

## 2. CULTURAL DISCOURSES IN NIGERIAN FILMS: A MULTIMODAL STUDY OF *ANIKULAPO* AND *ELESIN OBA*

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### Abstract

*The immense growth of Nollywood, or the Nigerian film industry, in recent years has made it a force to be reckoned with, especially the important role it plays as a main participant in the African and global film market. Despite this growth, little attention has been paid to the multimodal elements of these films, which are essential in understanding the meanings and messages conveyed. Therefore, this study takes a paradigm shift from existing scholarship by exploring the multimodal meanings embedded in film discourse. Drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar framework, this study examines how Nigerian filmmakers employ different semiotic modalities to create meaning, convey messages, evoke thoughts and emotions, and tell stories through the application of the visual, linguistic, aural, and gestural elements within the selected films. Kunle Afolayan's *Anikulapo* and Biyi Bandele's *Elesin Oba* form the database for this study. The findings from the study expose the complex interplay of semiotic modes in the storytelling process. The findings of the study also bring to the fore the intricate and culturally significant aspects of Nollywood cinemas. The study concludes that an in-depth understanding of the narrative techniques employed by Nollywood films is pertinent in enriching African cinema discourses as well as contributing to the expanding field of multimodal discourse analysis.*

**Keywords:** multimodal discourse analysis, Nollywood films, visual grammar, *Anikulapo*, *Elesin Oba*

### Introduction

Communication, whether interpersonal or intrapersonal, is essential to society, and it is firmly established as the animating force of human existence. The engagement of complex communication can only be achieved through language. Hence, human language can be said to be the main component of discourse. However, the use of language, in contemporary times, has gone beyond just language use, but in collaboration with other social semiotic modes, largely due to modern communication technologies that have transformed the world into a global village. Nurudeen (2022) acknowledges that communication through language use, in this contemporary age of electronic media and technology, has witnessed significant development, because the multimodal resources employed in discourses are more multifaceted and digitalised. This complexity in language use is also employed by the producers of visual images, advertisers, graphic artists, image-makers, film-makers, and so on, for the purpose of communicating their varied ideas. For filmmakers, the intention is not only for the purpose of selling their movies, but to project morals, create awareness about current societal happenings, correct societal ills, as well as to showcase and preserve cultural diversity through storytelling.

Burn (2013, p. 1) opines that "film theatre is an art of form which is multimodal... its signifying system integrates spoken language, dramatized action, gesture, facial expression, symbolic objects, representation of architecture." It is in the light of this that this study examines the meaning potentials of semiotic resources entrenched in various forms in the selected Nollywood films. The analysis is realised through a multimodal exploration.

The specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine how the visual elements have been applied to express cultural, social, and historical values;
- ii. identify how the linguistic and aural elements create meaning and convey messages in these films; and
- iii. Investigate the gestural modes elements that have been portrayed in these films.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Perspectives**

#### *Multimodal Discourse*

Earlier, much research has been conducted on multimodal discourse analysis of various genres. Some of these studies include: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight*: a Cooperative and Cinematic Discourse Perspective (Toh, 2010), A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of a Yoruba Song-Drama by Olateju (2015), A multimodal discourse analysis of television advertisements of selected banks in Nigeria (Ajepe, 2020), and Subtitle Translation from the Perspective of Multimodal Discourse Analysis: a Case Study of the *Big Bang Theory* (Wu Qingqing, 2022). While some researches in close similarity to this study include: A multimodal discourse analysis of Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Night* (Weimin, 2010), Multimodal discourse analysis of the movie *Agro* (Bo, 2018), and Multimodal discourse analysis on a cartoon film trailer (Xing, 2022). The application of multimodal analysis of Nigerian film discourse is quite limited in linguistics scholarship. Therefore, the need for a thorough investigation of the visual, linguistic, aural, and gestural elements that shape the meaning-making processes in Nollywood films justifies a multimodal exploration, especially as it reflects historical and socio-cultural nuances.

