrives at Mombasa, he writes, “I am delighted... to touch the red earth of Kenya. I was here during the war and I liked the climate” (48). Here, Thompson sees the landscape of Kenya as a paradise restored and the reader is a witness to the pastoral implications expressed clearly by his use of the word “delighted”. Even in the notes he makes at various times and places which he intends to put into “a coherent philosophy” in his book, *Prospero in Africa*, Thompson remains fascinated by the landscape of Kenya, especially that of Nyeri, one of the ridges of Thabai:

Nyeri is full of mountains, hills and deep valleys covered with impenetrable forests. These primordial trees have always awed primitive minds. The darkness and misery of the forest, have led him (the primitive man) to magic and ritual. (49)

Furthermore, Thompson celebrates the beautiful nature of Thabai’s landscape and the friendly disposition of the people of the village while interrogating Mugo to extract a confession about the oath. As Thompson questions Mugo and the latter says he is from Thabai, the narrator tells us that “for a few seconds he [Thompson] tried a friendly chat about Thabai: how green the landscape, how nice and friendly its inhabitants” (116). Yet, as we shall see in the last segment of the paper, it is Thompson who presides over the destruction of both the landscape and people of Thabai, which he celebrates here. Thompson’s statement echoes Wanja’s about Ilmorog in *Petals of Blood* when she, Karega and Munira return from the city to Ilmorog and see how the village is ravaged by drought: “So green in the past... So green and hopeful... and now this” (107).

Another locus where Ngugi depicts the beauty of the landscape is his description of the beautiful landscape of Mahee, which is in the Rift Valley, the heart of the White Highlands. With a touch of intimacy as if addressing someone, the narrator describes the topography of Mahee in the following terms:

If you stood at Mahee at any time of day, you would see the walls of the escarpment, an enchanting guard to one of the most beautiful valleys in the land. The walls climbed in steps to the highlands, a row smaller hills, some hewn round at the top while others bore

scoops and volcano mouths, receded into shrouds of mist and mystery. (16)

Like Nyeri, Mahee is also characterised by features of the landscape such as valleys, highlands and hills which beautify the environment. Such environments appeal to white people. It is not, therefore, difficult to see that the author partly uses the landscape as the source of conflict in the novel, for it is the forceful appropriation of the people's lands by the white settlers that provokes the conflict in the novel.

An example is Mahee itself, which is seized by the white settlers and made the White Highlands, where some of them live, and they chose to live there because the climate is cool and similar to that of Europe. As Elspeth Huxley explains, on the arrival of the Europeans in East Africa, they "instinctively select a country where the climate, vegetation and temperature most resemble those of the cold north" (72). It is in the White Highlands that we see three dominant colonial structures of coercion – the transit prison for those waiting to be taken to concentration camps, the police garrison and the police station, described as "a symbol of that might which dominated Kenya to the door of every hut" (84). However, Mahee is later recaptured by Kihika and his forest fighters.

In building the above-mentioned colonial structures in Mahee, the white settlers altered the pristine landscape of the place and refashioned it based on English models. This, of course, is not new, for it is the practice of the colonialists that on their arrival in the colonies, they always improve the landscapes of the colonies to suit their purposes. This, they do by constructing various edifices. Drawing upon Zimbabwe's experience, Lily G.N. Mabura writes:

Whitemen such as Rhodes set out to improve Zimbabwe's landscape, based principally, on their imperialist ambitions in the construction of military cities like Bulawayo. Once this was accomplished, they further embellished the landscape using a symbol based on English or other Western landscapes. (104)

There are two predominant forest landscapes in *A Grain of Wheat*, which provides aesthetic and social or recreational functions to the characters. They are the Githima forest and the Keninie Forest. Githima Forest is a thick, beautiful, healthy and fertile forest with abundant natural resources, and it is these natural qualities of the forest that attract the Europeans to the place. In keeping with their usual imagination, Githima Forest, for the Europeans, is an unoccupied space and is not owned by anybody – a forest which is owned by the Kenyans and has served their needs for centuries. Believing that the forest is not owned by anybody, the

Europeans begin a self-appointed mission to tame and make it useful by creating the Githima Forestry and Agricultural Research Station to which I will return in the final section of this paper.

In his description of the Githima Forest landscape, Ngugi opens before his readers the buildings in the area and in so doing, he shows the disparity between the European houses and the African houses. Some of the Europeans, like John Thompson, live in the Forestry Station in the Githima, and his house is a beautiful one surrounded by flowers. In the words of the narrator, “[a] neatly trimmed hedge of cider scrubs surrounded Thompson’s bungalow. At the entrance green creepers coiled on a wood stand, massed into an arch at the top and then fell to the hedge at the sides” (34). Mind that the word “green” signifies beauty and freshness associated with the flora and fauna in forests all over the world.

