

SEMIOTIC READING OF COSTUMES IN NIGERIAN VIDEO FILMS: *AFRICAN BRIDE* AS A PARADIGM

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Abstract

Semiotics is a theory developed in Linguistics for studying the structure and meaning of language. It is the study of signs and symbols and the way they generate meanings. Although semiotics was developed in the field of Linguistics to study the structure and signification of language, it has also been used to study various non-linguistics signs systems. In this study, we make a semiotic analysis of costumes and how they express the user's socio-cultural attributes. We demonstrate the phenomenal role that costume as a form of communication plays within the cultural and social society, specifically in video films. This paper makes use of semiotic theory and film analysis through qualitative methodology in order to analyze selected Nigerian video films. This form of analysis has been found to allow costume a distinct voice in words dominated film. It reinforces costume as communication through motifs, lines, shape, colour, fabric and texture. This work has been able to create a semiotics distinction of costumes in films using the socio-cultural and conventional interpretations of colours, fabrics, styles and textures of clothes and accessories. It has attempted to understand how colours, fabrics and textures convey meaning in film. We discover that costume aids us to form individual opinions about characters and at the same time reconstruct their socio-cultural realities. Based on this discovery, semiotic analysis can be

recommended as a useful adjunct to traditional idealistic research, particularly when the film costume being studied is so complex that objectivity is hard to maintain.

Introduction

The Nigerian movie industry has been attracting immense interest from audience and critics. The Nigerian styles of clothes which are distinctly Nigerian are now being transmitted as images around the globe through the Nigerian video films. So the film medium has come to be indirectly associated with the cultural industry. In this study, Nigerian video films are viewed and read through a theoretical frame work deeply rooted in theatrical and film costumes, and a comprehensive methodology that focuses on the intervening mediations between interpretation and meaning of colours, lines, fabrics, textures, and styles of costumes. The Nigerian film industry as we know it today is believed to have emerged with Kenneth Nnebue's *Living in Bondage* (1992). According to Ezeajugh:

In tracing the origin of the Nigerian film industry, scholars such as Femi Shaka, Barclays Ayakoroma, Hyginus Ekweuazi, Jonathan Hynes and Onokome Okome, have located Kenneth Nnebue's *Living in Bondage* as the film that gave the impetus to what has become a multi-million Naira business (65).

There are many reasons why Nigerian movie production shifted from celluloid to video film: These include among others, cultural and security reasons. However, a primary reason was concern for economy. Hence, Ayakoroma observes: "The commercial success of *Living in Bondage* was an impetus for other artisans and

peripheral businessmen, who joined to jumpstart what has become an industry” (21). *Living in Bondage*, the pacesetter of the Nigerian film industry was done in Igbo language. As this film was immensely enjoyed by large number of Nigerians, both Igbo people and Non-Igbo people, the film industry started pumping films done in English language into the market. This in turn expanded the popularity of Nigerian video films, and critics became interested in analyzing the Nigerian video films via different theatrical elements. Consequently, costumes in the Nigerian video films have drawn considerable attention and works from theatre practitioners. In other words, the Nigerian video films have been variously read by critics through its costumes.

Brief History of Theatrical Costumes

In the first theatre practice the costumes were basically ceremonial robes. In ancient Greece, the chiton was a gown-like costume similar to the robes worn by the priests who chanted the choral odes. According to Brockett and Hindy, “Several historians have argued that the standard costume for all tragic actors was a sleeved, highly decorated tunic (chiton), usually full-length, although sometimes shorter” (22). Costumes in Medieval drama were nearly identical to the robes worn by the priests who originated the liturgical texts. Cohen says that “The priests who first enacted the *Quem Queritis* trope (liturgical text) in medieval Europe simply wore their sacred albs...” (147). Costumes in Japanese Noh drama were based on the spiritual rather than the secular world. Brockett et al Hindy opine that, “The most typical Noh plays have as protagonist ghosts, demons...Noh plays are extremely varied, all draw on... Buddhist views” (626). In Elizabethan England, costumes were regal and ceremonial but were rarely used to establish character. In Shakespeare’s time, it

was common to see some actors wearing contemporary clothing alongside some who dressed for the period in which the play was set. According to Brockett “Like the medieval, the Elizabethan mind had little sense of history, and characters from almost any place or time could be dressed as Elizabethans would” (170). In the *commedia del’arte* pieces of Renaissance Italy, costumes for recurring characters helped gender, occupation, age and education significations. It was a gradual change whereby we started to see costumes used to define a character.

