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METAPRAGMATIC ACTS IN J. P. CLARKS'S *WIVES REVOLT*

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Abstract

This study explores the metapragmatic acts in J.P. Clark's Wives' Revolt; highlighting how conversational dynamics are shaped and reinforced in the play's thematic preoccupations. It investigates the functions of metapragmatic acts as both a linguistic and sociocultural tool in literary discourse. The research primarily analyses the types, forms, and features of metapragmatic acts in the text, emphasising their communicative functions. A qualitative method of data analysis was employed to investigate the explicit and implicit metapragmatic acts within the conversation. Explicit acts were evident through performative verbs such as summoning, decreeing, questioning, and confronting, as well as self-referential expressions, hedges, and contextualisation cues. Implicit acts were realised as deictic references and mood variations (exclamative, interrogative, and declarative). Findings showed that speech act descriptions and talk regulation strategies enhanced interaction and thematic expression. The study concluded that metapragmatic acts in Wives' Revolt serve as a vehicle for sociocultural critique, establishing language as a tool for power negotiation and social change.

Keywords: Metapragmatics, Metapragmatic acts, Wives' Revolt, Power negotiation, Literary discourse

1. Introduction

The scholarly investigations of literary discourse have established the complex interplay between language, meaning, and interpretation. As a specialised communicative modality, literary texts deploy nuances of linguistic devices which transcend simple referential signification to engage readers in inferential reasoning, contextual reconstruction and pragmatic negotiation. Within this domain, metapragmatics provides a crucial framework for understanding how literary works create, control, and dispute accepted conventions in

communication. Metapragmatics offers insights into the ideological issues of literary language, the creation of narrative identities, and the negotiation of socio-cultural norms within literary works by analysing how texts reflect their own discursive practices.

The term metapragmatic points to the linguistic markers that aid the interpretation of words beyond the denotative context. It focuses on how meta-utterances (utterances about other utterances) are used to shape conversations in real time, rather than simply discussing language itself. Beyond analysing how language is used or theorised, it examines speakers' active use of utterances to guide and influence communication. Hence, Caffi (1998) describes it as a theoretical and methodological approach describing pragmatics, the conditions governing communicative acts and the management of discourse. Metapragmatics examines how interactants use metalanguage to 'frame their own or other participants' expressions as true or false, precise or vague, cooperative or uncooperative... in order to secure or change the direction of the current talk, to create or maintain effective and efficient social relationships' (Hübler and Bublitz, 2007: 3; Grundy, 2008: 156). This is because the meaning and function of an utterance can vary contextually.

Verschueren (2000), asserts that it focuses on how language works by using language; adding that an utterance carries metapragmatic functions if there is an awareness of the pragmatic effect(s) which is the force behind the meaning-generating capacity of language in use. Distinguishing between the two types of metapragmatics acts, Verschueren (2000) identifies explicit and implicit acts. Explicit metapragmatic markers are markers that specifically comment on the communicative act which include performative verbs and speech act descriptions (apologising, praying, advising), self-referential expressions, hedges, quoted and reported speeches, evidentials and contextualisation cues (well, accordingly, all right, yet, of course). Deictics (they, I, now, where), aspect (progressive: '*you aren't suggesting*,' and perfective: '*I have already eaten.*'); mood: (exclamative, declarative and interrogative), modality (won't, can), contextualisation signals (space fillers, prosody, codeswitching), and implicit voice constitute the implicit metapragmatic items that subtly comment on the communicative act.

Hübler and Bublitz (2007) as cited by Unuabonah (2017) differentiate between regular and occasional pragmatic act, and On-line and Off-line metapragmatic act. While offline acts intrude ongoing discourse, online metapragmatic acts sustains a discourse in progress. While routine metapragmatic acts are conducted on a regular basis to achieving a specific pragmatic consequence, occasional metapragmatic acts are periodically perform in an accidental manner. Consequently, implicit on-line, explicit on-line, implicit off-line and explicit off-line are the realisations of metapragmatic acts.

Metapragmatic Comments

Hübler and Bublitz (2007) describes Metapragmatic comments as metapragmatic acts that concentrate on the entire principles of communication, communicative acts, and associated non-linguistic body behavior. Interactants use metapragmatic comments to help listeners understand what speakers are saying. As a result, analysing metapragmatic comments can provide information about our values and personality in addition to what we do when we communicate. Speakers bring up cooperative principle, a politeness principle, sociocultural norms, speech actions, and nonverbal communication up in their meta-utterances. These actions can also be self- or other-directed, prospective (when they relate to an impending discourse component), or retrospective (when they refer to a former speech or discourse segment). From the fore going, this research sets to explore the types, forms and features of metapragmatic acts in J. P. Clark's *Wives Revolt*.

2. Contextualisation of the text

J. P. Clark's *The Wives' Revolt* satirises gender roles, power dynamics, and resistance within a patriarchal society in the fictional *Erhuwaren* community in Niger Delta, Nigeria. The play is about women who have long experienced unfairness and marginalisation. They challenged their husbands who decided to exclude them and hoard the compensation money from an oil company. This exclusion stems from the societal belief that only men should be in charge of wealth and decision-making. The men are enraged by the women's insistence on the male-female sharing formula. The final decree is not favorably received by the women. The wife of the village leader Koko, organises a demonstration against this injustice. The women decide to leave the neighborhood at night and travel to Eyara, one of the outlying settlements in the disease-ridden area. These ladies are forced to bathe in filthy water in Eyara, and days later they return home sick from it. Finally giving in, Okoro changes the law. The women's revolt demonstrates both a literal and symbolic stand against oppression, thereby, giving insight into the evolving gender consciousness within traditional African societies.

Through humor and satire, Clark critiques the social injustices and the exploitation of both women and less powerful community members that bedeviled the society. His portrayal of the women's revolt foregrounds that resistance, even in the face of opposition, is necessary for justice and societal progress. Beyond its spatial setting, *The Wives' Revolt* projects the universal themes of gender inequality, oppression, social injustice and revolution. To Clark, women are not passive victims but active agents of change. This is in tandem

with the feminist discourse advocacy for equality and fairness.

3. Literature review

Jacquemet (2007) researches on 'If he speaks Italian, its better': Metapragmatics in court. He analyses the fight for the control of the pentiti's testimony by looking at the different strategies of metapragmatic awareness employed by the defense and the prosecuting bench, represented in the Italian legal system by a prosecuting magistrate, most of the times directly assisted by the presiding judge. The study concludes that, intimidation is usually the exclusive right of the most powerful speaker(s), and that only the powerful rely on explicit metapragmatic strategies as a form of control. Explicit metapragmatics becomes a mechanism of control over the communicative expectations of participants. In the case examined, the judge showed his ability to control different repertoires of alternative styles, displaying his refined social persona. This display of a broad communicative competence has not only boosted his 'interactional power' (Jacquemet 1989), but also signaled that the Neapolitan difference was tolerated and had a place in the Hall of Justice in Naples.

Hongladarom (2007) attempts a study of metapragmatic comments in Thai on the basis that Thais usually say things indirectly particularly in criticism. On this note, the study focuses on two types of metapragmatic comments in Thai- with and without overt disclaimer. The study aims to understand how these disclaimers are used and to reveal the nature of metapragmatic awareness and the notion of criticism from the Thai's point of view. Dialogues in novels and letters, gossips and editorial newspaper form the research data. The paper concludes that the concept of metapragmatics could expand to include the less evident expressions that also indicate the speaker's or writer's evaluative stance. It is established from the overt and covert disclaimer that Thais are concerned about interpersonal relationships. They value friendship and solidarity even when their interactants are unknown.

Also, Muntigl (2007) examines a metapragmatic examination of therapist reformation using the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) on the premise that SFL accounts for language use according to context and also an approach that is well equipped to explore the metapragmatic issues that surround reformation. The research examines what interactional relevance a certain reformation might have for the subsequent unfolding of the therapeutic conversation and the interrelationship between reformation type and social context. The study concludes that reformulation as an important metapragmatic functions operate to provide a novel frame which the clients may construe their experience of self or

other's behaviour. Reformation itself with respect to conjunctive meanings such as elaborating, summarising and exemplifying provide a general frame through which actions, utterances, sensing and being are interpreted. Also, reformulation constitute a key therapist practice of doing narrative therapy.

Tanskanen (2007) explores metapragmatic utterances in computer-mediated interactions. The study examines how and for what purpose do participants use metapragmatic utterances in the challenging communicative setting of asynchronous (utterances that comment on the communicative act only but not on the subject of discourse) computer-mediated interaction. Findings reveal that majority of the metapragmatic utterances are self-initiated and intratextual and that their most typical function is to act as judgments of appropriateness. The study draws its conclusion by asserting that there is a collaborative purpose behind the use of metapragmatic utterances, communicators adopt the perspective of their fellow communicators and construct their messages in a manner which contributes to a successful communicative exchange by anticipating potential problems.

Unuabonah (2017) investigates metapragmatic comments in Nigerian quasi-judicial public hearings using a discourse-pragmatic framework that integrates Verschueren's (2000) metapragmatics, Mey's (2001) pragmatic act theory, conversation analysis (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), and Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle to identify metapragmatic comments (MPCs) and their textual and interpersonal functions. Findings show that MPCs include speech act descriptions, maxim adherence/violation, talk regulation, and metalinguistic comments. Textually, MPCs control topics, mark discourse boundaries, and interrupt; interpersonally, they express evaluative stances, respond to comments, emphasise messages, and claim attention. The study concludes that MPCs both shape and are shaped by interactional context, with participant roles and status influencing their production and frequency.