Within the house, we see Mrs. Margery Thompson’s gardens characterised by flowers of different colours. As the narrator describes it, “[t]he hedge [of the house] closed gardens of flowers: flame lilies, morning glory, sunflowers, bougainvillaea. However, it was the garden of roses that stood out in colour above others. Mrs Margery Thompson had cultivated red roses, pink roses – roses of all shades” (34). While living in Githima Forest, Thompson’s wife, Mrs. Margery Thompson, has so loved the place and their house that as Kenya’s independence approaches and the Europeans prepare to leave Kenya for Britain, Mrs. Margery Thompson cries out painfully with a sense of nostalgia:

Would she never, never see Githima again? Would her flowers mean anything to whoever would take her place in the house? Every corner of the house, the chairs, the table, the beds and even the walls, held a memory for her; in her wanderings from district to district all over Kenya, no other house, no other place was intimately bound up with her. No other place had given her such a sense of release of freedom, of power. (44)

In contrast to the beautiful landscape of Thompson’s house, there is the only “licenced eating house at Githima” known as “Your Friend Unto Death” (36), a frightening, polluted and miserable hotel meant only for the Africans. According to the narrator, “[t]he stony walls [of the hotel] were covered with grease, a fertile ground for flies” (36). It calls to mind hotels like Six Eighty, May Fair and Farewell Bar in *Petals of Blood* and Sell Me Death and Angel’s Hotel in *Wizard of the Crow*. In *A Grain of Wheat*, the Githima Forest landscape functions as a site for love-making, for it is in that forest that Mrs. Margery Thompson and Dr. Henry Van Dyke, the colonial “meteorological officer” (31), make love at the back of his car seat. This resonates

with the way the wife of the Minister for Truth and Justice had sex with her driver in a black Mercedes-Benz in the wilderness in Ngugi's *Matigari*.

Apart from the Githima Forest, there is also the Keninie Forest landscape, which provides social or recreational functions to the characters in the novel. This is seen in the way the people of Thabai, Rung'ei, Keninie and the other villages go to dance and to recreate themselves in Keninie Forest. Before they go to this forest for their social and recreational activities, they first go to the railway station, which itself provides a "meeting place for the young" (63) to socialise or just to see the train. According to David Cook and Michael Okenimkpe, "unlike the restless moving, disruptive train, the railway station serves as a dynamic, unifying purpose by attracting villagers of the neighbourhood to weekly gathering on Sundays at which social issues and the future in general are discussed" (83). Like a tourist centre, the villagers go to the train station on Sundays to "meet one another, to talk, to gossip, to laugh" (63) and even hatch love-affairs. One leaves the train station, and they proceed to Keninie Forest to further socialise or dance. As the narrator informs us:

From the [railway] station they normally went to dance in Keninie Forest overlooking the Rift Valley. Guitar players occupied a place of honour in this community; beautiful girls surround them and paid tribute with their eyes. Men bought dances. When a person bought a dance, the guitarist played for him alone, praising his name, always the son of a man. The man danced to the rhythm alone or invited his friends to join him while others watched. Nobody else could come in. The conventions governing the dances in the wood were well understood. (63)

During the dance sessions, the narrator further says that "men and women fell into groups and laughed and buzzed, animating the wood" (83). The dances foster unity and interpersonal relationships among the people and also help them to forget their sorrows.

In and around Kininie Forest are trees, valleys and hills which give beauty to the environment and make it cool: "It was cool in Keninie Forest" (83), says the narrator. We see these features of the forest landscape during the dance sessions in the forest. For instance, when Wambuku and Kihika are dancing together in the forest, the narrator says they dance "their way round the silent trees, their feet shuffling through the fallen leaves. The tree-trunks also seemed to move among the dancing couples" (84). When they later move to "an open place in the sun," it is a landscape characterised by "green wattle trees and bush sloped sleeping into the valley below. The valley sprawled flat for a distance and then into a ridge of small hills" (84).

As a recreational centre for the people, Keninie Forest is where they run competitive races, such as when Karanja out-runs Gikonyo in the race to the train as a test of strength. Love relationships are also played out in this forest. Soon after Karanja defeats Gikonyo in their race competition, we are told that Gikonyo and Mumbi “walked side by side” in the wood, which “made a cool shelter from the sun” (79). Like the lovers in Robert Frost’s poem, “Two Look at Two,” who explore nature in the woods, Gikonyo and Mumbi also explore the beauty of nature in Keninie Forest: “Let us explore the wood,” Gikonyo suggests to Mumbi and “they came to an open place at the centre of the forest... He stood facing Mumbi and surrendered himself to a power he knew drew them together. He held her hand and his fingers were full, so sensitive” (80). Like the hill in *Weep Not, Child*, where Njoroge and Mwihaki forge their love relationship and like Honia River in *The River Between* where Wayaiki and Nyambura do the same, Keninie Forest is where Gikonyo and Mumbi forge their love relationship in *A Grain of Wheat*. As Gikonyo remarks, “[e]very day I found a new Mumbi. Together we plunge into the forest. And I was not afraid of the darkness” (86). And eventually, it is here that Gikonyo makes love for the first time to Mumbi on the grass.

Following in the landscape writing tradition, Ngugi represents Keninie Forest landscape as a refuge or, as William Slaymaker will put it, a “haven and security for the Mau Mau” (688) freedom fighters. It is in this forest that the author foreshadows the war between the freedom fighters and the Europeans, for it is here that the Kenyans draw their counter-resistance plans against the colonialists to reclaim their lost lands and souls. As the State of Emergency is declared by Boring, the colonial Governor, the narrator says that the people “went less to the train, the dance sessions in the forests turned into meetings where plans for the day of reckoning were drawn” (87).