Costuming more similar to what we know today came about in the 18th and 19th centuries when more realistic elements began to dominate the Western theatre. According to Cohen: “The shift of stress in costuming from a “dressing up” of the actor to a defining of the character came about gradually in the theatre’s history” (147). Video film is realism because of the verisimilitude of a film to the believability of its characters and events. In other words, reality is being presented in video film. Hence, costumes in video films are used to define characters, and through films-costumes, we can read the story of a film. A film can be read via its costumes, sometimes overtly, sometimes sub-textually (Not just conspicuous epic, magic or horror films, but contemporary stories set within a familiar world in familiar attires). On screen even the most rudimentary items of clothing can take on meaning. Many Nigerian video films portray the society as lavishly, sumptuously and splendidly dress and so please the eye of the audience that one always stays with the impression that he or she has just seen the truth. But how true to reality are the pictured fashions? According to Dobie:

The long-held view of the world as a knowable, objective entity that could be discovered through direct experience of

sense encountered serious challenges...In Philosophy, for example, thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) began to question the existence of objective truth (151).

Traditionally, film costume is read overtly through the idealist approach. But Roland Barthes developed a semiotic system for interpreting the discourse of fashion. Influenced by Saussure, Barthes found semiotics, the study of signs, useful in the interrogation of the French Bourgeois ideals that have contradicted certain realities.

Semiotic Theory

Semiotic is the study of signs, symbols and signification. It is the study of how meaning is created - not what it is but how it is evoked. The revolutionary nature of semiotic can be summarized by saying that, in general it challenges the way Western civilization has conceived the world since Plato. Barthes took over Saussure's concept of language as a sign system, producing work that can be regarded as an appendix to his "Mythologies" (1957), he shows how the denotations in the signs of popular culture betray connotations which are themselves myths generated by the larger sign system that make up society.

Adapting Saussure's model to the study of cultural phenomena other than language, Barthes developed his *Fashion System* (1967). In his *Fashion System*, Barthes shows how the adulteration of signs could easily be translated into words. He explained how in the fashion world any word could be loaded with idealistic bourgeois emphasis. Thus, if popular fashion says that a 'skirt' is ideal for a certain situation or ensemble, this ideal is immediately naturalized and accepted as truth, even though actual

style could just as easily be interchangeable with a 'wrapper', 'bubu' or 'trousers' or any number of combinations. In accordance to Barthes' view, Brandt submits:

Initially inclined towards an open methodology that would give the interpreter a major role in determining the meaning of any given text, professor Eco later came around to the view that there was an inherent hard core of meaning and that interpretation had been given too much theoretical scope (279).

Barthes' theory questions the overall utility of demystifying culture for the masses; hence it drives into a search for individualistic meaning in art.

Whereas, in the past, determinists like Aristotle saw things in terms of cause and effect, semiotics looks for signs and symbols. It challenges common sense, which believes that things have one meaning and that this meaning is pretty obvious. Semiotics tells us that meaning is constructed, as a product of shared system of signification. For instance, the traditional Igbo society denotes the wearing of two wrappers to signify that a woman is a wife and mother. Thus the signification of a woman's marital status by two ankle-length wrapper is a constructed meaning which has over time become the Igbo culture. Again, semiotics can be defined as the study of signs: how they work and how we use them. Berger defines semiotics as "The science that investigates the way meaning is produced and transmitted" (244). While a sign is anything that can be used to stand for something else. For instance, using a white robe with cape and a cross pendant to signify a catholic priest.

Semiotics in Films

Although, semiotics is closely related to the field of Linguistics which for its parts studies the structure and meaning of language more specifically, it also studies non-linguistic sign systems. Semiotics can be applied to all sorts of human endeavours, including dance, costumes, makeup and architecture. According to Berger:

Ferdinand de Saussure described his hopes for the science of semiotics in his book *Course in General Linguistics*...A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable, it would be part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology. I shall call it semiology...Semiology would show what constitutes a sign, what laws govern them (48).