These research works are connected with the present study with respect to the adopted framework. The divergence comes in the applicability. While the previous studies apply metapragmatics to court discourse, computer-mediated language and Thai language, the current study is domicile in literary discourse. Even though the focus is different, they provide a deeper insight into and better understanding of metapragmatics. The focus of these studies shows that literary discourse has not received adequate attention from metapragmatics standpoint. Thus, this study explores the metapragmatic acts in J.P. Clark's *The Wives Revolt*, its types (explicit and implicit), forms and functions to unveil how language is used and how speakers (or writers) reflect on and manipulate language to achieve specific effects.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to investigate the metapragmatic acts that are inherent in conversational exchanges in the selected text. Conversations drawn from J. P. Clark's *Wives' Revolt*, constitute the primary data for this research. The analysis follows a qualitative research design, focusing discursive analysis and textual interpretation. The data is subjected to thematic and contextual scrutiny, with a particular emphasis on identifying instances of explicit and implicit metapragmatic acts. Explicit metapragmatic acts captures overt commentary on language use within the dialogue, while implicit metapragmatic acts is concerned with more subtle, underlying pragmatic cues that shape conversational interpretation. A random sampling technique is employed to unveil representative instances of metapragmatic expressions within the text. This selection aids the presentation of a balanced representation of various speech forms and pragmatic strategies. The study also adopts a metapragmatic approach to elucidate the interpretative principles governing conversations. This framework fosters a deeper understanding of how metapragmatic awareness influences discursive intent, interactional coherence, and discourse meaning. Therefore, this study provides a nuanced exploration of metapragmatic acts within the interactants of *Wives' Revolt*, thereby contributes to existing studies on literary discourse and metapragmatics.

5. Data Analysis and interpretation

This section is grouped into three. The first discusses the various parameters through which both implicit and explicit metapragmatics are achieved in the text. The second section explores the forms in which the metapragmatic acts take. This involves a systematic description of the speech acts. The last part examines the features of the metapragmatic acts inherent in the text. Each aspect draws excerpts from the text to substantiate its claim.

5.1. Types of metapragmatics

The explicit and implicit metapragmatics is discussed. Excerpts from the text are used to substantiate the claims.

5.1.1 Explicit metapragmatics

5.1.1.1 Performative verbs

Summoning:

- a) OKORO: *Ehruwaren! Ehruwaren! Descendants of Udemede..., open your ears wide that you may hear well...*

WV pg 1

- b) IDAMA: *Oko!*
OKORO: (offstage right) *O!*

IDAMA: *Come out quick. Come out here quick!*

WV pg17

From the above excerpt, Okoro is set to make an announcement, he thereby calls the people of Erhuwaren to come closer and to pay rapt attention to his announcement. Similarly, in (b) Idama pays Okoro an early morning visit. Okoro, who is trying to fix himself a meal is summoned by Idama, who on the other hand brings the news of the absence of the female fold in the village. This is used to initiate listener's rapt attention.

Decreeing

OKORO: ... To stem these evil forces from the society before they take indestructible roots in our blessed soil, *it is hereby decreed as penal measures that, as from the first crowing of the cock tomorrow, it shall be come an offence for any citizen of Erhuwaren...*

WV pg 2

From the announcement made by Okoro, there is an underlying decree. The performative verb 'I hereby decree' is a pointer to the explicit metapragmatic act. The pragmatic act employed here is explicitly on-line, although Okoro is only the participant involved in this speech act.

Questioning:

a) KOKO: Have you come home after passing your obnoxious law?

...

b) OKORO: Unfair to whom to the goats or to their owners?

WV pg 4

After Okoro had announced the banishing of goats in the village, Okoro goes back home to be welcomed with a question by his dear wife. However, he also employs the act of questioning, trying to assert his unfairness as said by Koko. It is an explicit on-line pragmatic act. The pragmatic act of questioning gave room for more interaction.

Confronting/Challenging:

KOKO: Now, I know there really are hogs in the hedge. You don't even have to part the leaves to see their snouts.

OKORO: The prowlers you see are in your head, woman. *How dare you liken the best of our land to common swine?*

WV pg9

Okoro challenges the underlying ridicule in Koko's description of the men. The explicit on-line pragmatic is denotable here. After been challenged by Okoro, Koko doesn't cease to make her description of men known.

5.1.1.2 Self-referential expressions ('I have not passed any obnoxious law,),'

- a) KOKO: Have you come home after passing your obnoxious law?
OKORO: *I have* come home all right, but *I have* not passed any obnoxious law. So, mind what you say.

WV pg 4

- b) OKORO: Your mouth will get you into real fire one of these days...
KOKO: *I'll speak my mind* in any place any day. Anyway, *I am talking* in my own house and to my husband...

WV pg 6-7

- c) KOKO: You have your free women from the street all the time, ...
OKORO: ...Oh! *I should have known I would have* nothing but hostility and criticism from my own wife *when I came after* doing a good day's job for which *I have* had nothing but praise from everybody outside.

WV pg12

The participants make use of the self-referential explicit pragmatic act as an inclusive strategy to get themselves involved in the conversation ((a) *I have come home*) and also to make their opinions known ((a) *I have not passed any...*, (b) *I'll speak my mind*, (c) *I should have known*). These are explicit on-line pragmatic marker. Also, they are regular metapragmatic acts.

5.1.1.3 Hedges

- a) KOKO: Goats have no language that anybody in his right senses would hear, so don't try selling that cake that no child will buy.
OKORO: *Well*, so you women keep saying but as you can see, we have concrete evidence.

WV pg 4

- b) OKORO: Men pay all taxes in this land, that's how it's been since men dropped his poll tax upon our individual heads...
KOKO: *Well*, you will soon see what kind of bag you've brought yourselves with your new rules and regulations.

WV pg 10

- c) OKORO: Oh, the breed embraces men as well, *maybe not* in the same large number...

WV pg 34

The explicit metapragmatic acts are used to hedge. Participants avoid been committed to the effect of the utterances they make. In (a), Okoro refuses to be committed to Koko's assertion of goats' inability to speak. In (c), Idama asks why the only gender that constitute witchcraft is the female. Okoro in response to Idama's inquisition, says the men are also captured by this witchcraft but he refuses to commit himself totally to the assertion by saying *not in the same large number* that is to say the proportion of witchcraft is lesser than the wizard. This is

an explicit on-line metapragmatic act used to distant self from the postulation.

5.1.1.4 Contextualisation cues

- a) OKORO: ...*Accordingly*, all good citizens, now in possession of the above-mentioned creature, shall as from the time of this announcement, take all due step to remove their holdings, ... *WV pg 3*
- b) OKORO: Ehn, if I wasn't a clever man, much more cunning in fact that the tortoise of the tales, these children of mine would have killed me. *Oh, yes*, she's been teaching them a few tricks out of her dirty bag, *all right*. Look at it... *Well*, has he wet himself or done the big one that he is screaming?... *All right*, I am coming, don't worry, we'll see if we can do something to soothe the child.

WV, pg 25-27

The evident contextualisation cues used by the interlocutors helps to uphold the interaction. These cues contextually indicate hedging, assertiveness, turn upholding, and affirmativeness.

5.1.2 Implicit Metapragmatics

Deitic and mood are identified as the implicit metapragmatic acts in the texts.

5.1.2.1 Deitic

Personal deixis

OKORO: ...*they* have refused for many a day now to perform their civic duties... *Our* good women, not content with creating this condition of stench... This is the law of the land! It is the decree *I* have been empowered to proclaim!...

WV, pg 2

Place deixis

Chorus: Later the same evening, at *Okoro's house*, *Koko is sitting in front of her door at the kitchen end of the courtyard*, ...

WV, pg 4

KOKO: Have you come *home*, after passing your obnoxious law?

WV, pg 4

Time deixis

Chorus: A street at Erhuwaren early one *evening* in the Urbobo area of Nigeria...

WV, pg 1

Chorus: *Later the same evening*, at Okoro's house, Koko is sitting in front of her door at the kitchen end of the courtyard, ...

WV, pg 4

OKORO: ...*Accordingly*, all good citizens, *now* in possession of the

above-mentioned creature, shall as from the time of
this announcement, take all due step to remove their
holdings, ...

WV, pg 3

Metapragmatic acts implicitly express deixes of person, place and time. These help the interactants to have the full knowledge and understanding to their environment as well as the contextual understanding and interpretation of the discourse.

5.1.2.2 Mood

Exclamative mood

OKORO: *Erhuwaren! Erhuwaren!...*

WV, pg 1

KOKO: *Such sweet praise for iced fish!*

OKORO: No, you don't say it's iced fish I've been eating all the time?

KOKO: *I'm afraid so! It's the cooking that matters!*

WV, pg 13-14

Interrogative mood

KOKO: Have you come home after passing your obnoxious law?

.....

OKORO: Unfair to whom to the goats or the owners?

WV, pg 4

Declarative mood

KOKO: *The law you have passed is bad, unfair and
discriminatory, being directed against women
because of our stand. We will not accept it.*

OKORO: Is that a threat?

KOKO: *It is not. I meant exactly what I said.*

OKORO: And are you speaking for yourself or are all the
other women as pig-headed as you?

KOKO: *Abuse will not settle the matter.*

WV, pg 10-11

Speakers' mood is implicitly checked with the use of metapragmatic marker. In every utterance, there is an underlying mood that helps in the interpretation and the response to the ongoing discourse. Moods such as exclamative, interrogative and declarative mood are notable in the text. The interrogative mood keeps the interaction going (implicit on-line). The declarative mood as employed by Koko signals impoliteness as observed by the African culture. Women are believed to be submissive and modest but, reversed is the case in the text.

5.2 Metapragmatic Forms

5.2.1 Speech Act description

Metapragmatic acts perform certain speech acts some of which are: advising, objecting, apologizing, exemplifying, and requesting.

Advice

KOKO: And again money, no matter how it was got, will do the trick. Oh, we know who has the money has the title in this land. That's why you men are today keeping to yourself a great part of the money that belongs to everybody.

OKORO: *Your mouth will get you into real fire one of these days, and I won't bring you water or sand to save you. There's a limit to the protection I can give you in this town if you are going to let your tongue rule your head.*

WV Pg 6

Language is used to perform different acts. The act of advising is explicitly expressed with the use of metapragmatic act. Koko, who seem to be impolite in the text is advised by her husband to watch her tongue. He further says he can't be there to protect her at all times, hence, Koko needs to watch her mouth.

Objection

KOKO: You men spend all your money drinking together, anyway, and come home to be at your wives or drive them out of bed with your stench and snoring. Admit it, you rigged the whole thing to do us out of our fair share of the money that the white men paid us.

OKORO: *We did not.*

KOKO: Oh, yes, you did

OKORO: *We didn't, I swear.* You know as well as I do that it was in strict observance of tradition that we shared the money into three parts.

W

V Pg 7

Koko challenges the men of cheating the women as well as their irresponsible act. However, Okoro objects to this assertion, he even swears (*We didn't, I swear*) to ascertain credibility. The explicit off-line pragmatic act is deducible here. Koko disengages in the conversation by bring up the issue of the goats.