Thus, as soon as Jomo Kenyatta and other nationalist leaders are arrested, Kihika and other Mau Mau guerrilla fighters, such as the woman Njeri, General R. and Lt. Koinandu, run into the forests to fight the Europeans. It is from the Keninie Forest that Kihika and his men come and attack Mahee, the big police garrison and transit prison and free the Kenyan inmates. It is also from this forest that the Mau Mau terrorists appear and disappear after shooting the cruel Chief Muruithia. When Karanja is appointed Chief by the colonial government, he leads “homeguards into the forest to hunt down the Freedom Fighters” (129). It is in Keninie Forest that Kihika is captured and subsequently hanged by the Europeans.

While fighting in the forest, the Mau Mau guerrillas depend on the spiritual powers of the natural elements of the forest landscape such the mountains, for according to Lieutenant Koinandu, one of the Mau Mau members, before engaging the Europeans in any battle, the

freedom fighters pray, “facing Mount Kenya” (20). This is because “[t]he Kikuyus believe that God dwelled in the mountain” (Wangari Maathai, 173). Otherwise called Mount Kirinyaga or “Mwenanyaga,” Cook and Okeninkpe write that the mountain “is the source of spiritual value for the people and of their ancient, communal concepts of good life” (88). The Mau Mau freedom fighters also exploited the mountains, which they knew very well as their hideouts in the war against the Europeans in the forests. About this, Tirop Simatei writes:

It is in the forested mountains, especially Mount Kenya and Nyandura that the Mau Mau guerrillas enact mastery of the landscape to the awe of the colonial police. They become experts of moving and blending into the local terrain. In the war of liberating the land, the landscape itself becomes an invaluable ally. (88)

III

In *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi’s description of the landscape flows into an exploration of the land and its role in the life of the people. Meena Pydah observes that “Ngugi, through his descriptions of landscape, introduces the importance of land in the lives of the Africans” (110). The land is portrayed as a fertile one, a prime part of the landscape which provides for the economic needs of the people and ensures their survival. According to the Gukuyu creation myth, the land was a divine gift, one given to them by God, and in Ngugi’s fictional writings, the land assumes both economic and spiritual importance. As Roscoe points out, land in Ngugi’s novels is “the central factor in an equation guaranteeing the economic, social, psychological and spiritual survival of a people” (171). In his book, *Facing Mount Kenya*, Jomo Kenyatta also writes: “As agriculturalists the Gikuyu people depend entirely on the land. It supplies them with the needs of life, through which mental and spiritual contentment is achieved” (21).

As an economic commodity, land provides food for the people. Also, the forest landscape, such as the Kenia Forest, the Aberdares Mountains and Mount Kenya, is pregnant with trees like Muriri wood, podo and camphor timber, which Gikonyo uses in making furniture for the people of Thabai. It is because of the importance of the economic trees found in these mountains that, as Gikonyo tells one of his female customers, “the white people appropriated that land to themselves” (65). And as Thomas P. Ocfansky informs us, on the arrival of the Europeans in Kenya, “large quantities of timber were required to build schools and hospitals for the expanding indigenous population” (137). This is perhaps why the Europeans appropriated the Aberdares Mountains which Ocfansky also affirms is a wooded area in Kenya replete with

trees like “cedar yellow wood, Ibean camphor, Ibean poon, black and white wood, stinkwood, and pillar” (136).

The people of Thabai are basically pastoralists and this partly shows how the landscape influences the people, either as farmers or animal rearers. Ngugi exemplifies this through the lives of four characters: Waitherero, Mumbi’s father, Githua, and especially Mugo. Early in the novel, the author says that Mugo’s aunt, Waitherero, rears goats and sheep. At the death of his parents, Mugo lived with Waitherero and “used to sleep on the floor in his aunt’s hut sharing the fire place with goats and sheep” (7). Githua, the freedom fighter with a maimed leg like Abdulla in *Petals of Blood* is a poultry farmer before he loses his leg in an accident. As he recalls, before this incident, “Money was nothing to me. I was negotiating for a farm in Kerarapon, near Ngong. At home here I had poultry” (109). Mumbi’s father, Mbugua, is also a farmer who “earned his standing in the village through his achievements as a warrior and a farmer” (66).

It is, however, through the life and character of Mugo that Ngugi most illustrates this pastoral life of the people. Until Kihika “come [s] into his life” (9), Mugo, an orphan, has nothing to do with politics, not even with the Uhuru celebrations near the corner, but with farming: “I only looked after my little shamba and crops” (169), says Mugo. His ambition is to make a name and a mark in society through farming. Therefore, “[h]e turned to the soil. He would labour, sweat, and through success and wealth, force society to recognise him. There was, for him, solace in the very act of breaking the soil” (9). Thus, like Thomas Hardy’s Michael Henchard in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and Chinua Achebe’s Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, Mugo is always with a knife and a hoe, going to and returning from his farm.

When he is first seen, Mugo has woken up from sleep and he is heading to his farm, a piece of land given to him by Wairu, a village elder because Mugo’s piece of land has been seized by the whitemen while his is in detention: “He took a jembe and a panga to repeat the daily pattern his life had now fallen into... To reach his new strip of shamba which lay on the other side of Thabai, Mugo had to walk through the dusty streets” (3). Alone on his farm, cultivating his crops, Mugo’s fully himself. The land itself has become his identity, and he is part of it. Even when he deems it necessary to betray Kihika to the colonial authorities, it is after the day’s farming in another of his farms “near Rung’ei Railway Station” (107) that Mugo goes to Thompson and betrays Kihika. As Mugo reaches this farm, what we see is a beautiful and fragrant landscape: “The air was fresh and clear and sharp. The fields around, all covered with green things—long, wide leaves hiding the dark earth—appeared beautiful to look at” (108), says

the narrator. For Ngugi then, Mugo is an ideal farmer, contributing to the economic base of Thabai and the other villages.