Film costumes generate their meanings through elements of costume which can stand for signs. So film costume can adequately be studied in the semiotic mode. Within the Saussurean tradition, the task of the Semiotician is to look beyond the specific elements of costume (colour, fabric, texture, lines, space and motifs). Semiotics can be applied to anything which can be seen as signifying something –in other words, to everything which has meaning within a culture.

Even within the context of the theatre arts, one can apply semiotic analysis to any theatrical arts (including dance, makeup, and costume and scene design). Semiotics involves the study not only of what we refer to as signs in costumes, but of anything which stands for something else. In the semiotic sense, signs in costumes take the form of colours, insignia, images, textures and styles of clothes and accessories. Contemporary Semioticians study signs not only in isolation but as part of sign systems. They study

how meanings are made and how reality is presented. According to Berger, “There is a science that is of great utility in helping us understand how visual phenomena communicate- a field of knowledge called semiotics, the science of signs”(48). Semioticians believe that semiotic is the key for unlocking meaning of all things.

Saussure developed the principles of semiology as they apply to language; Barthes extended these ideas to messages (word-and-image relations) of all sorts. In his work, *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure focuses on the linguistic sign, making a number of crucial points about the relationship between the signifier and signified. In his view, the relationship between the signifier and signified is arbitrary. Different languages use different words for the same things. Hence, the meaning we ascribe to a costume in a film is based on collective behaviour, convention or culture. Quoting Saussure, Berger states that: “Concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms in the system” (51).

For instance, a black costume is defined by its relationship with a white costume (which is its opposite). Consequently, we define black as connoting gloom or evil, since white has culturally been attributed with purity. Meaning therefore, is determined not by content but by relationship. Furthermore, Enahoro analyzing the film *Xala* by Ousmane notes that, “The colour BLACK which signifies leaving the marriage is the opposite of WHITE, which signifies entering into marriage. The two costumes are logically related but are normally widely separated in time” (56).

Through semiotics, the costumes of film characters will read much like conversation, highlighting certain colours, fabrics, textures and lines to represent sentences that are able to acquire identity.

According to Gillette, “What a person wears, and how it is worn, says a great deal about that person and the society in which he/she lives” (387). A person can use his/her clothes and accessories to represent power, differentiation, status, character, mood, rebellion or apathy in a many different manifestations. The generation of the meaning of costume comes from the semiotics of the culture the audience comes from. In other words, the meaning one ascribes to a costume depends on previous knowledge of the meaning of clothes and the socio-cultural realities of his/her environment.

Pierce according to Berger categorized the patterns of meaning in signs as iconic, symbolic and indexical (49). An iconic sign looks like what it represents. A crown, horse tail (nza) and beads (akah) stand for royalty in Igbo society. It should be noted that an icon is easy to interpret. Secondly, an indexical sign is logically connected to what it represents, for instance, spaghetti top and sagging trousers representing a prostitute. Micheal in *War College* by Okereke wears big black eye glasses, sagging jeans, with his jacket buttons undone baring his chest- he is a notorious cultist in the film. The meaning of a symbol like Rosary beads worn by Jim Iyke in this film is determined by convention. In other words, its meaning is based upon agreement and learned through experience.

Convention shows that when we see a man wearing a rosary beads on his neck, we quickly label him as one who follows fashion trends. Berger suggests that “We have to learn about this connection and do so, often, simply from everyday life” (49). A good symbol, on the other hand, has conventional meaning, and there is no logical connection between this meaning and the symbol itself. It is something we have to learn, as with khaki clothes and the army. However, applying Pierce’s idea can be quite complicated as Saussure suggests in his *Course in General*

Linguistics. According to Saussure, the relationship that exists between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary or convention-in other words, the relation is not natural but must be learned.

Therefore, in Saussure's view, no signifier is self-explanatory or implies a specific signified. Hence, a black clothe can suggest bereavement or authority depending on the situation. In Saussure's opinion, a concept does not mean anything on its own; it is often defined in terms of how it differs from another concept. He opines that, "Concepts are purely differential and defined not by positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms in the systems" (117). So meaning is determined by relationship and not by content. The meaning of white costume is determined by its relationship with a black clothe. Yet it depends on the situation or context of the film one is analyzing. So if the film is centered on the evil of man to man, white can then be used to signify the good, while black can stand for the wicked. But if the film revolves around life and death, then green can stand for life while black signifies death. We can thus say that, we make sense of signs by their opposites.