Brown and Yule (1983, 1) state that discourse analysis is "language in use". This implies that language has been put to action. Hence, the reason why Coulthard (1981) opines that discourse analysts are concerned with the study of the rules of language, which describes how utterances perform social acts. Fairclough (1992) defines discourse as a socially constructed way of representing aspects of the world. This assertion means that for every socially inclined communication, language has been used to construct such, and that gives every social gathering a particular pattern of language use. Such social gatherings had been constructed based on the culture, beliefs, norms, and values accrued to such gatherings. The choice of the data for this study acknowledges the type of society to be investigated in the texts. One of the approaches to discourse analysis is Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA).

O'Halloran (2004, 1) asserts that "Multimodal discourse analysis is a collection of research papers in the field of multimodality. These papers are concerned with developing the theory and practice of the analysis of discourse and sites which make use of multiple semiotic resources; for example, language, visual images, space, and architecture. By implication, MDA takes into consideration various semiotic resources in a bid to arrive at effective communication. Also, Kress (2012, p.37) states that "In MMDA, the apt use of modes for the realisation of discourses in text in a specific situation is a central question. A multimodal approach assumes that language, whether as speech or as writing, is one means among many available for representation and meaning-making." The view of Kress upholds O'Halloran's submission in the sense that he lists other modes of meaning making aside from language, while Kress emphasised the fact that language is just one of the means of meaning representation among many others, as listed in the view of O'Halloran.

#### *Visual Grammar*

Visual grammar is a theoretical framework originated by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. Its goal is to investigate and understand the grammar of visual images, specifically those found in pictures, commercials, movies, television, and other visual media. It falls under the wider framework

of multimodal discourse analysis, which examines how different modes of communication, including language, visuals, sound, and gesture, interact and contribute to meaning-making. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), visual representations have their grammar in the same way that language does. A set of principles and ideas was presented for interpreting Visual Grammar, such as the concepts of composition, framing, and visual representation. Their theoretical framework posits that visual images are made up of many components, such as lines, forms, colours, textures, and spatial arrangements, which are arranged in particular ways to convey meaning. Visual representations can be analysed in terms of three major social semiotic dimensions, namely representational, interactive, and compositional.

1. **Representational:** Representational meaning refers to how visual images depict objects, people, or events. It involves the use of various visual codes such as colour, shape, size, and perspective to create a representation that is recognisable and meaningful to the viewer. For example, a photograph of a smiling person can represent happiness or joy. At its core, representational meaning explores the relationship between the form and content of a representation.
2. **Interactive:** this emphasises the social and cultural text in which visual images are produced and interpreted. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue that meanings are not fixed or universal but are shaped by cultural conventions and social practices. They suggest that visual images are influenced by ideologies, power relations, and social norms, which in turn shape the meanings that viewers derive from them. Interaction occurs when image producers and viewers engage in expressing their interpretations of images.
3. **Compositional:** In visual grammar, the compositional meaning agrees with the textual function of systematic function of grammar. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), any semiotic system must have the ability to create texts, which are sign complexes that are coherent both internally and with the context in and for which they are produced.

#### *Visual Semiosis*

O'Halloran's (2004) book titled *Visual Semiosis in Film* delves into the concept of visual semiotics and its application in film analysis. Semiotics, also referred to as semiology, is the study of signs and symbols and how they are interpreted. When applied to film, visual semiosis involves the examination of how meaning is conveyed through visual components like images, colours, composition, and camera angles. Within the book, various aspects of visual semiotics in film are explored, including the significance of iconic signs, indexical signs, and symbolic signs. Iconic signs are those that resemble what they represent, like photographs or realistic paintings. Indexical signs establish a direct connection or cause-and-effect relationship with their meaning, as seen with smoke being an indexical sign of fire. Symbolic signs rely on cultural conventions and associations to convey meaning and require shared knowledge within a specific cultural context. O'Halloran's *Visual Semiosis in Film* offers a thorough examination of how meaning is constructed and communicated through visual elements in cinema. By exploring the use of signs and symbols in film, O'Halloran sheds light on the intricate relationship between visuals and the processes of meaning-making. Her analysis provides valuable insights for scholars, students, and film enthusiasts interested in comprehending the language of films and its impact on viewers.