Finally, Ngugi's description of the landscape in *A Grain of Wheat* runs into an appraisal of the nature of the countryside and the lifestyle of the people. The countryside is represented by Thabai and "eight ridges around Thabai" (56). Unlike the city, Nairobi, which is a place of destruction, corruption, noise and unease, the countryside is a place of peace, harmony and natural beauty. It is a prelapsarian and peaceful world with traditional values. As shown earlier in this paper, before colonial intrusion, Thabai and its surrounding ridges or villages were beautiful and idealised environments with hills, rivers, mountains, valleys, lakes, trees, forests and fertile lands. The people have a close relationship with this non-human world. In the countryside, the homesteads are beautifully scattered among bushes and trees. Consider, for instance, this description of Mumbi's father, Mbugua's home in old Thabai:

His home consisted of three huts and two granaries where crops were stored after harvest. A bush – a dense of mass creepers, brambles, thorn trees, nettles and other stinging plants – formed a natural edge around the home. Old Thabai, in fact, was a village of such grass-thatched huts thinly scattered along the ridge. The hedges were hardly ever trimmed; wild animals used to make their lairs there. (676)

Apart from showing the nature of houses in Old Thabai village, this passage shows that the people in the countryside have a close relationship with their environment, where they cherish the land as their sole source of existence. This explains why the people are farmers.

There is also in the countryside an organised and close communal bond or fellow-feeling among the people. They also share things in common. For instance, when the people march to Nairobi to demand the release of Harry Thuku from the colonial government, the narrator recalls: "We shared whatever crumbs we had brought. Great love I saw there. A bean fell to the ground and it was quickly split among the children" (13-14). And when Gitogo is killed by the colonial soldiers, the author says that to ameliorate Gitogo's old mother's pains for losing a child, Mugo, out of fellow-feeling, "brought some sugar, maize flour, and a bundle of firewood" (7) to her. Though absent in the city, Nairobi, there is an organised traditional way of administering justice and resolving disputes in the countryside. In the novel, Ngugi illustrates this through a traditional body in Rung'ei known as "the village council of elders", which is described as ("an official Kiama, traditional in origin and character, that nevertheless discussed and resolved conflicts among the village people") (73). Joe Nwabueze Obinaju puts

in perspective the nature of life lived by Africans in the countryside before the advent of colonialism and the city:

Before colonialism was born, Africa never knew the city the way they have come to know and appreciate it today. People then lived freely in their different ethnic cultural groupings and societies preferably referred to as villages. Life was simple, easy-going, well structured... communal life reigned supreme with family members helping one another, sharing their joys and pains. (253)

The passage shows that in the countryside, people live a free, simple and communal lifestyle. Indeed, such is the life lived by the people of Thabai, Rung-ei and the other villages before the incursion of colonialism and the influence of the city. Thus, until the arrival of the colonial masters, there were no modern power structures or instruments of coercion, such as courts, prisons, police, army and detention camps in the countryside.

IV

The evidence so far in his paper is that in his representation of landscape in *A Grain of Wheat*, the author has, using Thabai and its surrounding ridges, shown Kenya's or Gikuyu's countryside as a peaceful, idyllic and Eden-like place before the arrival of the colonial masters in Kenya. However, on their arrival, the Europeans not only seized but also wilfully destroyed the landscapes, including the people. In the remainder of this paper, I show this destructive will of the Europeans.

The first way Ngugi represents the destruction of the landscape or environment in the novel is the way the Europeans appropriate and destroy the Githima Forest. This, they do by refashioning or improving the Githima Forest landscape to suit their purposes. According to Ofcansky, "[t]he establishment of British rule also marked the beginning of an influx of European settlers bent on refashioning the Kenyan landscape after their notions of a 'white man's country'" (137). And Jonathan Bate tells us that "the Western man" has always regarded "virgin rainforest [as] a powerful idea" and when he goes "out of the city to the country [his] response to what [he] sees is shaped by cultural conditions" (63).

In *A Grain of Wheat*, Ofcansky and Bate's statements above are true of the colonialists, especially Mr. Rogers, the Colonial Agricultural Officer with a deep passion for "land development" (31). Like many other European travellers to East Africa who travel by train, it was while "travelling by train from Nairobi to Nakuru" (31) that Mr. Rogers first saw the Githima Forest. Attracted by the beauty and natural resources of the forest, Mr. Rogers later

carries out a *locus in quo* inspection of the forest and thinks of using science to tame and develop the forest by setting up a “Forestry Research Station” but he is suddenly “killed by a train at Githima crossing” (31).

After Mr. Roger’s death, the Europeans began the improvement of Githima forest by creating the “Githima Forestry and Agricultural Research Station ... as part of a new colonial development plan” and soon after its creation, the station “teemed with European scientists and administrators” (31). It is in this station that most of the colonialists and their African stooges like Karanja and Mwaura live and work. According to Byron Caminero-Santangelo, “[t]he apparent purpose of the ‘station’ is to develop knowledge of plants, and weather to improve agriculture and conservation” (2007:702; 2011:157). The setting up of this station echoes the way C.F. Elliot, an official of the Indian Forestry Service in 1902, “opened a Forestry Department in Nairobi, recruited three forest rangers and began introducing exotic tree species – including two species of pine – for experimental plantation” (Thomas P. Ofcansky, 138).