So, Berger submits, "...a colour's impact depends to a great degree on the colour around it" (52). Black clothes in Igbo community used to be seen as evil. So, people consciously avoided wearing plain black clothe because in those days it entirely signifies bereavement and mourning. But today even the Igbo people of this age have come to accept black clothes as being fashionable. Again, white clothes have also been adopted for mourning. So we see meaning changing with convention and time. During the time before this century, in the Omambala area of Anambra state, women who were seen in plain white clothes are quickly termed spiritualist (those who practice traditional religion), but in this century ,white clothes do not wholly suggest that the

person is a spiritualist. The meaning of plain white clothes in this area now depends on the accessories used. If the person wears white tiny beads, it becomes a symbol of mourning. Film-costumes use symbols that have to be learned. Originally, young people who wear the rosary beads on their neck are immediately identified as devout Catholics. But conventionally, the use of rosary beads as necklace has been found to connote that one is an entertainer, trend follower or even a defiant. Thus, semiotics theory focuses on the social and cultural meaning of signs and codes. The meanings of signs depend on the relationship between the signifier, the sign and referent (what the image refer to). For example, people learn that the colours red and green as signifiers have certain signified meanings-stop and go with the referent being stopping and starting a car on the street based on a set of cultural codes and conventions.

Furthermore, Roland Barthes, a key figure in semiotic theory, argues that the meanings of images are cultural ideologies. So when we see a film, what we believe in depends on a number of factors, including our age, education, exposure, socialization, socioeconomic status, culture and personality. Our belief that things exist in the real world often is tied to what we have seen; our faith in the truth about propositions usually is tied to reasoning and influence. For instance, the assertion that red clothes symbolize danger is usually tied to the conclusion that since blood is red, the use of red clothes also symbolizes blood. This is the reason why in African socio-cultural context, the chief priest or native doctors wear red especially when there is need to offer sacrifice to the gods which also involve the killing of animal and offering of its blood to the gods. Also, in Catholic church, the priest wear red while celebrating Mass in honour of the death of Christ or on the feast day of a martyr. All these instances are indications symbolizing blood. Therefore, based on the African

belief system, when we see a woman dressed in red clothes, our brain quickly tells us that she is embarking on religious rituals. However, semiotics is saying that seeing does not entirely reveal the whole truth. Truth is therefore subjective; the meaning we ascribe to the costumes we see in film is based on influence, personal feelings, taste or opinions.

According to Berger, “The actual act of seeing is determined by the physical structure of the eye. What we perceive, of course, is affected by other factors” (19). People see in somewhat different ways. So the mechanism of seeing involves the relation between the eye and the brain. What we see in film, or perhaps what we focus our minds on when we see a film, differs from culture to culture. Hence, Arnheim posits, “Visual perception is not a passive recording of stimulus material but an active concern of the mind. The sense of sight operates selectively...perception involves problem solving” (37). Semiotics is the science that helps us understand how visual phenomena communicate; it is the science of signs. According to Berger, “A sign, from semiotic perspective, is anything that stands for something else” (49). For instance, there are several ways to suggest that an actor is portraying a medical doctor.

The actor could say, “I am a doctor”, or a narrator could tell us; or the actor could wear a lab coat and stethoscope. All these are signs that, taken together suggest a medical doctor. The theatre itself is a sign- a sign of the real world. Talking about the theatre being a representation of the real world, Honzi gives an illustration with a voice in a radio drama. According to him, “...in radio plays, voice and sound represent not only dramatic characters but also all the other facts that make up the reality of the theatre: the stage, scenery, props and lighting” (270). So, looking at costume as a sign in the theatre, a sign which stands for something else, Carlson

reveals that, “Costumes...almost inevitably make some kind of continuous commentary in the theatre” (291).

The Nigerian video film industry has been using costumes and accessories as forms of nonverbal communication to indicate occupation, social statues, gender, sexual availability, locality, class, and wealth and group affiliation. Film costume connotes whatever is worn on the performer’s body. It conveys information about the character and aid in setting the tone of the film. According to Umukoro, “...costume...bear indices and attributes which most appropriately evoke the personality of the actor(s)...It serves basically as tool for character delineation...” (54). Furthermore, Utoh-Ezeajugh defining costume opines, “These instruments are used to physically transform performers, thereby aiding them to lose their own identities and assume that of the characters they are impersonating ...they are universally regarded as indispensable aids to performance” (83). According to her, costume transposes the actor/actress into the reality of his/her role, and illuminates the character both for the impersonator and the audience (83).