Apology

OKORO: ...To bring peace and harmony back to town, back to the

home, it makes my heart sweet all over to be able to announce that with immediate effect, even as I am speaking, *the obnoxious law, banning all manner of goats from our city and anywhere near Its precincts, is hereby revoked and consigned to that place where all such unhappy things are better left and unforgotten.* In consequence of which all good citizens, who have suffered loss of goats by one head or an entire herd, *are entitled to collect compensation at public expense after confirmation of their claims.* By the same token, our women folk whose insight into these matter passes the understanding of all men, deserve the specially fatted cow; the hundred heads of yam, the ten barrels of palm oil and all the other items of reparation required in the act of...

WV pg 58-59

Okoro made a proclamation of the banishing of goats in Erhuwaren. This proclamation seems offensive to the female folk. Thus, they make up their minds to excuse themselves from the community. After several deliberations and juxtapositions, the law is then reversed by the same individual who proclaims it. Okoro apologises and reverses the obnoxious law and also backs it up with compensation. Hence, it is an explicit off-line metapragmatic act.

Reminder/ Exemplification

OKORO: ...*You remember* the man who broke open his gramophone at Oto-Ogon, thinking he would find a man inside? All he found there was a network of knobs, rods and twisted steel. Now, that's real witchcraft for you.

WV pg 34

Okoro tries to educate Idama on witchcraft, he thereby delves into the past and citing the example of a man who broke open his gramophone hoping to find a man in it but did not. The explicit on-line metapragmatic act is employed to indicate the act of reminder and exemplification.

Requests

OKORO: *Where are they now?*

IDAMA: You know they didn't stop at Agboghiambe but went on straight to Otughievwen. There they were warmly received and entertained in the town -hall.

WV pg 28

The act of request is explicit through the use of questions. The implicit metapragmatic act of interrogation is employed to explicitly make request. Okoro, who is quite anxious asks Idama where their women are. Thus, this can be said to be explicit on-line metapragmatic act.

5.2.2 Talk Regulation Comments

Upholding of Turns:

OKORO: Oh, the breed embraces men as well, *maybe not* in the same large number... *At night*, they can fly from here to Lagos and ... *or* they only have... Oh, to have a witch in the house is a terrible thing. *yes*, whether as mother... *All right*. How else do you think the white man speaks...

WV pg 33-34

Bid for Turn

a) OKORO: That's slander, and you know it. Kama, you forget is an Ade of Ughievwen and...

KOKO: (completing the catalogue for him.) Idodo and Oto are members of the Honourable Orders of Igbu and Ebo at Otughievwen.

WV pg 6

Check listener's attention

OKORO: What do you mean they didn't stop there? Now, where did they go? Don't tell me they are going to Okwagbe or Owahwa? That will be taking the dance a little too far, don't you think?

IDAMA: Well, I remember you saying not quite long ago that they could go as far as Otokutu-or was it Ughevwighe that you mentioned?

OKORO: Must you record everything a man says like the magic box brought from Accra? Tell me, where have the old girls tracked our wives to?

IDAMA: Do you really want to know?

OKORO: Oh, you release words with great reluctance like a rich man his money. Where have our wives gone? I asked.

WV pg 30

The interactants employ metapragmatic acts to uphold, bid for turns and check listeners' attention. In a) Okoro uses explicit on-line metapragmatic act to uphold

his floor while Idama listens until the floor is released. However, Koko bids for turn my cutting in Okoro's speech. She didn't wait until the floor is allocated to her. While the listener's attention is checked by questioning. Similarly, Idama's attentiveness is displayed when Okoro challenges him of keeping record of all that is said *'must you record everything a man says like the magic box brought from Accra? Tell me, where have the old girls tracked our wives to?* It can be deduced from the utterance that Idama is attentive to the interaction. The use of interrogation by the participants explicitly checks listeners' attention.

From the analysis above, explicit and implicit metapragmatics as essential tools for navigating social interaction and meaning in the text. Explicit metapragmatics are characterised by on-line markers such as performative verbs (summoning, decreeing, questioning, and confronting), self-referential expressions used as inclusive strategies, and hedges that allow participants to distance themselves from their assertions. These explicit acts also function as contextualisation cues to manage assertiveness and turn-taking. Conversely, implicit metapragmatics operate through deixis (person, place and time) and mood (exclamative, interrogative, and declarative), which provide necessary environmental context and signal underlying attitudes, such as the impoliteness noted in declarative shifts. Furthermore, these metapragmatic forms perform specific speech acts which include advising, objecting, apologising and requesting while simultaneously serving as talk regulation comments to uphold or bid for conversational turns and verify listeners' attention.

5.3 Features of Metapragmatic acts

Findings reveal that self-directed metapragmatic comments (MPCs) allow speakers to express their thoughts and feelings about their own messages and the person they are interacting with, while other-directed metapragmatic comments help speakers to show their perspective on the listeners and the listeners' messages.

5.3.1 Direction

Self Direct

KOKO: Have you come home, after passing your obnoxious law?

OKORO: *I have come home* all right, but I have not passed any obnoxious law. So mind what you say.

WV, pg4

Others Direct

KOKO: *What else can you call a law that banishes goats from the town on account of the reasons you have given, if it is not downright unfair?*

OKORO: *Unfair to whom to the goats or their owners?* Nobody has ever heard the goats complain except those who speak their language.

WVPg4

Self-directed MPCs help the speakers to reveal their epistemic and affective stance towards the content of the speakers' messages and the addressee, while other-directed MPCs help the speakers to indicate their epistemic stance towards the addressees and the addressees' messages.

5.3.2 Positioning

Mid message

a) IDAMA: Yes, it's a shame but, Oko, are you sure she's still in bed sleeping?

OKORO: Am I sure? If I don't know my wife inside out, who should? *Of course*, she's still in her dreamland, pursuing herd of pigs...

WV pg18

b) OKORO: Yes, I've finished, no, I'm quite finished by this terrible thing our women have done to us. *Yet* I still can't how it was done. Did they wake up our women in turn at dead of night, and taking each out of hearing and sight of others, lead them out with promise of gold trinkets dangling outside to fall their individual laps? Or did those men of Eyara simply take them in one straight procession?

WV pg 47

In a), Okoro employs mid message to indicate awareness of Koko's whereabouts as reflected in the previous speaker's utterance while in b), the mid message indicator shows contrast and also holds the attention of other interactant during the interaction.

Prospective

OKORO: Who would have thought they had the might and mind.

IDAMA: *Well*, never trust a woman, so the saying goes.

OKORO: Gone, walked out, emigrated! Are you sure of your facts?

IDAMA: *Of course*, I'm sure. My own Titi, too is gone. yes, all

are gone-handmaid, headwife, most favoured wife,
nursing mother...

WV pg 19

The speakers position these metapragmatic acts at the beginning of their utterances for different reasons. Idama uses *well* to hedge the previous speaker while Okoro uses the phrase *of course* to assert and respond to the previous speaker.

Retrospective

IDAMA: They went there all right, but they didn't stop there.

OKORO: What do you mean they didn't stop there? Now, where did they go? Don't tell me they are going all the way to Okwagbe or Owahwa? That will be taking the dance a little too far, *don't you think?* *WV pg. 29*

Okoro utilises an MPC that describes the kind of message he has passed across at the end of his utterance. This speech act description serves to intensify the force of the interrogation in his utterance, indicating that, the addressee is obliged to carry out the action of responding to his questions. It is an explicit on-line metapragmatic act.

Self-directed metapragmatic comments allow speakers to express their epistemic and affective stances toward the messages and the listener, while other-directed MPCs reflect the speaker's perspective on the addressee's messages. Structurally, these acts are positioned as prospective (at the beginning) to hedge or assert responses, mid-message to indicate awareness, contrast, or maintain listener attention, or retrospective (at the end) to intensify the force of an utterance or describe the preceding speech act. Ultimately, these explicit on-line markers serve as crucial regulatory tools, obliging responses and clarifying the communicative intent within the interaction.

6. Discussion of findings

Conversations in *Wives's Revolt* encapsulate the types, forms and features of metapragmatic acts. Both explicit and implicit metapragmatic acts are significantly evident in the text. The explicit metapragmatic acts are realised through performative verbs such as summoning, decreeing, questioning, confronting/challenging; self-referential expressions, hedges and contextualisation cues. The implicit metapragmatic act are presented as deitic (person, time and place), mood (exclamative, interrogative and declarative) in the text. The implicit interrogative mood metapragmatic act is employed majorly to uphold the interaction as well as checking listener's attentiveness. The directive mood as employed by Koko is an impolite strategy against the African cultural

belief of women's submissiveness and modesty.

The metapragmatic forms, speech act descriptions and talk regulation comments are noticeable as in the text analysed. Speech act descriptions are presented as objecting, advising, apologising, decreeing, exemplifying, and requesting while the talk regulation comments are used to uphold turns, bid for turns and to check listener's attention. Direction is achieved through self- direct and others direct while the positioning are identified as prospective, mid message and retrospective. These form the metapragmatic features in J P. Clark's *Wives Revolt*. They show awareness, assertion, hedging and also intensify interrogation as well as establishing a relationship and connection between the participants.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of *Wives' Revolt* by J.P. Clark projects the importance of metapragmatic acts in shaping conversational dynamics and thematic preoccupations of the text. Both explicit and implicit metapragmatic acts serve various communicative and discursive functions. Explicit metapragmatic acts elements highlight the characters' awareness of language use and its effects in their conversations. The metapragmatic forms such as speech act descriptions and turn taking comments ultimately ensures a deeper relationship among/between the interlocutors and reinforces the central themes of gender roles, resistance, and power dynamics. This study establishes the importance of metapragmatic awareness in literary discourse; thus, reinforcing that language is not just an instrument of communication but a weapon of power relations and social change. Ultimately, the metapragmatic acts in *Wives' Revolt* not only structure the discourse but also serve as a vehicle for sociocultural critique. Through explicit and implicit strategies, the play underpins issues of gender roles, authority, and linguistic influence in negotiating societal norms.