#### *The Genre of Nollywood*

Nollywood is the Nigerian film industry that has and continues to gain global recognition over the years. Nollywood emerged in the 1990s (Burns, 2023), following the decline of the Nigerian television industry, and low-budget, straight-to-video productions initially characterised it. However, the industry has since evolved, and Nollywood films are now produced with higher budgets, more sophisticated storytelling techniques, and better production values. In the early 1990s, *Living in Bondage*, *Circle of Doom*, and *Glamour Girls* were produced by Evangelist Kenneth Nnebue, marking

a turning point in the industry. The Nollywood industry forms a very vital part of Nigeria's cultural heritage. Its popularity is reflected in its distinctive storytelling style, a reflection of cultural and political elements in all its practicality. The films have been a source of communicating and understanding the Nigerian culture as well as an influence on the lifestyles of Nigerian populations (Giwa, 2014).

Peng (2022) investigated movie posters titled "Hi, Mom." from the perspective of Visual Grammar using Multimodal Discourse Analysis. The current study is grounded in Peng's (2022) study, which highlights that posters are one of the main modes of multimodal discourse that play a unique function in film production. It was proposed in Peng's research that meaning is explicated via the three levels of Visual Grammar, that is, representational, interactive, and compositional. The study discovered that MDA helps in exploring the connotative and thematic meaning of film poster discourse, all aiming at effective communication.

### **Methodology**

The data for this analysis are purposively selected Nollywood films directed by Kunle Afolayan (*Anikulapo*) and Biyi Bandele (*Elesin Oba*). The films have been sampled based on their relevance to the research questions and their popularity in the Nollywood industry, especially in terms of the prevalent directing prowess of the films' directors, Kunle Afolayan and Biyi Bandele.

Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar is adopted to the analysis of the selected data under study, to identify and unravel the visual, linguistic, aural, and gestural elements prominent in the films. The analysis also examines the functions of these modes and how they work concurrently to provide overall meanings, as well as how cultural, social, and historical values are expressed.

### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

#### **Expression of Visual Elements through Cultural, Social, and Historical Values**

Cultural, social, and historical aspects influence Nollywood films, resulting in visually appealing narratives that resonate with Nigerian audiences. Traditional clothing, hairstyles, cosmetics, rituals, ceremonies, and music all contribute to an authentic representation of Nigerian life. Gender, class, religion, and politics are examples of social values that address social concerns and pique discussions. Nollywood filmmakers are inspired by historical values such as colonisation, independence fights, and political upheavals to produce narratives that appeal to viewers, which are evident in the films *Anikulapo* and *Elesin Oba*. Nollywood films not only entertain but also educate and remind audiences of their common heritage by including actual cultural practices, addressing social issues, and drawing inspiration from history. In general, Nollywood films are an effective medium for narrative, cultural representation, political discourse, and historical reflection, and they contribute to the growth of the film industry.

#### **1. Visual Representation of Historical and Cultural Practices and Traditions**

The visual representation of historical and cultural traditions and practices in these films displays a variety of elements of Nigerian culture, including rituals, ceremonies, traditional attire, languages, and social standards. A sense of authenticity in the narrative is usually achieved by doing this to preserve cultural history and educate people. Nollywood filmmakers recreate these practices using elaborate contexts, costumes, and scenes to give viewers a better knowledge of the nation's rich cultural diversity and history.

**Datum One: *Anikulapo***



*Figure 1: Akala bird*

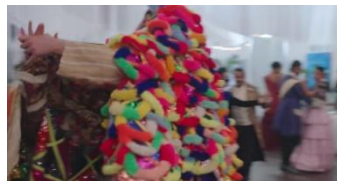
*Figure 2: Resurrection of Saro by Akala*

*Figure 1* illustrates the Akala bird, a mystical creature that holds a significant place in Yoruba culture, representing various symbolic meanings and spiritual beliefs. In Yoruba mythology, Akala is often associated with transformation, rebirth, and divine protection. This mystical bird is believed to possess supernatural powers and is revered for its connection to the spiritual realm. Historically, the dead were not always buried under the ground but were rather deposited in the forest known as Igbo-Akala, where the Akala bird passes judgment. When a person dies in an untimely way, the mystical bird has the power to resurrect them but if the person's time is due then the mystical bird allows them passage to the great beyond. This is the fate of Saro who has died in an untimely way and is being resurrected by the Akala, who asks him "What's the cause of your death?" as seen in *Figure 2* above.