Countering the submission of Peter Brooke and Jerzy Grotowski, she posits that costume as an element of play production, remains an integral part of characterization, so much so that performances would decidedly be incomplete without costumes (84). Accordingly, listing costume as one of the “Sign Systems Common to all Dramatic Media”, Esslin submits: “These, then, are the means, the tools by which the originators of a dramatic performance can establish their characters, paint their background and environment, and tell their story” (306).

Historian, philosopher and literary critic Walter Benjamin wrote on fashion’s relationship to modernity, commodity fetishism, history and memory. While Roland Berthes developed a semiotic system

for interpreting the discourse of fashion. Barthes' *Fashion System* suggests costume can be understood as a language composed of codes, signs and significations. Both Barthes and Benjamin wrote on fashion's relationship to temporality, memory and history and both critically investigated the potential of dress as metaphor in literary and visual analysis.

Barthes was convinced that semiotics would provide an appropriate reading of modern culture since it is a science of signs that not only possesses a notion of ideology against which the truth of science can be measured, but promises a scientific way of understanding popular culture. Cohen explaining the functions of costumes posits that, "...the individual costumes can express the specific individuality of each character's role; they reveal at a glance, for example, the character's profession, wealth, age, class status, taste, and self-image" (149). Fashion choices and brand names act as symbols that communicate information about the social and economic status of a person. Unknowingly, we give off certain signs about ourselves throughout clothing's colour, texture and style. In *African Bride*, we often see Adaugo clad in black dress with her well made up face which is an indication that she is not bereaved, we therefore conclude that she is an independent woman with people under her authority.

Ultimately, the colour black holds cultural significance for Igbo society (which is locale of the film) – black is used for mourning and as Craig posits "...black has been associated with mystery, tragedy, and silence" (209). Yet colours often have different meanings in various cultures. Black in films can be overpowering or make the wearer seem aloof or evil. Witches often wear black. Semiotics aids us in constructing opinions about others.

They are many specific signs in *African Bride* that convey messages for the audience to decode. The scenes that we see Adaugo wearing sleeping dress, suggest the time of day. They are subtleties within the film's costumes that allude to time, social status, career, and emotional makeup of the characters. *African Bride* amongst other things uses costume to introduce notions of evil dispositions of Adaugo.

When taking account of the emotional forlornness and desperate attitudes of Adaugo, we can definitely establish links between costumes and emotional disposition. The black clothes and red lipstick she wears may thus serve as some kind of external manifestation of her inner turmoil and pessimistic outlook on life. The fraudster's outfits in gloomy grey dark colours underline the dark aspects of his character. Also, the unusual style of his grey caftan with puffy long-sleeves and an unusual embroidery further hint at his inhumanity.

Semiotics Analysis of *African Bride*

According semiotic theory, visual images, fabrics, colours, lines and textures of costumes can be read in an identical manner to a text. Costumes have their own idiolect and can be interpreted as a justification of personality and character. So we will be looking beyond the colours of the costumes, the textures of the clothes, the lines and types of fabrics. The primary goal is to establish the underlying conventions, identifying significant differences and oppositions in an attempt to model the system of connotations, distinctions, relations and rule of combination employed. For instance, we will look at what differentiates a fashionable from an unfashionable garment. Semiotic reading of film involves an effort to make explicit what is usually implicit.

The film *African Bride* was produced by Kaycee Oguejiofor , directed by Chima Okoroji and its costumes were designed by Ayode Alabi for Filmark Production Limited in 2014.

The film is based on the chaotic marriage of Aداugo and Paschal. Although the couple lives in the same house, they live in disharmony and isolation. They live under the same roof but in a different world. The bone of contention is the wedding gifts Aداugo got from her wealthy parents. The house, car and other household items offered to the couple by Aداugo's parents create great barrier between the couple as Aداugo constantly reminds Paschal that she owns the house they both live in. While Aداugo continues to live in her rich luxurious world, her husband Paschal lives in fear as she will not allow him free access to anything that belongs to her or that came from her parents no matter how insignificant the item may seem. Aداugo sees Paschal and members of his family as threat to her inheritance. Thus, she develops violent dispositions and attitude in order to guard her possessions. The film shows her as a violent and aggressive woman.