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CONTEXTUAL USE OF PROVERBS IN YORUBA-ENGLISH NOLLYWOOD FILMS OF SOUTHWEST NIGERIA AS REFLECTION OF SOCIETAL VALUES NORMS AND BELIEFS

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Abstract

Proverbs are cornerstone of Yoruba oral literature, rich in metaphors and symbolism, serving as vehicles for conveying cultural values, societal norms, and communal wisdom. This study examines the proverbs used in Jagun Jagun, Anikulapo, and Elesin Oba, focusing on their contextual dimensions and pragmatic usage in relation to societal values and beliefs, philosophical depth and resourcefulness for continuity Yoruba traditions. The study adopted a qualitative content analysis, systematically identifying and analysing proverbs through multiple viewings, transcription, contextual interpretation, and categorisation. Each proverb was examined for its literal and metaphorical meanings, its narrative function, and its broader cultural implications. Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Acts Theory provided the theoretical lens study. This facilitates a detailed analysis of proverbs within their cultural, social, and communicative contexts. The findings reveal that the proverbs in Jagun Jagun emphasise bravery, loyalty, and communal unity and the repercussions of war. Those in Anikulapo centers on fate and destiny, the importance of focus and caution against greed, reflecting societal values of patience and singularity of purpose. Proverbs in Elesin Oba explores duty, tension between tradition and modernity, and the impact of cultural transitions. The study underscores the significance of proverbs in enhancing the richness of Yoruba storytelling, offering profound insights into the cultural, philosophical, and communicative practices of the Yoruba people.

Keywords: African oral literature, cultural beliefs, cultural transmission, societal values, Proverbs, qualitative content analysis.

Introduction

Proverbs, as encapsulated wisdom and traditional truths, form a cornerstone of oral literature across diverse cultures, particularly in Africa. Scholars such as Zakariyah (2013) and Mieder (1985) define proverbs as concise sayings that convey profound insights into human experience and societal values. Lawal et al. (1997) further highlight their role as repositories of collective wisdom, passed down through generations, offering crucial insights into pragmatic constraints in language use. These traditional expressions are not merely linguistic artifacts but dynamic tools that shape communication and reinforce cultural identity. In the context of Yoruba literature, proverbs are integral to both communication and the reinforcement of cultural values and societal norms. This study focuses on the analysis of proverbs within three prominent Yoruba-English Nollywood films: *Jagun Jagun*, *Anikulapo*, and *Elesin Oba*. The analysis will be conducted contextually, examining how these proverbs contribute to the portrayal of societal values and beliefs, integrating a socio-pragmatic approach with Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Acts Theory.

Nollywood, the Nigerian video-film industry, has emerged as a significant cultural force on the African continent since its origins in the late 20th century. Usman & Joshua (2019) note that the use of proverbs in Nigerian Nollywood movies dates back to the industry's beginnings, serving to justify character actions, critique immoral behavior, and enrich the Yoruba worldview (Kelani, 2015). This study investigates into this phenomenon, exploring the lexical and contextual dimensions of proverbs in these selected films and their reflection of societal values, norms, and beliefs in Southwest Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The study of proverbs has garnered significant academic attention across various linguistic sub-fields, including semantics, pragmatics, syntax, sociolinguistics and rhetoric, as well as in broader disciplines such as history, politics, and power studies. For instance, Alabi (2009) provides a comprehensive understanding of the pragmatic functions of Yoruba proverbs within their socio-cultural context, highlighting their enduring significance in social interactions and their role in sustaining cultural continuity and cohesion. Similarly, Adejumo (2009) offers an extensive analysis of Yoruba proverbs in Nollywood movies, demonstrating their multifaceted roles in storytelling, cultural transmission, and moral education, thereby enriching African orature. Despite the acknowledged prominence of proverbs in Nollywood films as a powerful medium for cultural expression and

social communication, a critical research gap persists in fully understanding their socio-pragmatic functions within cinematic discourse. While existing scholarship has explored the linguistic and literary dimensions of proverbs, their dynamic role as communicative tools embedded within film narratives has largely been overlooked. Specifically, there is a need for deeper investigation into how these proverbs operate pragmatically to shape social interactions, reinforce cultural identity, and influence audience interpretation within the unique context of film.

This study directly addresses this lacuna by investigating the socio-communicative strategies that govern the usage of proverbs in Nollywood films, and how these strategies reflect or reshape real-life Nigerian discourse practices. By applying Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Act Theory to selected films, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how proverbs function as situated communicative acts, contributing to character development, power dynamics, and cultural transmission. The findings of this research are expected to significantly advance knowledge in African sociolinguistics, film studies, and media pragmatics, thereby illuminating the intricate intersection of language, culture, and popular media in Nigeria.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the research is to examine the use of Proverbs in *JagunJagun*, *Anikulapo* and *Elesin-Oba* lexically and contextually and the reflection on societal values and beliefs. The following objectives guided the study:

- i. to contextually and lexically examine the proverbs used in *JagunJagun*, *Anikulapo* and *Elesin oba*;
- ii. to analyse how the use of proverbs in *Jagun Jagun*, *Anikulapo*, and *Elesin Oba* reflects the socio-pragmatic functions of communication, highlighting how they convey societal values, beliefs, and social roles within the context of the films;

Literature Review

Proverbs, as concise and culturally rich expressions, serve as fundamental pillars of communication and cultural transmission across various societies, particularly in Africa. They encapsulate collective wisdom, moral codes, and societal norms, functioning as didactic tools that impart ethical guidance and foster social harmony (Finnegan, 2012 and Yankah, 2015). As Agyekum (2018) argues, proverbs offer a unique window into a community's collective psyche, revealing its priorities, fears, and aspirations. Olatunji (2020) further emphasizes their role

in articulating the moral and ethical foundations of a society, underscoring their significance in understanding cultural values and beliefs.

Odebunmi's (2006) work does deal with the context of meaning as it focuses on how meaning is shaped by contextual factors. Specifically, his work explores the pragmatic and discourse features of interactions, emphasising how meaning emerges from situational and cultural contexts. Odebunmi (2006) examines the concept of context in communication, emphasising its critical role in interpreting meaning. The work categorises context into linguistic, situational, psychological, and social dimensions. Linguistic context involves the surrounding text or discourse, situational context refers to the physical and environmental setting, psychological context pertains to the speaker's and listener's mental states, and social context addresses the cultural and interpersonal norms guiding interaction.

In the context of African cinema, particularly Nigerian Nollywood, proverbs are not merely linguistic embellishments but active communicative tools that shape narratives, define characters, and reinforce cultural identity (Akpati, et.al, 2025). The history of proverbs in Nigerian cinema dates back to its inception, with filmmakers intentionally incorporating them to justify character actions, critique societal behaviors, and enrich the Yoruba worldview (Adeniji, 2018). Despite their prominent use, a significant research gap exists in understanding the socio-pragmatic functions of proverbs within cinematic discourse, especially how they dynamically operate as communicative acts to influence audience interpretation and reflect real-life Nigerian discourse practices.

The Didactic and Cultural Role of Proverbs in African Societies

The scholarly discourse on proverbs in African societies has consistently emphasized their multifaceted roles as repositories of cultural wisdom and moral guidance. Finnegan's (2012) seminal work on oral literature in Africa establishes proverbs as fundamental components of cultural transmission, serving as vehicles for conveying collective wisdom across generations. This perspective is reinforced by Yankah (2015), who emphasizes the didactic function of proverbs, noting their crucial role in imparting ethical guidance and social norms within communities. The convergence of these scholarly views underscores the universal recognition of proverbs as more than mere linguistic expressions; they are cultural artifacts that embody the philosophical and moral foundations of societies.

Building on this, Agyekum (2018) provides a psychological dimension to proverb analysis, arguing that these expressions serve as windows into the collective

psyche of communities, revealing their priorities, fears, and aspirations. This perspective is particularly relevant to the current study, as it suggests that proverbs in Nollywood films may function as mirrors reflecting the contemporary concerns and values of Yoruba society. Olatunji (2020) further extends this understanding by emphasizing how proverbs encapsulate the moral and ethical foundations of societies, highlighting their significance in understanding cultural values and beliefs.

Proverbs in African Cinema: An Emerging Field of Study

The intersection of proverbs and African cinema represents a relatively nascent but rapidly growing field of academic inquiry. Recent studies have begun to explore how proverbs function within cinematic narratives, moving beyond their traditional oral contexts to examine their roles in visual storytelling. Akpati et al. (2025) provide a significant contribution to this field through their socio-critical discourse analysis of proverbs in “The King of Boys,” demonstrating how proverbs serve multiple functions including character development, social critique, and identity construction. Their findings reveal that proverbs in Nollywood films are strategically employed to demean, discredit, and characterize individuals while simultaneously portraying cultural values such as patience, strategic thinking, and meticulous planning.

This research builds upon earlier work by Adejumo (2009), who conducted an extensive survey of Yoruba proverbs in Nollywood movies, showcasing their multifaceted roles in storytelling, cultural transmission, and moral education. Adejumo’s work emphasizes the contribution of proverbs to the richness of African orature, establishing a foundation for understanding their cinematic applications. Similarly, Alabi (2009) provides analysis into the pragmatic functions of Yoruba proverbs within socio-cultural contexts, demonstrating their enduring significance in maintaining cultural continuity and social cohesion.

The anthropological perspective offered by recent studies on proverbs in feature films further enriches this discourse. Research on films like “Isakaba” has interrogated the usefulness of African proverbs in Nollywood narratives, revealing their capacity to enhance cultural authenticity and audience engagement. These studies collectively suggest that proverbs in African cinema function as cultural bridges, connecting traditional wisdom with contemporary storytelling techniques.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework provides a conceptual structure to understand and interpret the data. The theoretical framework integrates the Socio-pragmatic approach and Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Acts Theory. This integration allows for a comprehensive analysis of proverbs within their cultural, social, and communicative contexts, providing insights into their functions and meanings in the selected Nollywood films, and promoting societal values and beliefs.

Socio-Pragmatic Approaches to Language in Film

The application of socio-pragmatic theories to film analysis represents a sophisticated approach to understanding how language functions within mediated contexts. Mey's (2010) definition of socio-pragmatics as "the study of how language use is embedded in social practices, and how these practices shape the meaning and function of language" provides a crucial theoretical foundation for analyzing proverbs in cinematic discourse. This approach recognizes that meaning is not inherent in linguistic structures alone but emerges from the complex interplay between language, social context, and communicative practices.