Although the “Githima Forestry and Agricultural Research Station” is a plausible project, I argue that underneath is the Europeans’ usual desire to take the people’s land and dispossess them of their existence. It will also lead to environmental destruction, for to build the station, vast lands belonging to the people will be seized and destroyed. The application of chemicals to improve agriculture will also lead to the destruction of the landscape. As Caminero-Santangelo puts it, the station “reinforces the dispossession of the Gikuyu from their land by formulating the British as its proper stewards and by effacing the forms of knowledge and the kinds of relationships with the land which have been developed over centuries” (2007:702). Emily Brownwell and Toyin Falola also write that “[t]he introduction of new technology into landscapes and the colonial encounter both often rely on the alienation of people from their land” (6). About this, Harry Garuba also writes: “Colonialism is not simply about taking away the land, it is also about dispossessing the colonised of their histories and ontologies” (214). Even the re-naming of the forest by the Europeans tells their desire to take over the land, for according to Garuba, “[t]hese new ways of seeing and naming land effectively took away cognitive ownership of the colonized” (218).

However, as the Europeans set out to destroy the Githima Forest landscape, “the forest fights back” (277), to borrow Kayode O. Ogunfolabi’s words. This, the forest does by killing two Europeans – Mr. Rogers and Dr. Henry van Dyke who are both killed by a train at Githima. Although Ngugi does not say so in the novel, in all probability, the two Europeans only paid the price for the prior will to destroy the forest. They were presumably killed by evil spirits in

the forest, for in Africa, the forest is usually “conceived of as the problematic ‘Other’ harbouring all sorts of supernatural forces” (Ato Quayson, 46).

The second way Ngugi portrays the destruction of the landscape is through the building of the railway station in Rung’ei by the Europeans to exploit the people and the environment. According to Christine Reichart-Burikukiye, “[t]he railway has played a significant role in the process of colonisation of Africa. It was an instrument of economic exploitation and control and it encapsulated the ideas of European expansion and domination” (62). Cook and Okenimkpe observe that “the railway represents the ruthless advance of colonialism” (82) into Kenya. This goes to confirm the prophecy of the Gikuyu seer, Mugo wa Kabiro, for it cannot be forgotten that, long before the building of the railway station in Rung’ei, Kabiro had prophesied the coming of “the iron snake [train] towards Nairobi for the through exploitation of the hinterland” (12).

The implication of building the railway in Rung’ei by the colonial government is that there are now industrial forces threatening to destroy the pristine landscape and environment of the people, including their heritage. The construction of the railway means altering the rural landscape. When the first train appears in Thabai, it leads to the displacement of the people as they run for their dear lives. As the author puts it: “Of the story, current to this day in other ridges, which told how men, women and children deserted Thabai for a whole week when the iron snake, foreseen by the Gikuyu seer, first appeared on the land, they kept discrete silence. They ran for refuge to the neighbouring ridges” (62). This displacement of the people falls within the latitude of what Rob Nixon calls “displacement without moving or stationary displacement”, that is a displacement which amounts “to loss of land and resources beneath them, a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable” (19).

Displacement or dislocation of people from their homes or places because of environmental destruction is a common occurrence in many parts of the world today. It results mostly from wars and the exploration of natural resources by multinational oil companies. Yet, nothing is done to ameliorate the pains and sufferings of the displaced people. A familiar example is the displacement of the Ogoni people of Rivers State, Nigeria, as a result of the exploitation of oil in Ogoniland by the multinational oil companies.

Though a positive means of transportation, the train is ironically one of the known sources of environmental pollution. This is true of the first train that appeared in Rung’ei and Thabai. On its appearance in Rung’ei and later in Thabai, the train polluted the environment, “coughing and vomiting smoke as it rattled along” (62), thereby contributing to global warming and

climate change. With the building of the railway in Rung'ei and Thabai, the process of industrialisation of these places began, since the railway is a powerful symbol of industrialisation. Referring for instance, to Nathaniel Hawthorne's description of the sudden and startling appearance of the locomotive which shattered the pastoral peace in the woods near Concord, Massachusetts (as in the case of the people of Thabai and Rung'ei) Leo Marx writes: "The locomotive, associated with fire, smoke, speed iron and noise, is the leading symbol of the new industrial power. It is... a cause of alienation in the root sense of the word" (27).

The effect of the "colonial development plan" with the train is that the people suffer what Nixon again calls "slow violence". In his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Nixon describes slow violence as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2). While the destruction inflicted on the Githima Forest and Thabai landscapes by the colonialists illustrates what one knows as violence – that is, "an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space" – one has to put these into the context of "incremental and accretive" (2) slow violence still going on presently in Kenya as elsewhere in Africa. There are various forms of slow violence, including global warming, acid rain, climate change, deforestation and land conservation as the colonialists do to the Githima Forest and the Thabai landscape. And this fits into Nixon's idea of slow violence: unspectacular, gradual, bloodless and difficult to reverse.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, the alienation of the people from their environment by the Europeans properly begins when the colonial government declares a State of Emergency all over Kenya in order to contain the Mau Mau insurgency. With the State of Emergency, the old life and personalities of the people, including the environment, have changed over time. As Gitua cries out early in the novel, "The Emergency Destroyed Us" (5). The aspects of destruction are many. First, the deaf and dumb Gitogo, suspected to be a Mau Mau terrorist, is shot by the British soldiers. Next, Waiyaki is arrested and "buried alive at Kibwezi with his head facing into the centre of the earth" (12). Young Harry is jailed and Kihika is hanged in public; Jomo Kenyatta, like Young Harry is also jailed; Gikonyo, Mugo, Gatu and several others are sent to various detention camps where Gatu later hangs himself; under John Thompson as Colonial Administrator, eleven African detainees die during questioning and torture; Wambuku is severely beaten by a soldier for refusing his advances and she later dies during pregnancy; Njeri is killed in the forest in a battle with the British soldiers, and the people themselves have

become traitors—a lifestyle they never lived, but are forced to live under the State of Emergency to escape from the wrath of the colonial masters.