Semiotic theory assumes that a film character's costume is directly related to aspects of his/her personality. Society acknowledges certain dress codes and attributes them to particular qualities in individuals' traits. For instance, we would expect a doctor in a film to hang a stethoscope on his neck. Hence, we conclude that costume is communication and has a crucial role in constructing and maintaining cultural ideals and responsibilities. It is a stereotype, a conversation and a reflection of personality. It is not necessary for a character to tell the audience his/her personality; his/her costume will do the talking for him/her. However, Berger notes that:

Because the relationship that exists between signs and what they mean (from Saussure's perspective) is arbitrary, we have to find ways of making sense of signs; we do so via codes. Codes can be looked at...as systems of conventions that we are taught or pick up from our culture (54).

So we will be analyzing this video film based on the notion which culture and convention hold on colour, texture, line and style in addition to our knowledge of the meanings and significance of colour, fabrics, lines, and style of clothes and accessories. However, reference will be made to literatures on the subject.

Adaugo in the context of this film is portrayed as an extrovert: her attitude borders on violent disposition. She exhibits boundless energy, a convincing debater; what she lacks in fact or arguments, she makes up in bluffing and bravado. She has a quick explosive temper and a long burning resentment. Adaugo is impatient with those who do not share her motivation; she is brutally and sarcastically frank about her material possessions. Her tongue seems to be razor-sharp and active all the time. She is apt to be autocratic. However with her costumes, she inspires admiration and hate simultaneously. Her sarcasm can devastate other characters. She is a strict disciplinarian.

In her first Appearance, Adaugo is seen in yellow bubu and a pink trouser, high-heeled black shoes, a bogus necklace. Analyzing Adaugo's costumes as described above in terms of colours, we know that colours hold different meanings amongst different cultures. However, the meanings of colours change over time, yet there could be a general meaning that is accurate to each colour. In a semiotic analysis, colour is seen as a carrier of meaning and as such there is an assumption of fixity which is often equated to a powerful effect. This film draws a clear line between a

poor husband and his rich wife. At the beginning, it presents the active female/passive male phenomenon. In the scene where Adaugo hits Paschal with a cooking spoon, he bends down sobbing, while she stands straight watching him without any sign of remorse or fear. At first, Paschal stands his ground, but immediately she reminds him of her sole ownership of the house, car (jeep), and the entire household items, he becomes docile and incapable of earning respect from Adaugo.

Another example of showing how passive he could be, is when he gives in to her seductive advances when Adaugo needs to satisfy herself sexually (before now she speaks and treats him like a houseboy). He desires to fulfill his fantasy of marrying her and having a peaceful home. At the beginning of the film, Paschal presents himself as an object. His manner and appearance in almost oversized, cheap looking brocade (caftan) set him up as an object that Adaugo maltreats and threatens all the time. In one of the scenes, Adaugo needs to satisfy her sexual urge, she wears a flashy, sexy sleeveless sky blue mini chiffon gown richly ornamented with sequins on the neckline. This costume only serves to draw Paschal to her apparent sexual availability. With this costume, she lures Paschal to the bedroom from the parlour where he is watching television. In order for audience and other characters in the movie (like Adaugo's mother) to view the milieu of the film in Adaugo's perspective and appreciate her motives, Adaugo works very hard and fights extremely hard to preserve her properties including the duplex and car which are amongst the wedding gifts she got from her parents.

Towards the middle of the film, when Paschal begins to take assert himself, he begins the process of shifting from being an object to the subject. He is no longer passive to what Adaugo wants of him, he becomes active, and in accordance, his richly

made golden blazer reflects this transformation. He finally realizes that Aداugo and her mother will never take him seriously if he continues to live the way he has been living. After being humiliated before his friend and security guard, he comes to this realization.

Dressed in indigo jeans, he goes to his father-in-law requesting that he takes back the house he gave to him and Aداugo, so that they can leave in peace. This bold request shocks Aداugo and her mother who had been collaborators in frustrating Paschal. At first, the camera positions and points of view were presenting Paschal to the audience as women would see him. By the end, it shifts from the female gaze to where the audience could identify with him and see what he sees. He is now the subject of the film and challenges the notion of him being passive, emotionally weak, a pauper and a sexual object. He takes on the role of what society may see as masculine. He takes control over his own life and how others perceive him. One stereotype about certain young-men is that they get married to rich men's daughters in order to become comfortable and rich through their wife's possessions.