Recent developments in pragmatic theory, particularly Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Acts Theory, offer valuable insights for understanding how proverbs function as situated communicative acts within film narratives. Mey's (2001) concept of the "pragmeme" – a basic unit of pragmatic action that includes both the speech act and its contextual embedding – provides a more holistic framework for understanding language use than traditional speech act theory. This theoretical advancement is particularly relevant for analyzing proverbs in film, where visual, auditory, and narrative contexts significantly influence meaning construction.

The application of pragmatic acts theory to African linguistic contexts has gained momentum in recent years. Studies examining pragmatic acts in various African languages and contexts have demonstrated the theory's versatility and relevance for understanding culturally specific communicative practices. For instance, research on pragmatic acts in alms begging language in Nigeria has shown how Mey's framework can illuminate the social and cultural dimensions of language use in specific African contexts.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative content analysis approach, examining the proverbs within *Jagun Jagun*, *Anikulapo*, and *Elesin Oba*. The study focused on the context in which these proverbs are used and the societal values and beliefs they convey. Each proverb is analysed for its literal and metaphorical meanings, and its role in the narrative and broader cultural context is considered. The primary research instrument is a content analysis checklist developed to identify and categorise proverbs based on their socio-pragmatic functions. The process of identifying and cataloging proverbs in the selected films involves several systematic steps to ensure a thorough and accurate collection of data. These steps include multiple viewings, transcription, contextual analysis, and categorisation. Data were collected from purposively selected Nollywood movies: *Jagun Jagun*, *Anikulapo*, and *Elesin Oba*. Relevant scenes containing proverbs were transcribed and subjected to socio-pragmatic analysis using Mey's Pragmatic Acts theory. Proverbs were analysed in terms of their contextual functions, illocutionary force, and socio-cultural implications.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the analysis and discussion of the findings derived from the study of proverbs in three selected Yoruba-English Nollywood films: *Jagun Jagun*, *Anikulapo*, and *Elesin Oba*. The discussion is structured to directly address the two primary objectives of this study: (i) to contextually and lexically examine the proverbs used in the aforementioned films, and (ii) to analyse how the use of these proverbs reflects the socio-pragmatic functions of communication, thereby conveying societal values, beliefs, and social roles within the cinematic narratives.

Objective I: Lexical and Contextual Examination of Proverbs

This section examines the lexical meanings and contextual adaptations of proverbs identified in *Jagun Jagun*, *Elesin Oba* and *Anikulapo*. Drawing on Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Acts Theory (Mey, 2001), the study investigate how these proverbs function as pragmemes, where their literal (lexical) meanings are dynamically shaped and enriched by the specific filmic contexts in which they are uttered. This approach aligns with Odebunmi's (2006) assertion that the meaning of linguistic expressions, including proverbs, is multifaceted, encompassing linguistic, situational, psychological, and social dimensions (Odebunmi, 2006). The use of proverbs in Nollywood films, as noted by Adejumo (2009), serves not only as a storytelling device but also as a powerful means of cultural transmission and moral education (Adejumo, 2009).

Proverbs in Jagun Jagun: Lexical Meaning and Contextual Adaptation

In *Jagun Jagun*, a film steeped in themes of warfare, power, and justice, the identified proverbs are strategically deployed to underscore character motivations, societal expectations, and the consequences of actions. The lexical meanings of these proverbs, rooted in Yoruba oral tradition, are often straightforward, yet their contextual application within the film adds layers of pragmatic significance. For instance, the proverb "Gbogbo ogun ni l'á'ni l'òògùn, gbogbo ìjà ni kùn'ni l'ápá" (All battles make one sweat; quarrels make one incapacitated) lexically warns against the futility and debilitating nature of incessant conflict. Contextually, its utterance during the welcoming of warriors to a training school functions as a pragmeme of caution, tempering nascent aggression with a reminder of the toll of war. This reflects the didactic function of proverbs, which Yankah (2015) identifies as a key aspect of their communicative purpose.

Another significant proverb, "Wón ní kí olè kí ó sá..." (A thief was told to flee and he fled...), carries the lexical meaning that compliance should suffice, and excessive punishment is unwarranted. In the film, this proverb is contextually adapted when a character criticizes the King of Modede for his brutal execution of laborers. Here, the proverb acts as a pragmeme of critique, challenging the king's authority and highlighting a societal value against disproportionate retribution. This demonstrates how proverbs can be used to interrogate existing power structures and norms, rather than merely reinforcing them (Agyekum, 2018).

The proverb "Ewú orí l'ògbón irun, gbón lá, gbà" (Grey hair signifies wisdom) lexically equates age with wisdom and authority. When used by the King of Modede, its contextual function is to legitimize his authority and demand respect, framing his decisions as products of accumulated experience. This exemplifies how proverbs serve as normative tools that enforce cultural values, particularly the reverence for elders and their wisdom, a common theme in African societies (Finnegan, 2012). The proverb becomes a pragmeme of authority assertion, leveraging collective wisdom to bolster individual power.

Furthermore, the proverb "Òkà wón bí'mọ̀ sílẹ̀, ó bí ọ̀rọ̀..." (A boa constrictor gives birth to venom; a scorpion reproduces troubles) lexically conveys the idea that evil begets evil. Its contextual use by Ogundiji's subordinates during a war, as they witness the escalating violence, transforms it into a pragmeme of fatalism and a commentary on the cyclical nature of conflict. This proverb, in its contextual deployment, reinforces the thematic category of Consequences of Actions, illustrating how proverbs can encapsulate moral lessons and traditional ethical codes (Alabi, 2009).

The proverb "Àì fẹ'lẹ k'ẹbòsí nì ó ní ẹ'nì jọ ọ" (What makes a bawling not danceable is that it was not made calmly) lexically speaks to the importance of a calm and diplomatic approach. Gbotija's utterance of this proverb, albeit initially a misunderstanding of the food situation, contextually highlights the value placed on diplomacy and careful deliberation (Ìtójú) in resolving disputes. This demonstrates the proverb's function as a pragmeme advocating for peaceful and considered communication, aligning with the idea of proverbs as repositories of collective wisdom that guide social interactions (Lawal et al., 1997).

Proverbs in Elesin Oba: Lexical Meaning and Contextual Adaptation

Elesin Oba, a film rich in cultural ritual and the exploration of duty versus desire, employs proverbs to articulate complex moral dilemmas, reinforce social hierarchies, and critique individual failings. The proverbs here often carry a profound weight, reflecting the gravity of the narrative.

Consider the proverb "A kì í lu bàtá k'énìkan dá'rín" (He who plays the bàtá drum does not lead a song). Lexically, this proverb underscores the concept of distinct roles and boundaries within a social structure. Its contextual use by Sergeant Amusa, when he is sent to arrest Elesin-oba to prevent the ritual suicide, functions as a pragmeme of critique against overreach and a reinforcement of established social roles. Amusa, a colonial figure, uses a traditional proverb to assert the boundaries of his authority and to implicitly criticize Elesin-oba's perceived transgression of his own role by delaying the ritual. This highlights how proverbs can be utilized to mediate conflict and reinforce societal expectations, even across cultural divides (Mey, 2010).

The proverb "Ajá ò ní sáré kí ó fì olówó rẹ sílẹ" (A dog will not run past his owner) lexically signifies unwavering loyalty and adherence to hierarchy. Elesin-oba's use of this proverb to express his loyalty to the king in the afterlife is a powerful pragmeme of commitment to duty and the spiritual order. It underscores the deep-seated belief in the continuity of relationships beyond the physical realm and the importance of fulfilling one's obligations, even in death. This proverb directly reflects the thematic category of Hierarchy and Authority, demonstrating how proverbs serve as moral anchors guiding ethical behavior and reinforcing traditional values (Alabi, 2009).

Iyaloja's use of "Ẹni tí ó bá ẹ ohun tí ẹni kan kò ẹ rí..." (Whoever does what nobody has done will witness what nobody has witnessed) is particularly potent. Lexically, it warns against unprecedented actions and their unforeseen consequences, or conversely, justifies innovation. However, in its contextual application to Elesin-oba after his arrest, it functions as a chilling pragmeme of threat. Iyaloja employs it to underscore the severe repercussions of Elesin-oba's failure to fulfill his sacred duty, implying that his actions

have brought about an unprecedented and dire situation for the community. This illustrates the proverb's capacity to convey strong social pressure and to highlight the Consequences of Actions, aligning with Olatunji's (2020) view of proverbs encapsulating moral and ethical foundations.

Similarly, "Òkété gbàgbé ibòsí, ó d'élé alátè ó ká'wò s'órí" (A rat forgets consequences and regrets) lexically critiques impulsivity and lack of foresight. Directed at Elesin Oba's failure to fulfill his duty, this proverb becomes a pragmeme of condemnation, highlighting the tragic outcome of his momentary lapse in judgment. It serves as a stark reminder of the societal expectation for careful deliberation (Ìtójú) and the severe consequences of neglecting one's responsibilities, thereby functioning as a normative tool to uphold communal values (Lawal et al., 1997).

The proverb "Bí ọ̀gèdè bá kú, a fí ọmọ rẹ̀ rọ̀pò ní" (When banana plant dies, its suckers replace it) lexically speaks to the concept of legacy and continuity. Its use to justify the king's ritual suicide and the cyclical nature of life transforms it into a pragmeme of acceptance and affirmation of generational succession. This proverb encapsulates a philosophical understanding of life and death, where individual existence is part of a larger, ongoing cycle, and duty is passed down through generations. This aligns with the idea of proverbs as windows into the collective psyche, reflecting deeply held beliefs about existence and social order (Agyekum, 2018).

Proverbs in Anikulapo: Lexical Meaning and Contextual Adaptation

Anikulapo, a narrative that explores themes of destiny, ambition, and the consequences of defying fate, utilizes proverbs to foreshadow events, comment on character flaws, and reinforce traditional wisdom. The proverbs in this film often serve to highlight the intricate web of cause and effect that governs human existence.

The proverb "Wón ní ohun bọ̀ wón bọ̀ àwòn l'a fí n dèná rẹ̀" (The way to stop a fast-approaching animal is through a net) lexically emphasizes strategic preparedness and foresight. When uttered by the King of Ilu-oyo while discussing an impending threat from a neighboring town, it functions as a pragmeme of strategic planning and caution. This proverb underscores the importance of proactive measures in leadership and governance, reflecting a societal value that prioritizes collective security and intelligent anticipation of challenges. This aligns with the broader understanding of proverbs as didactic tools that guide practical decision-making (Yankah, 2015).