The changes brought about by the State of Emergency also affect the ridges and the environment. This manifests in the way black and white soldiers invade Thabai and Rung'ei to destroy the places:

One day people in Thabai and Rung'ei woke up to find themselves ringed with black and white soldiers carrying guns, and tanks last seen on the road during Churchill's war with Hitler. Gunfire smoked in the sky; people held their stomachs. Some men locked themselves in latrines; others hid among the sacks of sugar and beans in the shops. Yet others tried to sneak out of the town towards the forest, only to find that all roads to freedom were blocked ... Gitogo continued running. Something hit him at the back. He raised his arms in the air. He fell on his stomach. Apparently, the bullet had touched his heart. The soldier left his place. Another Mau Mau terrorist had been shot dead. (6)

In representing environmental destruction, the author sometimes juxtaposes scenes of man-made environmental changes with natural ones. For instance, not too long after the above incident, one sees a natural disaster in the form of a severe drought ravaging the entire Kenya, leaving the landscape arid without crops. Being a farmer, Mugo is disturbed by this development as he lies down in his hut: "In the shamba, he [Mugo] felt hollow. There were no crops on the land and what with the dried-up weed, gakaraku, micege, mikengeria, bangi – and the sun, the country appeared sick and dull" (7). Even in lived experience, Kenya is suffering from drought today, for according to *CARE International*, "climate change is heavily and continuously showing its impact on the East African country. Kenya has been facing droughts in recent years with the most severe hitting the country in 2016/17" (12). When Mugo leaves his house and goes to his farm to plant crops, he meets dry soil caused by the drought. As he raises his hoe to tilt the soil, Mugo hears "the soil, dry and hollow, tumble down. Dust flew into the sky, enveloped him, and then settled into his hair and clothes... He quickly dropped the jembe... He sat down: where was the fascination he used to find in the soil before the Emergency?" (7). Here nature is conspiring to work against human efforts.

Soon after this natural change in the environment, Ngugi again returns to show other instances of man-made environmental destruction. One is the way the new Kenyan converts tread on sacred places and how the white settlers seize the people's lands:

The few [Kenyans] who were converted started speaking a faith foreign to the ways of the land. They trod on sacred places to show that no harm could reach those protected by the hand of the Lord. Soon, people saw the white man had imperceptibly acquired more land to meet the growing needs of his position. He had already pulled down the grass-thatched hut and erected a more permanent building. (12)

At a meeting of the Party at Rung'ei Market, Kihika further points out the way the white man uses the trick of the Bible to steal the lands and destroy them subsequently: "We went to their church. Mubia, in white ropes, opened the Bible. He said: Let us shut our eyes. We did. You know he remained open so that he could read the word. When we opened our eyes, our land was gone and the sword of flames stood on guard" (15). Furthermore, the British people, such as Mr. Burton, the first to arrive in Kenya, confiscated the people's land, cleared the forests and use them to cultivate their crops. It is, for instance, owing to the State of Emergency that Mugo loses his piece of land to the colonial authorities "while he was in detention" (4). Like Wanjia and Karega in *Petals of Blood*, who on their return from Nairobi to Ilmorog return only to notice the negative environmental changes in the countryside, Gikonyo in *A Grain of Wheat* sees similar changes that overcome everything in Thabai and Rung'ei on his return from six years of detention by the British people. As he narrates to Mugo: "Do you know... that when I finally came back, well for me everything had changed; the shambas, and the villages and the people" (61), including his wife, Mumbi. With a sense of loss and pastoral clergy, Gikonyo continues to see these changes. When he walks back to Thabai from detention, he is confronted with climate change affecting the environment.

The drought that the reader is to meet in larger doses and a more devastating and lasting form in *Petals of Blood* is affecting the entire countryside in *A Grain of Wheat*:

The bumpy, battered land sloped on either side; sickly crops just recovering from a recent drought, one more scourge which had afflicted the country in this period [the State of Emergency], leaving anxious faces of mothers dry and cracked, were scattered on the strips of shambas on either side of the road. (91)

It is not only the drought that is threatening the destruction of Old Thabai. The Colonial District Officer, Thomas Robson, has also ordered the destruction of Old Thabai. The author shows this in the following passage narrated by Mumbi to Mugo:

Even now, at night, in bed, she started. I remember the red flames. There were two huts. One belonged to my mother, the other was mine. *They* told us to remove our bedding and clothes and utensils. They splashed some petrol on the grass-thatch of my mother's hut... The leader of the homeguards struck a match and threw it at the roof... Dark and blue smoke tossed from the roof, and the flames leapt to the sky. *They* went to my hut... I shut my eyes. I wanted to scream, but I must have lost my voice because no sound left my throat ... The roofs were cracking. I remember the pain as the cracking noise repeated in my heart. Soon the roofs of the hut fell in, one after the other, with a roar. I heard my mother gasp at the first roar. (122-3)