**Datum Two: *Elesin Oba***



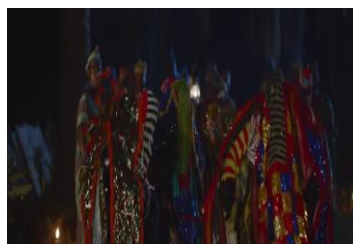
**Figure 3:** Jane and Pikings dancing in a masquerade outfit



**Figure 4:** Jane and Pikings in masquerade costumes at the Ball



**Figure 5:** Amusa, a police officer looking away



**Figure 6:** Real masquerades

*Figure 3* shows Jane and Pikings dancing in a masquerade outfit and being intimate. To them, it is just a typical Nigerian costume they intend on wearing to a ball later that day, as seen in *Figure 4*. Jane thought of the 'costume' as a "fancy dress" they could use to win the best dressed at the ball. Unknown to Jane, in the Yoruba land, a woman isn't allowed to wear a masquerade outfit due to spiritual and ancestral beliefs. Their ignorance shows them demystifying the Yoruba culture as the costume is regarded as a sacred outfit which is meant to be worn by chosen members of a secret society who possess specific qualities that make them suitable for embodying ancestral spirits or deities during their performances.

Amusa, a police officer in the service of the British government, is astonished seeing them dressed in the masquerade outfit and looks away (see *figure 5*), which is why he asks “What do you think you are...doing in that outfit? Eh?” He then tells them the outfit belongs to the dead and not the living. Although Jane and Pikings are aware of the norms and traditions surrounding the masquerade outfit, they do not believe it and think of it as “mumbo jumbo”. Amusa warns them to take it off and says it isn’t normal for people like them to touch the outfit, especially with the fact that they belong to the costume of the dead, and they were taken from some arrested Egugun cult leaders by the orders of Pikings.

## 2. Language and Aural Elements Creating Meaning and Conveying Messages

Linguistic and aural elements are essential multimodal tools in Nollywood films. These semiotic elements are established through Language choice, dialects, accents, sound effects, background music, and non-verbal vocal cues are used to create meaning and convey messages in Nollywood films. Language choice accurately represents Nigeria’s cultural diversity and conveys important information about the characters’ identities, social status, and cultural backgrounds. Dialects, accents, and speech patterns are used to portray regional variations within Nigeria, adding depth and realism to film characters. Aural elements, such as sound effects, background music, and ambient sounds, are carefully selected to enhance the emotional impact of scenes. Nonverbal vocal cues, such as tone, pitch, and volume, also play a vital role in conveying the emotions and intentions of characters. Overall, linguistic and aural modes are significant meaning-making parameters in Nollywood films, which help to establish cultural authenticity, portray regional variations, enhance emotional impact, and effectively communicate messages to the audience.

### a. Dialogues and Language Use

In Nollywood films, dialogues and language use, that is, are important vehicles for storytelling, character development, and cultural expression. Characters share their thoughts, emotions, and motives through speech, propelling the plot forward and connecting with the viewers. Characters’ language choices, accents, and speech patterns reflect their histories, economic status, and identities, resulting in a rich depiction of cultural diversity inside Nigeria and beyond. Furthermore, dialogues frequently include local idioms, proverbs, and slang terms, which lend authenticity and depth to the story while embodying cultural norms and values. Dialogues and language use are important components in Nollywood films since they not only transmit information but also inspire a sense of familiarity, allowing viewers to closely connect with the characters. Dialogues through the use of proverbs are explicated in various scenes in the two films: *Anikulapo* and *Elesin Oba*.

#### Datum One: *Anikulapo*

At the palace, the village chiefs and elders are in a meeting with the king. They are seen discussing the neighbouring village, “The Tapa Tribe,” and taxes. The king begins his speech with the proverb, “Ó ñ bọ, Ó ñ bọ. Ààwọn làá dẹ́ dẹ́” meaning “To be forewarned is to be forearmed.” This means that when one knows about a problem or situation in advance, one will be able to deal with it early. He also says, “Ìgì ganganran mó gún-un lójú, òkèrè bá yí làá tí yẹ́” implying that “If we fail to prepare, we are preparing to fail,” which means if we do not prepare for an event or the future, we are indirectly planning not to succeed. This buttresses his point about the issue with the Tapa tribe and taxes. In another scene where the use of proverbs is employed, Awarun warns Saro, telling him “Ha! Saró, mó gungì kojá orí ewé o” implying “Ah! Saro, do not bite more than you can chew.” This implies that he should not take on more responsibilities than he can handle or involve himself in things that he is

incapable of handling. This advice plays a vital role in the latter parts of the movie, in which Saro ends up biting more than he can chew, and this eventually leads to his doom.