Similarly, "Igi gọgọrọ má gùn mí l'ọjú, àt'òkèrèrè l'a ti n wò ó" (A tall tree that could stab the eye is best seen from afar) lexically advocates for foresight and the avoidance of potential harm. Its repeated use by the King when discussing threats reinforces its

function as a *pragmeme* of prudence and careful observation. This proverb serves as a moral anchor, guiding leaders to consider long-term consequences and to maintain a vigilant stance against potential dangers, thereby reflecting the thematic category of Wisdom and Experience (Olatunji, 2020).

The proverb "Ikú ara n'í n pa odíderé" (Plucking its own feathers kills the parrot) lexically warns against self-destructive behavior stemming from vanity or greed. Olori Wojuola, the King's second wife, employs this proverb to insult the fourth wife, Olori Arolake, out of jealousy. In this context, it acts as a *pragmeme* of condemnation and a veiled threat, highlighting the destructive nature of envy and ambition within the royal court. This proverb powerfully illustrates the Consequences of Actions and serves as a moral anchor against negative character traits, resonating with the traditional ethical codes encapsulated in Yoruba proverbs (Alabi, 2009).

Another proverb, "Eni tí kò bá j'owú, ọbẹ̀ rẹ̀ kì í dùn" (One who lacks envy will never cook delicious soup), presents a more nuanced perspective. Lexically, it suggests that a certain degree of rivalry or ambition can drive excellence. Olori Wojuola uses this proverb to express her displeasure about the king favoring Olori Arolake, transforming it into a *pragmeme* that justifies her competitive spirit and ambition. This proverb reveals a complex aspect of societal values, where ambition, even when fueled by rivalry, can be seen as a catalyst for achievement. It functions as a power negotiation tool, allowing characters to rationalize their actions and assert their positions within a hierarchical structure (Mey, 2010).

The proverb "Má gùn igi s'aré kojá ewé" (Don't climb a tree beyond its leaves) lexically advises against overreaching or exceeding one's limits. Awarun uses this proverb to warn Saro about boundaries, making it a *pragmeme* of caution and a reminder of social decorum. This proverb underscores the importance of understanding and respecting one's place within the social order, reflecting a normative tool that reinforces communal harmony and prevents disruptive individualism (Lawal et al., 1997).

Finally, "Ohun ọwọ́ mi ò tó m'á fí gògò fà á" (What my hand can't reach, I'll use a hook) lexically speaks to ingenuity and resourcefulness in overcoming obstacles. Awarun uses this to warn Saro about not reaching for what isn't his, transforming it into a *pragmeme* of warning against illicit ambition and a subtle threat. While lexically it suggests resourcefulness, contextually it implies that illegitimate means will be used to reclaim what is rightfully hers, highlighting the complexities of power negotiations and the lengths to which individuals might go to protect their interests. This demonstrates the dynamic interplay between the literal meaning of a proverb and its pragmatic function within a specific communicative act (Odebunmi, 2006).

Through this lexical and contextual examination, it becomes evident that proverbs in these Nollywood films are not mere decorative linguistic elements. Instead, they are potent pragmemes that actively shape meaning, influence character interactions, and reflect the intricate tapestry of Yoruba societal values, beliefs, and norms. Their adaptive nature allows them to convey both explicit and implicit messages, making them invaluable tools for understanding the socio-pragmatic landscape of the narratives.

Objective II: Socio-Pragmatic Functions of Proverbs and Reflection of Societal Values

This section examines how the contextual use of proverbs in *Jagun Jagun*, *Elesin Oba*, and *Anikulapo* reflects the socio-pragmatic functions of communication, thereby conveying deeply embedded societal values, beliefs, and social roles. As Mey (2010) posits, socio-pragmatics examines language use in its social context, highlighting how linguistic choices are shaped by and, in turn, shape social interactions (Mey, 2010). Proverbs, in this regard, function as powerful pragmemes units of pragmatic action that perform specific communicative acts within the filmic narratives, often serving as normative tools, moral anchors, conflict mediators, and instruments of power negotiation.

Proverbs as Normative Tools: Reinforcing Hierarchy and Authority

Proverbs frequently operate as normative tools, enforcing cultural values and reinforcing established social structures, particularly those pertaining to hierarchy and authority. In Yoruba society, respect for elders and those in positions of power is a fundamental value, and this is vividly reflected in the cinematic deployment of proverbs (Adejumo, 2009).

In *Jagun Jagun*, the proverb "Ewú orí l'ógbón irun, gbón lá, gbà" (Grey hair signifies wisdom) serves as a potent pragme for legitimizing authority. When uttered by the King of Modede, it is not merely a statement about age; it is a performative act that demands deference and respect, framing his leadership as inherently wise and deserving of obedience. This aligns with the thematic category of Wisdom and Experience, where elders are positioned as custodians of knowledge and tradition (Lawal et al., 1997). The proverb, in this context, functions to uphold the societal value of respecting seniority and established leadership, acting as a subtle yet firm directive for compliance within the social hierarchy. This resonates with Finnegan's (2012) observation that proverbs are crucial for cultural transmission, embedding societal norms and expectations within communicative acts.

Similarly, the proverb "Èni bá rán ni ní'sé l'á bèrù..." (Fear the one who sends an errand, not the messenger) from *Jagun Jagun* explicitly reinforces the principle of hierarchy and authority. Used in a scene addressing insufficient food for warriors, this proverb functions as a pragme of indirect admonition. It redirects potential discontent from the

immediate issue or messenger to the ultimate authority, thereby safeguarding the hierarchical structure. This proverb underscores the societal belief in respecting the source of command, even when its directives lead to hardship, highlighting a value system that prioritizes order and obedience within a chain of command. Usman and Joshua (2019) note that such proverbs in Nollywood often reflect the deep-seated cultural reverence for authority figures.

In Elesin Oba, the proverb "Ajá ò ní sáré kí ó fi olówó rẹ̀ sílẹ̀" (A dog will not run past his owner) is a powerful pragmeme affirming loyalty and hierarchy. Elesin-oba's use of this proverb to express his unwavering commitment to the king, even in death, reinforces the societal value of fidelity and the acceptance of one's designated role within the social order. This proverb encapsulates the belief that one's allegiance to a superior, whether earthly or spiritual, is paramount. It serves as a normative tool that reinforces the traditional social contract, where individuals are expected to honor their commitments and maintain their positions within the established hierarchy. This reflects the broader cultural emphasis on collective responsibility and adherence to traditional roles, as discussed by Olatunji (2020).

Proverbs as Moral Anchors: Guiding Ethical Behavior and Consequences of Actions

Beyond reinforcing social structures, proverbs also serve as moral anchors, guiding ethical behavior and highlighting the consequences of actions. They encapsulate traditional ethical codes, such as *Ìwà Pelú Ìtẹ̀* (good character with patience) and *Ìtọ́jú* (careful deliberation), which are central to Yoruba philosophical thought (Alabi, 2009).

In Anikulapo, the proverb "Ikú ara n'í ñ pa odìdẹ̀rẹ̀" (Plucking its own feathers kills the parrot) functions as a strong moral anchor against vanity and greed. Olori Wojuola's use of this proverb to insult Olori Arolake is a pragmeme of moral judgment, implying that Arolake's perceived vanity will lead to her downfall. This proverb reflects a societal belief that excessive self-indulgence or covetousness is self-destructive, a warning against hubris that resonates deeply within Yoruba moral philosophy. Agyekum (2018) argues that proverbs serve as windows into the collective psyche, revealing deeply held moral principles. This proverb, therefore, not only critiques individual behavior but also reinforces a communal value system that champions humility and moderation.

Another proverb from Elesin Oba, "Òkété gbàgbé ibòsí, ó d'élé alátẹ̀ ó ká'wọ̀ s'órí" (A rat forgets consequences and regrets), acts as a poignant moral anchor against impulsivity and a lack of foresight. Directed at Elesin Oba's tragic failure to fulfill his sacred duty, this proverb is a pragmeme of condemnation, underscoring the severe repercussions of neglecting one's responsibilities. It reflects the societal value of *Ìtọ́jú*, emphasizing the importance of careful deliberation and understanding the long-term implications of one's

choices. The proverb serves as a stark reminder that actions have consequences, and a failure to consider them can lead to profound regret and societal disapproval. This highlights the didactic function of proverbs, which Yankah (2015) identifies as crucial for moral education.

Furthermore, the proverb "Gbà mí gbà mí ẹranko kò yẹ ọdẹ" ("Save me from animals" does not befit a hunter) from *Elesin Oba* functions as a moral anchor that shames cowardice and reinforces the expectation of courage and responsibility. Iyaloja's use of this proverb to mock *Elesin-oba*'s failure to perform his ritual duty is a powerful pragmeme of social shaming. It highlights the societal belief that individuals, especially those in positions of honor or responsibility, must face their duties with fortitude. The proverb critiques the deviation from expected social roles and reinforces the value of bravery and steadfastness in the face of adversity, aligning with the traditional emphasis on character and integrity (Alabi, 2009).

These examples demonstrate how proverbs, as pragmemes, are not merely descriptive but prescriptive, actively shaping and reinforcing the moral fabric of the society depicted in the films. They serve as constant reminders of the ethical boundaries and behavioral expectations that govern communal life, reflecting a deep-seated cultural commitment to moral rectitude and accountability.

Proverbs and Gender and Social Roles: Challenging and Reinforcing Norms

Proverbs in Nollywood films also engage with the complex dynamics of gender and social roles, sometimes reinforcing traditional expectations and at other times subtly challenging them. This dual function highlights the nuanced ways in which cultural narratives both preserve and interrogate societal norms.

In *Jagun Jagun*, the proverb "Wón ní k'òkùnrin t'átòrìn, k'òbìnrin t'átòrìn..." (Let a man and woman urinate to see who soaks more) is a striking example of a proverb used to challenge gender stereotypes. Lexically, it is a provocative statement designed to assert capability regardless of gender. Contextually, its use as a threat by the king to his brother functions as a pragmeme that questions traditional gendered assumptions about strength and dominance. While the immediate context is a power struggle between men, the underlying message challenges the notion that one gender is inherently superior or more capable than the other. This reflects a progressive aspect of cultural discourse, where proverbs can be repurposed to advocate for more equitable social roles, aligning with the broader societal shifts observed in contemporary Nollywood narratives (Akpati et al., 2025).