The passage tells of the way the Europeans order the home guards to destroy the people's houses and displace them from their lands. It specifically has affinity with the way Ngugi's home and village were destroyed when he returns from school, the Alliance High School, Kikuyu:

I came back after the first term and confidently walked back to my old village. My home was now on a pile of dry mud-stones, bits of grass, charcoal and ashes. Nothing remained, not even crops, except for a lone peer tree... I stood there bewildered. Not only my home, but the old village with its allure, its memories and its warmth had been razed to the grounds. (*Detained*, 73-74)

And as the destruction continues, Mumbi avers that: "Before nightfall the walls of Old Thabai Village had tumbled down: mud, soot, and ashes marked the spots where the various huts once stood" (124). As the British people forcefully eject the Africans from their homes and set their houses on fire, the narrator says that "altogether twenty-one men and women died. They were buried beside the trench" (128). It is a rather sad situation in which "one meaning blots out another" (Bate, 21) or, as Marx would put it, "discord replaces harmony and the tranquil mood vanishes" (225) in Kenya. Thus, the earlier beautifully built and scattered homesteads of Old Thabai are destroyed and in their places begin what Gerald Moore calls "enforced villagisation" (273), that is, the building of New Thabai, which is in time characterised by the unease of city life.

Like Old Thabai, Rung'ei also experiences this environmental destruction by the colonial authorities, and this is seen through the accounts of Gikonyo and Mugo. Out of detention, as Gikonyo moves through Thabai towards Rung'ei market, the reader follows him to notice that Old Rung'ei landscape has been destroyed and it is now assuming a near urban outlook whose "very air choked him" (102) because of environmental pollution. And near the end of the book, as Mugo goes to his farm close to Rung'ei railway station, it is observed that Rung'ei and Thabai have been turned into squalor: "Here and there the fields were littered with broken sites where not a week before stood homesteads that made up Thabai village" (170).

As he moves along, Mugo is to come across "a stench of decaying rubbish" (170) where African children are looking for what to eat – an environmental abuse akin to the "GREEN MARKET" in Ngugi's sixth novel, *Matigari*. Thus, the old, peaceful order of Thabai and Rung'ei has given way to a new order in the name of economic development and progress. Thabai and Rung'ei are no longer the alluring prelapsarian world, but toxic sites. The environmental disaster seen in the landscapes of Thabai and Rung'ei brings to mind what Lawrence Buell calls "toxic gothic", for it shows the "gothicized environmental squalor" which often accompanies traumatic stories of "contained communities" in a once beautiful but now destroyed Eden-like world" (42-43, 36).

Conclusion

An aspect of fiction, landscape, is often used by writers, including Ngugi. This essay has been concerned with his representation of Kenya's rural landscapes in *A Grain of Wheat*. The essay has shown the beauty of the landscapes and the functions they perform for the characters in the novel. It demonstrates that until the advent of colonialism in Kenya, the landscapes served local needs and had meaning for the people, but on the arrival of the Europeans in Kenya, they destroyed the landscapes out of their destructive will. The paper concludes that Ngugi uses landscape in all his novels and he does this in order to show the relationships between his people and the natural world.

Works Cited

- Achebe, Chinua. *Things Falls Apart*. London: Heinemann, 1958.
Bate, Jonathan. *The Song of the Earth*. London: Picardor, 2000.
Brownwell, Emily and Toyin Falola. "Introduction: Landscapes, Environments and Technology – Looking Out, Looking Back." *Landscape, Environment and Technology in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*, edited by Toyin Falola and Emily Brownwell. New York: Routledge, 2012, pp.1-18.

- Buell, Lawrence. *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Care International. "Suffering in Silence: The 10 Most Under-Reported Humanitarian Crises of 2019." www.care-international.org. 2019, pp.1-19.
- Caminero-Santangelo, Byron. "Different Shades of Green: Ecocriticism in African Literature." *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, edited by Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2008, pp.698-706.
- . "Shifting the Centre: A Tradition of Environmental Literary Discourse from Africa". *Environmental Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Stephanie LeMenager, Teresa Shewry, and Ken Hiltner, New York: Routledge; 2011, pp. 148-162.
- Cook, David and Michael Okenimkpe. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of his Writings*. London: Heinemann, 1983.
- Frost, Robert. "Two Look at Two." *New Enlarged Anthology of Robert Frost's Poems*, compiled by Louis Utermeye and Mary Silver Cosgrave. New York: Pocket Books, 1971, pp. 215-217.
- Garuba, Harry. "Landscape, the Environment and Postcolonial Poetry." *The Cambridge Companion of Postcolonial Poetry*, edited by Jahan Ramazani. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp.209-221.
- Hammer, Amanda "Sleepwalking Lands: Literature and Landscapes of Transformation in Encounters with Mia Couto". *Environments at the Margins: Literary Environmental Studies in Africa*, edited by Byron Caminero-Santangelo and Garth Myers. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011, pp. 121-140.
- Hardy, Thomas. *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. London: Macmillan Educational Books, 1994.
- Huxley, Elspeth. *The Flame Trees of Thika: Memories of an African Childhood*. New York: William Morrow, 1959.
- Ime, Ikiddeh. "Introduction." *Weep Not, Child*. London: Heinemann, 1964.
- . "Ngugi wa Thiong'o: the novelist as Historian" *Critical Perspectives on Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, edited by G.D. Killam. Washington, D.C.: Three Continent Press, 1984, pp. 67-79.
- James, Louis: "Landscape in Nineteenth Century Literature" *The Rural Idyll*, edited by Gordon Edmund Mingay. London: Routledge, 1989, pp. 61-76.
- Kenyatta, Jomo. *Facing Mount Kenya*. London, Mercury Books, 1961.
- Langman, Fred. "Landscape and Identity in the American Novel". *American Studies International*, vol. 16 no. 4. Summer 1978, pp. 34-47. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/41278576>.
- Loflin, Christine. "Ngugi wa Thiongo's Visions of Africa". *Research in African Literatures: New Voices in African Literature*, vol. 26. no. 4. 1995, pp. 77-93.
- . "African Arid Landscapes in Literature and Beyond". *Aridlands: The Deserts in Literature II*, no. 50. Nov/Dec. 2001, pp. 1-5.
- Maathai, Wangari. *The Challenge for Africa*. New York: Anchor Books, 2010.
- Mabura, G.N. Lily. "Black Women Walking Zimbabwe: Refuge and Prospect in the Landscapes of Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Its Sequel, *The Book of Not*". *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 41, no. 3. Fall 2010, pp. 88-111. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/ral.2010.41.3.88>.
- Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- Moore, Gerald. *Twelve African Writers*. London: Melbourne Sydney, Auckland, Hutchinson and Company (Publishers) Ltd; 1980.
- Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011.