Another instance of the use of proverbs in the film is in the dialogue between the hunter, Saro, and Arolake. The hunter, while advising Saro and Arolake to put a halt to their journey to avoid getting caught by the slave traders, says “Igboràn ó sànjẹ́bọ́ rírú” meaning “Obedience is better than sacrifice.” This means that it is more important for them to listen and follow his words of advice rather than regretting it later and offering sacrifices.

#### **Datum Two: *Elesin Oba***

The dialogue in the film plays an important role in expressing emotions, relationships, and character dynamics. The speech, choice of words, and language use of the characters reveal details about their personalities. In the dialogue between Iyaloja and Elesin at the market square, Elesin professes his intention to marry a lady who happens to be her future daughter-in-law. She warns him that “Ẹ̀sẹ̀ rẹ̀ kán tí wà nílẹ̀ ọ̀kọ́, ọ́ tí l'ólúwá.” It implies that “she’s already engaged to be married; she has a man.” Iyaloja eventually succumbs to Elesin’s intentions but she warns him that “Àmọ́ èsò tóo fẹ́ gbìn, má jẹ́ kó jẹ́ èyí tó ní ègún lówó”, meaning “Be warned, the seed you want to plant does not come with a curse to the community.” Elesin eventually fails to perform his duties in which he gets arrested. In a bid to keep the honour and save Elesin from total disgrace and dishonour, Olunde, his son, takes his place and performs the ritual rites in his stead. Olohun Iyo tells him (Elesin) “Bá òjìjì rẹ̀ s'òrò, bá òjìjì rẹ̀ tó tí gbà ipò rẹ̀ sòrò” meaning “Talk to your shadow now, speak to your shadow which must now serve in your place.” “Òjìjì” refers to the shadow, but in the context of this film, òjìjì refers to Elesin’s son, who has now taken the place of the father and has died in his stead. This makes Iyaloja exclaim saying “Ah! Ẹ̀lẹ̀sìn, ọ̀mọ́ tí dì bàbá báyií ọ” implying that “Ah, Elesin, the son has proven to be the father.” This infers that the son has restored the honour of the family’s lineage and averted any impending doom from the community.

## **2. Portrayal of Gestural Elements**

Gestural modes are vital in Nollywood films for conveying emotions, cultural nuances, and storytelling techniques. Exaggerated facial expressions and hand gestures, for example, enhance the narrative, represent characters' emotions, and communicate with the viewer on a deeper level. Exaggerated facial expressions also augment the emotional impact of scenes, whilst hand gestures indicate certain elements and provide significance. Body movements and postures can also convey different parts of a character's personality or social status, assisting viewers in understanding their motivations and goals. Gestures also express cultural conventions and customs, capturing the viewer's attention and portraying Nigeria's varied ethnic groups. Gestural aspects in Nollywood films serve as a potent instrument for communication and expression, grabbing the viewer and producing an immersive cinematic experience.

### **a. Nonverbal Communication and Body Language**

Nonverbal communication and body language play a significant role in conveying emotions, intentions, and messages in any form of visual storytelling, including films. In both *Anikulapo* and *Elesin Oba*, there are various instances where nonverbal communication and body language are used to heighten the films’ narrative and to deepen the understanding of the characters and their relationships