Conversely, in Elesin Oba, the proverb "Ọmọ ti di bàbá, bàbá ti di ọmọ" (The child has become the father) speaks to role reversals and power shifts, particularly in the context of Elesin Oba's failure and his son Olunde's assumption of responsibility. Lexically, it describes a situation where the natural order of authority is inverted. As a pragmeme, it underscores the profound disruption caused by Elesin Oba's dereliction of duty, where the son is forced to embody the responsibility traditionally held by the father. This proverb, while descriptive of a specific event, reinforces the societal expectation of filial duty and the grave consequences when traditional roles are not upheld. It highlights the importance of maintaining social order and the continuity of generational responsibility, a core aspect of Yoruba communal values (Olatunji, 2020).

Proverbs as Conflict Mediators and Tools of Persuasion

Proverbs are frequently employed as conflict mediators and powerful tools of persuasion, offering guidance for resolving disputes and influencing behavior. They provide a culturally sanctioned means of expressing dissent, offering advice, or de-escalating tension.

In Jagun Jagun, the proverb "Àì fẹ'lẹ k'ẹ̀bòsì ní ó ní ẹ̀ni jọ ọ" (What makes a bawling not danceable is that it was not made calmly) functions as a pragmeme advocating for diplomacy and careful approach in conflict situations. Gbotija's utterance, even if initially misapplied, highlights the societal value placed on Ìtọ́jú (careful deliberation) and peaceful resolution. This proverb serves as a conflict mediator, suggesting that the manner in which an issue is raised or addressed significantly impacts its outcome. It underscores the belief that calm and diplomatic communication is essential for achieving harmonious results, reflecting the collective wisdom embedded in proverbs for navigating social interactions (Lawal et al., 1997).

Another proverb from Jagun Jagun, "T'áṣe bá di méjì a dá'bà..." (When order becomes two, it turns to suggestions), serves as a pragmeme of critique against divided leadership. Uttered by Ogundiji when infuriated with his subordinates, it articulates the societal belief that clear, unified leadership is paramount for effective action, especially in times of conflict. This proverb functions as a conflict mediator by implicitly urging a return to singular authority, thereby preventing the chaos that can arise from conflicting directives. It reflects a societal value that prioritizes cohesion and decisive leadership, particularly in situations demanding collective effort (Usman & Joshua, 2019).

In Anikulapo, the proverb "Wón ní ohun bọ wón bọ àwọn l'a fí ń dènà rẹ" (The way to stop a fast-approaching animal is through a net) is used by the King of Ilu-oyo when discussing an impending threat. This proverb, functioning as a pragmeme of strategic preparedness, acts as a persuasive tool to advocate for proactive measures in the face of

potential conflict. It emphasizes the importance of foresight and intelligent planning to mitigate harm, thereby serving as a form of conflict mediation by promoting preventative action rather than reactive engagement. This aligns with the didactic function of proverbs in guiding practical decision-making and ensuring communal safety (Yankah, 2015).

Proverbs as Instruments of Power Negotiations

Proverbs are also potent instruments in power negotiations, used to legitimize or challenge authority, assert dominance, or subtly influence social standing. They allow characters to navigate complex social hierarchies and assert their will within established norms.

In Jagun Jagun, the proverb "Èni bá jù'ni lẹ̀ lẹ̀ jù'ni nù" (Whoever is superior can overpower another) is a direct pragmeme warning about power dynamics. This proverb, while seemingly a statement of fact, is used to assert dominance and remind others of the existing power imbalance. It functions as a tool in power negotiation, signaling that resistance to a superior force is futile and potentially dangerous. This reflects a pragmatic understanding of social realities, where power differentials are acknowledged and often reinforced through linguistic means (Odebunmi, 2006).

Another powerful example from Jagun Jagun is "L'ójú tá l'ẹwúré rẹ̀ fẹ́ má gbó bí ajá?" (At whose front does your goat want to bark like a dog?). This proverb, used by Ogundiji when his warriors were losing, is a pragmeme of defiance and an assertion of dominance. It challenges the perceived weakness of his own forces and reasserts his authority, implying that his subordinates should not act out of character or show weakness in the face of adversity. This proverb is a clear instance of power negotiation, where a leader uses traditional wisdom to rally his troops and re-establish control, leveraging cultural metaphors to convey a strong message of resolve (Usman & Joshua, 2019).

In Anikulapo, Olori Wojuola's use of "Èni tí kò bá j'owú, ọ̀bẹ̀ rẹ̀ kì í dùn" (One who lacks envy will never cook delicious soup) is a subtle yet effective pragmeme in power negotiation. While lexically suggesting that rivalry can drive excellence, in context, it justifies her ambition and displeasure over the king's favoritism towards Olori Arolake. This proverb allows her to articulate her competitive stance and assert her desire for influence within the royal court, framing her ambition not as a flaw but as a necessary ingredient for success. This demonstrates how proverbs can be employed to rationalize personal motivations and negotiate one's position within a social hierarchy (Mey, 2010).

Furthermore, Awarun's warning to Saro in Anikulapo with the proverb "Ohun ọ̀wọ́ mì ò tó m'á fì gògò fà á" (What my hand can't reach, I'll use a hook) serves as a pragmeme of veiled threat and a clear act of power negotiation. While lexically it speaks to ingenuity,

its contextual application implies that Awarun will use any means necessary to protect her interests and reclaim what she perceives as hers. This proverb underscores the complex interplay of resourcefulness and assertion of power, highlighting how individuals can leverage traditional wisdom to navigate disputes and protect their social or material standing (Odebunmi, 2006).

Conclusion

Across all three films, the proverbs function as dynamic pragmemees that not only reflect but also actively shape the socio-pragmatic landscape of the narratives. They serve as a rich tapestry through which the societal values, beliefs, and social roles of the Yoruba culture are both upheld and interrogated. The consistent application of Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Acts Theory reveals that the communicative significance of these proverbs extends far beyond their literal meanings; they are performative utterances that enact social functions within their specific contexts (Mey, 2001).

The analysis demonstrates a clear tension between communalism and individualism, a recurring theme in Yoruba thought. While many proverbs reinforce collective responsibility, hierarchy, and adherence to traditional roles, others, like those challenging gender stereotypes or critiquing leadership, suggest a dynamic cultural space where norms are constantly negotiated. This aligns with Akpati et al.'s (2025) socio-critical discourse analysis of proverbs, indicating their role in both maintaining and questioning societal structures (Akpati et al., 2025).

Proverbs consistently serve as moral lessons, reinforcing traditional ethical codes such as *Ìwà Pelú Ìtẹ́* (good character with patience) and *Ìtọ́jú* (careful deliberation). They provide a framework for understanding the consequences of actions, guiding characters and audiences towards behaviors deemed virtuous within the cultural context. This didactic function, as highlighted by Yankah (2015), is central to their communicative purpose.

Ultimately, the contextual use of proverbs in *Jagun Jagun*, *Elesin Oba*, and *Anikulapo* reveals them to be more than mere linguistic embellishments. They are vital communicative acts that encapsulate the collective wisdom, moral philosophy, and social dynamics of the Yoruba people, offering profound insights into their worldview and the intricate ways in which language shapes social reality. The films not only entertain but also educate, using proverbs to transmit cultural knowledge, instill ethical principles, and provoke reflection on the human condition. This study affirms the significant role of proverbs in Nollywood as a dynamic medium for cultural expression and a profound commentary on the philosophical underpinnings of Yoruba society.

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THE ROLE OF FRENCH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIAN EDUCATION: A REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

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Abstract

This article examines the role of French language education in Nigeria and highlights its implementation, challenges, and national relevance through a review of existing studies and policy frameworks. Although French was declared Nigeria's second official language in 1996 and incorporated into the National Policy on Education, its actual implementation in public schools remains limited and uneven. Drawing on a qualitative synthesis of over twenty peer-reviewed studies, the article evaluates key dimensions of French education, including curriculum design, teacher development, pedagogical practices, and learner engagement across different regions. The findings reveal persistent structural challenges such as inadequate funding, shortage of qualified teachers, poor infrastructure, and low learner motivation. Nevertheless, the study identifies institutional innovation and strategic partnerships as emerging pathways for improvement. It argues for renewed investment in teacher training, curriculum reform, and stronger policy enforcement. By synthesizing these insights, the article contributes to ongoing national debates on educational reform and language planning, positioning French as a critical tool for regional integration and national development.

Keywords: Curriculum Implementation, French Language Education, Learner Engagement, Nigeria Language Policy, Regional Integration, Teacher Training

1. Introduction

Nigeria is one of Africa's most linguistically diverse nations, with over 500 indigenous languages coexisting alongside English, the official language (Eka, 2019). Within this multilingual landscape, French occupies a position of strategic importance due to Nigeria's geopolitical proximity to several Francophone countries, including Bénin Republic, Cameroon, and Niger. In recognition of this, the Federal Government declared French as Nigeria's second official language in 1996, underscoring its relevance for diplomacy, regional cooperation, and international engagement (Offorma, 2012). Beyond its diplomatic significance, French plays a crucial role in facilitating regional integration, trade, and cross-border communication within West Africa (Sanni-Suleiman, 2022). Consequently, its inclusion in Nigeria's education system has received sustained policy attention.

The National Policy on Education (NPE) designates French as a core subject at the junior secondary level, with the broader objective of equipping learners with communicative competence and intercultural awareness. However, despite these policy intentions, the implementation of French language education across Nigerian schools remains inconsistent and uneven.

This inconsistency reflects a broader structural challenge within the Nigerian education system namely, the gap between policy formulation and practical implementation. In many schools, particularly in rural and underserved areas, French language instruction is constrained by inadequate infrastructure, shortage of qualified teachers, limited pedagogical training, and low learner motivation (Awanbor, 2023). As a result, the presence of French in policy documents does not necessarily translate into meaningful classroom practice. While some studies have highlighted the potential of digital tools and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to enhance language learning, access to such innovations remains limited, further reinforcing disparities in educational provision (Inyang, 2017). Although a growing body of research has examined French language education in Nigeria, much of the existing literature focuses on isolated aspects such as policy design, curriculum structure, or teacher development. There is limited integrative analysis of how these factors interact to shape overall learning outcomes within the Nigerian context. This fragmentation constrains a comprehensive understanding of the systemic challenges affecting French education.