- Obinaju, Nwabueze Joe. "The City as Symbol of Oppression and Violence in Francophone African Novels Before Independence". *Reconstructing the Canon: Festschrift in Honour of Professor Charles Ekwusiaga Nnolim*, edited by Augustine Amanze Akpuda. Owerri: Skillmark Media Ltd; 2001, pp. 253-270.
- Ocfansky, P. Thomas. "Kenya Forestry Under British Colonial Administration, 1895-1693". *Journal of Forest History*, vol. 28. no. 3. Jul. 1984, pp. 136-143, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4004/697>.
- Ogunfolabi, O. Kayode. "Fictionalising the Crisis of the Environment in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and *Songs of Enchantment*". *Landscape, Environment and Technology in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*, edited by Toyin Falola and Emily Brownwell. New York: Routledge, 2012. pp. 273-290.
- Pydah, Meena. "The Language of Discord in the Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o". *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities*. vol. 1. no. 5. 2014, pp. 108-120.
- Quayson, Ato. *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing*. Oxford: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- Reichart. Burikukiye, Christine. "The Railway in Colonial East Africa: Colonial Iconography and African Appropriation of a New Technology". *Landscape, Environment and Technology in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*, edited by Toyin Falola and Emily Brownwell, New York: Routledge, 2012, pp. 62-83.
- Roscoe, Adrian. *Uhuru's Fire: African Literature East to South*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- Simatei, Tirop. "Colonial Violence, Postcolonial Violations: Violence, Landscape and Memory in Kenyan Fiction". *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 36. no. 2. Summer 2005, pp.85-94. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30131143>.
- Slaymaker, Williams "Echoing the Other(s): The Call of Global Green and Black African Responses:" *African Literature: An Anthology Criticism and Theory*, edited by Tejumola and Ato Quayson. Malden, Massachusetts; Blackwell, 2008, pp. 683-697.
- wa Thiong'o, Ngugi. *Weep Not, Child*: London: Heinemann, 1964.
- . *The River Between*. London: Heinemann, 1965.
- . *A Grain of Wheat*, London: Heinemann, 1971.
- . *Petals of Blood*. London: Heinemann, 1977.
- . *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*. London: Heinemann, 1981.
- . *Matigari*. Nairobi: Heinemann, 1987.
- . ("Ngugi wa Thiong'o: Moving the Centre"). Interview by Charles Cantapulo. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o Speaks: Interviews with the Kenyan Writer*, edited by Reinhard Sander, Bernth Lindfors and Lynette Clinton. Trenton: African World Press, Incorporated, 2006, pp.333-351.
- . *Wizard of the Crow*: Lagos: Farafina, 2007.

2 Poems: *If I love and religious mathematics*

Stephen O. Solanke, PhD.

Department of English, Faculty of Humanities,
Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo
myacada@gmail.com, so.solanke@acu.edu.ng
08036661540

1. *If I love*

If I love
 I would love a pig
 it minds not where it is

If I love
 I would love a sheep
 it is a believing follower

If I love
 I would love a dog
 its friendship is forever

If I love
 I would love a dove
 it stays, in problems, with its owner

If I love
 I would love a cat
 its cuddling is never affected

But I love
 YOU!

You possess none of the above

Oh!
Why do I love you?

2. religious mathematics

when they married
 they were told one plus one
 one will be

the first week
 both slept apart
 fagged out from the celebrations
in the mornings
the wife said we are
 two not one

the second week
 the man read in the parlour
 the woman cooked in the kitchen
and the amala had mould
the husband said we are
 two not one

the third week
 the man went out to work
 the woman worked at home
and they came to a rest point,
with both saying we are
 two not one

the fourth week
 in the nights the baby cried
 with no one to attend to it
one faced east the other west
and the baby shouted you are
 two not one

religious mathematics
in practical marriage?
two are one, one are two
 a realism?