Clothes in *African Bride* function symbolically to represent the character's situations in life as Gillette posits, "Social status has always been indicated with clothes. Someone dressed in shabby, ill-kempt clothes of rough homespun materials would rarely be mistaken for a member of the upper class" (392). Colours often have different meanings in various cultures. According to Craig,

Black was associated with life by the Greeks because out of the black night day was born. During the sixteen Century Anne of Brittany used black for mourning, and henceforth black has been associated with mystery, tragedy, and silence (209).

Black in films can be overpowering and make the wearer seem evil and autocratic. Villains such as Adaugo often wear black. In all the scenes where Adaugo is seen at home in her aggressive mood, she wears black. Gillette submits, "Clothes can also be visible clues to the wearer's emotional state" (388). Black symbolizes death and it is the traditional colour of mourning in Igbo culture (from her name we deduce that she is an Igbo woman).

Therefore, Adaugo's use of black dresses when she is not mourning anyone is symbolic. Black is associated with evil and evokes fear and horror. Colour has symbolic meaning in Igbo culture and each colour conveys peculiar information when worn. The black colour is a symbolic colour for funerals in traditional Igbo society. It was the official mourning colour at funerals. Although, other colours such as white has become the mourner's choice in recent times. What then is Adaugo telling the audience and other characters in the film with her frequently worn black dress? This can be said to signify her lack of respect for the life of her husband. Traditionally, it is believed that a wife who wears plain black clothes wishes her husband death. It can also be said to symbolize her feelings towards her marital life. These black clothes are clues to her state of mind towards her husband. She does not care whether Paschal is dead or alive, all that matters to her is that her wedding gifts are kept intact for her. Her use of black, invokes Enahoro analyses of the film *Xala*, where he opines that:

The use of colour in this film is very symbolic. N'Gone is veiled and dressed in white entering into marriage and leaving the unmarried world. If El haji Abdou Kader Beye were to have died in the film, N'Gone would have dressed in black, as a widow leaving marriage (56).

Colour hence becomes a coded iconography in *African Bride*. The message conveyed by the black dresses Adaugo wears is filled with visual connotations. As Brockett opines:

Colour is one of the most powerful means available to the costumer for expressing mood and character. Although it is difficult to specify connotations, different colours clearly can arouse different responses. Hues that are grayed in saturation and black in value aid in establishing a somber mood... (559).

Adaugo's frequently worn black costume also signifies her disdain for tradition and custom as the Igbo culture does not encourage a wife who is not widowed to wear plain black clothes. However, black is fashionable in the contemporary fashion world, so the costume designer might not have taken note of the message these black dresses pass onto to the audience and the psychological effects they have on the other characters in the film. Black dress in this film hence becomes the signifier signifying Adaugo's goal. One cannot also help but find comparisons between Adaugo's costumes and those of Paschal. Paschal's costumes signal degrees of restriction and freedom.

At the beginning of the film, Paschal wears lighter hue. For instance, in the first scene, he wears brocade with light crisp, somewhat glossy surface which according to Brockett connote brittleness and femininity. However, he ended the film wearing dark hue jeans trousers most of the time. According to, Brockett, "Materials with heavy threads...have a homespun quality associated with the working class" (560). Moreover, jeans are the most worn type of trousers with almost no competition from various other fabrics. It seems everyone from almost any economic

class wear jeans because they are durable and cheap. Although, there are jeans that are of the designers' range which are costly. But these classes of designers' jeans usually carry insignia to symbolize the designer who made them. Paschal's jeans does not carry emblem, so one may quickly conclude that they must be cheap. Besides, one meaning of blue holds that apart from signifying serenity, blue brings sadness and depression.

According to Craig, blue "...is associated with...sadness" (209). So the often worn denim by Paschal symbolizes his character, economic class, temperament and personality. The indigo colour of the denim symbolizes his fidelity, loyalty and faithfulness to his wife. While Adaugo is already tending towards falling prey to the fraudster's sexual advances, Paschal remains loyal to his marriage. Taking note of his temperament, we also have discovered that blue elicits calmness psychologically. According to Enahoro, "...blue...suggest calmness and quietness" (56).