**Datum One: *Anikulapo***



Figure 7: Body language at play



Figure 8: Senior Queen expressing her displeasure

An instance of body language and non-verbal communication can be seen in *Figure 7*. The facial expressions between Queen Wojuola and the third Queen depict their hatred and enmity towards Queen Arolake. Their body movement, ridiculous laughter, and squeezing of the nose show how displeased they are with her presence in the Palace. *Figure 8* then shows the Senior Queen's displeasure with the other queens' attitudes towards Queen Arolake. The queens' dislike for Queen Arolake is a result of her young age, the jealousy they feel towards her being the king's favourite. Ultimately, her young age plays a significant role in their animosity. As the younger queen, Arolake stands as a potential threat to the power and authority of the other queens, as she receives special attention and privileges that the other queens may envy. Her beauty also contributes to the other queens' animosity. Her attractiveness makes her stand out and earn more attention from both the king and the people, and this further intensifies feelings of envy and insecurity among the other queens. Lastly, she is disliked by the other queens as a result of her inability to conceive. In many royal families, producing an heir is of utmost importance, and her inability to conceive makes the other queens view her as incapable of securing a future in the palace, leading to resentment and hostility.

**Datum Two: *Elesin Oba***



Figure 9: White's domineering disposition towards the black



Figure 10: Reactions of the villagers to Elesin Oba's refusal to do the needful

During the festival meant for the death of the great chief, Elesin Oba, to meet the King, it is believed that the event should hold without any interruptions or external forces and the Elesin Oba should perform his duties till he meets his end. If this doesn't happen, it is regarded as a taboo and can be said that the Elesin Oba has failed in his duties. Leading the abrupt interruption of the ceremony, Pilkings orders some officers to arrest the Elesin Oba to prevent him from committing the ritual suicide. The event of his arrest is seen as degrading a sacred personality, invariably showing disregard for Yoruba culture. The act of putting the chief in chains as shown in Figure 9 represents the disposition of white men towards black men and how they see black people as subjects to be controlled.



The arrest of the Elesin Oba is also a great shock to the land and will come with dire consequences as it is believed that when the Elesin Oba does not complete the ceremony, the King is left halfway between the living and the dead. This is evident in *Figure 10* through the various reactions (shock, fear, and confusion) from the villagers who have come to witness such a great ceremony.



Figure 11: Elesin Oba's overwhelming feelings of sadness

*Figure 11* portrays Elesin Oba's overwhelming feelings of sadness, regret, and disappointment upon seeing the corpse of his son, Olounde. These emotions are depicted through Elesin's body language and facial expression. His face is torn with grief, his eyes filled with tears. Through these physical representations of emotion, the viewers can witness the depth of Elesin's sadness, regret, and disappointment. The loss of his son, coupled with the regret of not being able to fulfil his duty and the disappointment in himself, creates a powerful emotional moment in the play. This emotional scene captures the realisation of a complex cultural ritual in which Olounde has performed his duties and committed ritual suicide in his father's stead, thereby restoring honour to their family's lineage. Elesin Oba's emotions at this moment are complex and deeply profound. He experiences an overwhelming sense of sadness upon seeing his son's lifeless body. The loss of a loved one is always a deeply painful experience, and Elesin's grief is intensified by the fact that Olounde willingly sacrificed himself for the sake of their family's honour. Elesin Oba feels a profound sense of regret.

As the supposed King's Horseman, it is his duty to perform the ritual suicide. However, due to his arrest by Pilkings, Elesin is unable to fulfil this duty himself. Instead, Olounde steps in to carry out the ritual on his father's behalf. While this act restores honour to their family, it also leaves Elesin burdened with deep regret for not being able to fulfil his duty. He is acutely aware that he has failed in his responsibility as the King's Horseman and feels a deep sense of remorse for not being able to make this ultimate sacrifice himself. Elesin Oba experiences intense disappointment in himself. As a respected figure in his village, he holds himself to high standards and expects nothing less than perfection from himself. The fact that he was unable to complete the ritual suicide weighs heavily on him and ruins his self-image as a man of honour and integrity. This disappointment is intensified by the knowledge that his son had to step in and take his place, further underlining his own perceived failure.

#### **b. Physical Movements and Actions**

Physical movements and activities in Nollywood films are crucial because they convey emotions, advance the plot, reflect cultural features, and engage the audience. These motions, including facial expressions, body language, gestures, and postures, assist viewers in connecting with characters and understanding the narrative. They also help to develop the plot, which increases interest and involvement. Traditional dances, ceremonies, and greetings are frequently included in Nollywood films, displaying Nigeria's rich cultural past and adding authenticity to the narrative.

**Datum One: Anikulapo**



Figure 12: Egun Festival



Figure 13: Dance and Euphoria at the Egun Festival

In *Figures 12 and 13*, we see the villagers dancing to celebrate the Egun festival. This visual representation provides a glimpse into the lively and dynamic nature of this traditional event. The villagers are dressed in traditional attire, adorned with colourful fabrics and accessories that hold cultural significance. Their movements are rhythmic and synchronised, reflecting the communal spirit of the festival. The atmosphere is vibrant, as laughter, joy, and a sense of unity permeate the scene. The dance moves reflect the cultural heritage and deep-rooted traditions of the community, passed down through generations. It depicts how the Oyo Empire celebrates the Egun festival, which is a time of cultural expression, unity, and reverence for ancestors that plays a notable role in shaping the empire's traditions and cultural unity. This festival serves as a way for the community to honour their ancestors, connect with their heritage, and seek blessings for prosperity and well-being. During the Egun festival in the Oyo Empire, people would come together to honour their ancestors and pay homage to the spirits of the departed. Villagers are seen dressed in vibrant and colourful traditional attire in *Figures 3.16 and 3.17*. The rhythmic beats of drums and other musical instruments would echo through the air, setting the tempo for the dances that followed. These dances were not only a means of celebration but also a way to connect with their cultural roots and pay homage to their ancestors.

The villagers' synchronised movements and the sense of unity as portrayed in *Figures 3.16 and 3.17* are an essential part of the Egun festival. The dances and performances would reflect the empire's cultural identity and spiritual beliefs, embodying the shared history and values of the people. The purpose of dancing during the Egun festival serves as a form of entertainment and celebration, creating a joyous atmosphere for everybody. The lively rhythms and synchronised movements create a sense of unity and collective spirit among the villagers. It is believed that through their movements and music, the dancers can channel the energy and blessings of their ancestors. It is also an opportunity for the villagers to remember and honour their ancestors, expressing gratitude for their guidance and protection.

**Datum Two: Elesin Oba**



Figure 14: Masquerades' dance



Figure 15: Celebration of Elesin and his demise.

*Figure 14* portrays the masquerades' dance as characterised by intricate movements, vibrant costumes, and rhythmic music. Their synchronised steps and gestures convey a sense of unity and collective purpose. Each movement is carefully choreographed to convey specific meanings and messages. Through their dance, they express their gratitude for Elesin Oba's life and accomplishments while also preparing for his journey into the afterlife. The celebration surrounding Elesin Oba's impending death is not rooted in morbid fascination or a desire for his demise but rather in a deep understanding and acceptance of the natural order of life. In Yoruba culture, death is seen as an integral part of existence, and it is believed that one's spirit continues to live on after physical death. The masquerades' dance serves as a reminder of this belief and a celebration of the eternal nature of the human spirit. The dance symbolises the transition of Elesin Oba from the world of the living to that of the ancestors, marking an important moment in Yoruba cosmology and emphasising the continuity of existence beyond mortality.

The villagers dancing in *Figure 15* serve as a visual representation of their expression of joy and happiness towards Elesin and the funeral proceedings. To them, it is considered honourable to die with the king, as it signifies loyalty and devotion. The dance reflects their belief that participating in the funeral rites will bring blessings, good luck, and fortune not only to the village but also to themselves as individuals. The act of dancing during the funeral rites is deeply rooted in Yoruba culture, which is prevalent in Nigeria, where the play is set. In Yoruba tradition, dance is an integral part of various ceremonies and rituals, including funerals. It serves as a means of communication with the spiritual realm and a way to express emotions and celebrate important events. The villagers' dance during Elesin's funeral signifies their reverence for him and their belief in the significance of his role as the king's horseman. The dance also depicts the communal aspect of Yoruba culture. The villagers' participation in the dance demonstrates their collective support for Elesin and their shared belief in the importance of upholding traditions and fulfilling obligations. Through their dance, the villagers convey their understanding of death as a natural part of life. In Yoruba culture, death is not viewed as an end but rather as a transition to another realm. By celebrating Elesin's passage to the afterlife, the villagers acknowledge the cyclical nature of existence and embrace the belief in the continuity of life beyond death.