So the frequently worn blue denim of Paschal becomes a colour code symbolizing his calm nature. We never see Paschal lose his temper no matter the situation. Severally we see his wife exhibiting aggressive and violent behaviour towards him publicly and privately, yet Paschal continues to remain calm. Also, Paschal is not the very-social kind of person. He is calm, and mostly focused on his business, immediate and extended family. Unlike his wife who is quick to make friends. According to semiotic theory, costumes have their own idiolect which can be interpreted as justification of personality and character. Hence, Gillette submits:

Clothes can also be visible clue to the wearer's emotional state. An introvert would probably wear something that would make him blend into the crowd...similarly, someone

who is gloomy might wear something dark and dreary to reinforce and visually announce their mood... (388).

Furthermore, Leo the fraudster, as projected by the costume designer, is a rich young man with good taste of fashion. Through his costumes, he endeavours to appear in the dignity of a gentleman despite his real social status. However, while he showcases himself as a rich businessman, he also uses his cunning to get what he needs to survive. The costume designer used colours, fabric and style to give him the look which is what he intends to communicate to other characters in the film. This in essence is symbolic to his character as he lives in deceit; hence his costumes also become deceptive.

In this wise, Berger submits: “In addition to these more-less conventionally understood signs of identity, there are some people who try to mislead others about who they are and what they are like by the signs they use” (23). We see Leo dressed in well tailored suits. Generally we regard men in suits as gentlemen, but in the socio-cultural context of this film, suit is used to signify deceit and greed. It symbolizes an imposter appropriating a decent profession or pretending to have a different profession. His costumes also include muscle shirts, earring, and a bowler hat. He lives like an “actor” living in a rich man’s world via his costumes.

However, events in the film show that he is always utterly broke, but he maintains the attitude and demeanour of a high-class individual; and as long as he acts like this, other characters in the film believe he is one, and he is able to keep them believing his appearance until he traps them into his net. His costumes include: hat, three-quarter shorts, designers’ wrist watches, bold dark sun shade glasses, richly embroidered caftan and beautiful designers’ pairs of shoes. As the film progresses, his physicality shifts from

the classy Western fashion to Arab dressing, and all his costumes are bundles of contradictions symbolizing his character.

Conclusion

Video film is a “text” that relies on visual imagery to tell a specific story. Doing a semiotic reading of a film requires one to take a careful look at the setting, plot, characters, dialogue, symbols, as well as those factors that have an influence on the film, such as the social, cultural, economic, historical and political context in which the film was created. The aim of a semiotic analysis is however, to determine the social significance of the film. Semiotics as earlier noted, is basically the study of signs and symbols. A video film is clearly a system of signs and symbols. A video film first and foremost comprises images, image of people, clothes and properties. It is a system of images whose purpose is to describe, develop and narrate an event or series of events. In the costumes worn in *African Bride*, there are many signs and symbols (in the form of fabric, colour, texture and style) that create an overall message.

According to Gillette, “Typically, the designer will select a range of colours textures, and fabrics appropriate to the period and production concept and then develop variations within those themes for individual characters” (395). With costumes, non-verbal communication is unavoidable. Regardless of whether or not the message is intentional, characters continue to communicate through their costumes and with their costumes. It is impossible to wear costumes without transmitting socio-cultural signals. A costume designer may decide to avoid trends and hence dress a character in jean and tee-shirt, a fraudster may decide to look responsible by wearing suit and tie: In every costume there must be a message whether intended or not). Following or avoiding trends

in dressing goes further to convey messages depending on the culturally accepted codes among the people's culture and convention. Gillette posits that, a "...costume designer needs to distill that mound of information into a few typical lines, colours, textures, and details that represents the essence of the period" (394). Costumes as we have demonstrated, symbolize the differences between Paschal and Adaugo's economic background in *African Bride* with her expensive, richly embroidered Indian Sari, Adaugo clearly represents the upper class whereas Paschal appears in rather disheveled, scruffy outfits and therefore makes his lower class background clear to the audience.

Adaugo's black clothes and sometimes bright extravagant colours, of yellow and pink symbolize the nonconformist, loud and unrestrained nature of her character. While Paschal's grey, plain and nondescript clothes suggest the dull dreary reality of his character and life. Therefore costume may be regarded as a language of signs, symbols and iconography that non-verbally communicates meanings about individuals and groups.

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