### Findings and Conclusion

The study demonstrates that visuals are persuasive forms of communication because they essentially draw viewers to the locution being made while enabling encoders to be more creative with language use in terms of how information is passed. The findings from the study also reveal how different visual elements, such as costumes and set designs, create and shape narratives. The films often showcase traditional attire, architectural styles, and landscapes that reflect Nigerian culture and heritage. These

visual cues not only enhance the visual appeal of the films but also contribute to the overall storytelling by immersing the audience in a specific cultural milieu.

The visual elements of both *Anikulapo* and *Elesin Oba* communicate the variety of Nigerian culture and have successfully educated the viewers on Yoruba culture and how they can be sensitive to certain traditions. This is evident in *Elesin Oba* when Jane and Pilkings were dressed as masquerades, and the shock on Amusa's face when he saw them in it. Amusa did not verbally communicate his displeasure; rather, his facial expression communicated his impression of them as ignorant and insensitive to Yoruba culture. Historically, before anyone can put on a masquerade outfit, the person must be a chosen member of a secret, possessing specific qualities. Jane and Pilkings' ignorance of this depicts them disrespecting the Yoruba culture, tradition, and history. Similarly, the real masquerades who are believed to hold a prominent position in the Yoruba culture are later portrayed in the film. They are seen engaging in joyous dances to celebrate the imminent death of the great chief, *Elesin Oba*. Likewise, the visual representation of the Akala bird in *Anikulapo* has been culturally and historically represented and expressed. In the Yoruba culture, the Akala bird is often associated with the power of resurrection, transformation, rebirth, and divine protection.

The findings from the study substantiate the fact in existing literature that language cannot be divorced from culture, as, invariably, culture is an integral part of language and vice versa. They are present not just in what they say but in how they say it. Both movies are created with the Yoruba culture in mind – to fit the cultural nuances and societal norms of the Yoruba traditions. The characters speak the Yoruba language, but they also speak in a way that is tailored to the Nigerian culture, i.e., speaking in proverbs, incantations, etc. The use of these linguistic elements, such as proverbs and idioms, not only added depth to the characters' conversations but also reflects traditional wisdom and cultural norms within the Nigerian social and cultural terrain.

The use of aural modes, such as music and sound effects, added depth and emotional resonance to the films. The sound effects were used strategically to enhance dramatic moments or create a sense of realism within the narratives.

Gestural language is the interpretation of people's movements, whether through their facial expressions or body language. Gestures integrate linguistic, visual, and aural, to convey more information and improve communication. Kendon (2004, 1-2) describes gesture as the visible actions that comprise utterances. These visible utterances can occur in conjunction with, or independently of, speech. The several gestural elements employed in both films contribute to the overall narrative and characterisation. One prominent gestural element is the use of facial expressions, which the actors used to convey the inner thoughts and emotions of their characters. The actors effectively utilise facial expressions to convey a range of emotions such as happiness, sadness, fear, or surprise. Close-up shots capture these expressions in detail, allowing the audience to connect with the characters at a deeper level. Facial expressions are powerful means by which a person's thoughts and emotional state can be deciphered without the person verbally expressing them.

The portrayal of gestural elements has been vividly visualised in these films through the use of hand gestures in *Anikulapo* to portray the Queen's displeasure with the other Queens' attitude towards Arolake; facial expressions portraying the other Queens' jealousy, hatred, and dislike of Arolake, also in *Anikulapo*, the villagers' shock, disbelief, and fear. Elesin's feelings of sadness, shock, regret, and disappointment in *Elesin Oba*. The physical and bodily movements portraying the villagers dancing to celebrate the Egun festival in *Anikulapo* and the masquerades dancing in *Elesin Oba* to celebrate the imminent death of Elesin Oba are also indicative of gestural meanings.

The application of the visual, linguistic, and aural modes employed in the films all support and enhance the specific meanings and cultural representations conveyed in the films' narratives. The study, therefore, concludes that an in-depth understanding of the narrative techniques employed by Nollywood films is pertinent in enriching African cinema discourses as well as contributing to the expanding field of multimodal discourse analysis and its applicability to culturally inclined film discourses.

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