This article addresses this gap by providing a critical and integrative review of French language education in Nigeria, focusing on the interconnections between policy frameworks, curriculum design, pedagogical practices, and learner engagement. By synthesizing these dimensions, the study contributes to ongoing debates on educational reform and language planning, while also identifying practical pathways for strengthening the role of French as a tool for national development and regional integration.

2. Literature Review

French language education in Nigeria has been widely examined across multiple domains, particularly in relation to language policy, curriculum design, teacher development, and learner engagement. While existing studies consistently affirm the strategic importance of French within Nigeria's multilingual and geopolitical context, they also reveal persistent structural and systemic constraints that limit its effective integration into the education system. A critical examination of the literature shows that these challenges are interconnected, yet often treated in isolation. A central theme in the literature is the role of language policy in shaping educational practice. Scholars such as Offorma (2012) and Adejimola

(2010) argue that the inclusion of French in the National Policy on Education reflects Nigeria's commitment to regional integration and international cooperation. The declaration of French as Nigeria's second official language in 1996 further reinforces its symbolic and strategic importance. However, several studies highlight a fundamental policy–practice disjuncture. While French is prominently featured in policy documents, its implementation remains inconsistent across schools. This has led researchers to characterize Nigerian language policy as largely symbolic, lacking the institutional mechanisms, enforcement strategies, and accountability structures necessary for effective implementation.

Closely related to policy concerns are issues of curriculum design and delivery. The French curriculum, developed by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), is structured around communicative competence, incorporating listening, speaking, reading, writing, and cultural awareness (Yusuf & Ashiru, 2022). This aligns with contemporary approaches to second language acquisition, which emphasize functional language use and contextual learning. However, empirical studies suggest a significant disconnect between curriculum design and classroom practice. Araromi (2018) and Awanbor (2023) note that in many schools—particularly in underserved areas French instruction is reduced to grammar-focused teaching and rote memorization, with minimal emphasis on communicative interaction. This gap undermines the effectiveness of the curriculum and limits students' ability to use the language in real-life contexts.

Teacher-related factors constitute another major area of concern in the literature. A consistent finding across studies is the shortage of qualified French language teachers, particularly in public schools and rural regions (Onuko, 2011; Awanbor, 2023). Beyond this shortage, issues of teacher quality and preparedness are also significant. Akinpelu and Yegblemenawo (2023) argue that many teachers lack exposure to modern pedagogical approaches, especially communicative language teaching (CLT), which reduces their ability to engage learners effectively. Furthermore, the absence of structured and continuous professional development programs means that many teachers rely on outdated instructional methods, further limiting the quality of language instruction. In addition to teacher-related challenges, infrastructural and resource constraints are widely documented. Studies indicate that many Nigerian schools lack essential facilities such as language laboratories, audio-visual equipment, and up-to-date instructional materials (Awodeha & Chika, 2025). These deficiencies significantly restrict the implementation of interactive and learner-centered teaching approaches. Although some researchers, such as Inyang (2017), highlight the potential of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to enhance language learning particularly through mobile applications, audio tools, and interactive

platforms the adoption of such technologies remains limited due to infrastructural barriers and uneven access.

Learner-related factors also play a critical role in shaping educational outcomes. Research consistently shows that student motivation toward French is relatively low, particularly in contexts where the language has limited immediate practical relevance (Onuko, 2011). The dominance of English as the primary language of instruction, coupled with interference from indigenous languages, further complicates the learning process. In many cases, students have limited exposure to authentic French usage outside the classroom, which reduces opportunities for practice and reinforces the perception of French as an abstract or non-essential subject.

Despite the extensive body of research on French language education in Nigeria, a significant gap remains. Much of the existing literature examines individual components such as policy, curriculum, teacher development, or learner attitudes in isolation. There is limited integrative analysis of how these factors interact within the broader educational system to influence learning outcomes. This fragmentation constrains a holistic understanding of the systemic challenges facing French language education. This study addresses this gap by providing a critical and integrative review of French language education in Nigeria. It examines the interrelationships between policy frameworks, curriculum design, pedagogical practices, and learner engagement, offering a more comprehensive perspective on the structural dynamics shaping language education. By doing so, the article contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities within French language education and proposes pathways for more effective implementation.

3. Historical Evolution of French Language Education in Nigeria

The development of French language education in Nigeria is closely linked to the country's historical trajectory and its geopolitical positioning within West Africa. Although Nigeria was colonized by Britain and adopted English as its official language, its proximity to several Francophone countries including Bénin Republic, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon has consistently underscored the strategic importance of French. This geographical reality has influenced both Nigeria's diplomatic orientation and its language policy decisions, particularly in relation to education.

3.1 Early Exposure and Colonial Indifference

French language exposure in Nigeria predates its formal inclusion in the education system. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, interactions with French missionaries and traders especially in border communities introduced elements of the language through informal means (Orekan, 2010). However, during the colonial period, British educational policy largely excluded French from formal instruction, prioritizing English as the primary medium of administration and control (Offorma, 2012). This colonial neglect had lasting implications for language development in Nigeria. The absence of early institutional support for French delayed the establishment of structured language education, thereby creating a foundational gap that later policy efforts struggled to address. As a result, French entered the Nigerian education system without a strong historical base for widespread adoption.

3.2 French in the National Policy on Education

The post-independence period marked a significant shift in Nigeria's language policy. With increasing emphasis on Pan-African cooperation and regional integration, French began to gain recognition as a language of diplomacy and cross-border communication. This shift was formally institutionalized in the National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1977, which acknowledged the importance of foreign language education within the national curriculum (Adejimola, 2010).

Subsequent revisions of the policy in 1981, 1998, and 2004 reinforced this position, designating French as an official foreign language within the education system. The declaration of French as Nigeria's second official language in 1996 represented a critical milestone in national language planning. However, despite its symbolic significance, this policy decision was not accompanied by sufficient institutional support. The absence of coordinated implementation strategies, funding mechanisms, and teacher development frameworks limited its practical impact, thereby reinforcing the gap between policy intention and educational reality (Offorma, 2012; Orekan, 2010).

3.3 Curriculum Development and Structural Implementation

The development of the French language curriculum in Nigeria has been guided by national agencies such as the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC). The curriculum is structured around communicative competence, emphasizing language skills development alongside cultural awareness (Yusuf & Ashiru, 2022). In principle, this aligns with

contemporary approaches to second language acquisition. However, the implementation of this curriculum has been constrained by systemic limitations. Many schools lack the necessary instructional materials, including audio-visual resources and language laboratories, which are essential for effective communicative language teaching. In addition, teachers often operate without adequate professional support or opportunities for continuous training. These constraints have weakened the translation of curriculum objectives into meaningful classroom practice, particularly in public schools and underserved areas (Awanbor, 2023; Araromi, 2018).

3.4 Role of International Partnerships and Language Institutes

In response to these challenges, international collaborations have played a supplementary role in supporting French language education in Nigeria. Institutions such as the French Embassy, the Institut Français, and other Francophone partners have contributed through teacher training programs, scholarships, instructional materials, and immersion opportunities (Iteogu, 2016). Similarly, language centers such as the Centre for French Teaching and Documentation (CFTD), established in cities including Abuja, Ibadan, and Enugu, have served as important hubs for teacher development and language proficiency enhancement. While these initiatives have provided valuable support, their impact remains limited in scale and uneven in distribution. Consequently, they have not sufficiently addressed the broader structural deficiencies within the national education system.

3.5 Regional Variations and Uneven Growth

The evolution of French language education in Nigeria has been marked by significant regional disparities. Southern states, which generally benefit from better infrastructure and greater access to educational partnerships, have made relatively more progress in implementing French language programs. In contrast, northern and rural regions continue to face systemic challenges, including teacher shortages, insecurity, and limited institutional support (Onuko, 2011). Studies indicate that, despite its presence in policy documents, French often occupies a marginal position in actual educational planning at the state level (Yusuf & Ashiru, 2022; Sanni-Suleiman, 2022). In some cases, the subject is absent from school timetables altogether due to a lack of personnel or resources. This uneven development not only undermines national language policy objectives but also reinforces broader patterns of educational inequality across regions.

4. National Policy on Education and French Curriculum Structure

The National Policy on Education (NPE) serves as the central framework guiding educational planning and delivery in Nigeria. Since its introduction in 1977, the policy has undergone several revisions aimed at aligning education with national development priorities, including linguistic diversity, regional integration, and global competitiveness. Within this framework, French is recognized as a strategically important foreign language intended to facilitate communication with neighboring Francophone countries and enhance Nigeria's international engagement (Adejimola, 2010). Despite this formal recognition, a persistent gap exists between policy articulation and implementation. While French is prominently featured in national policy documents, its practical delivery within schools remains inconsistent across regions and institutions. This disconnect reflects a broader structural weakness in educational policy design, where inclusion at the policy level is not matched by corresponding institutional support, funding, or accountability mechanisms.

4.1 Policy Provisions for French Language Education

The 1977 edition of the NPE established the foundation for foreign language education in Nigeria, with French identified as a key component of the curriculum. Subsequent revisions in 1981, 1998, 2004, and 2013 reaffirmed this position, designating French as a compulsory subject at the junior secondary level and an elective subject at the senior secondary and tertiary levels (Adejimola, 2010). The declaration of French as Nigeria's second official language in 1996 further underscored its importance within national language planning. However, this policy shift has largely remained symbolic. In many states, French is included in official timetables but is not effectively taught due to the absence of qualified teachers, insufficient instructional materials, and weak administrative enforcement (Yusuf & Ashiru, 2022). This situation illustrates a critical limitation of policy design in Nigeria, where formal provisions are not supported by clear implementation strategies, monitoring frameworks, or resource allocation plans.

4.2 Curriculum Design and Content Structure

The French language curriculum in Nigeria is developed by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) and is structured to promote communicative competence. It integrates key language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing alongside cultural awareness, reflecting contemporary approaches to second language acquisition (Yusuf & Ashiru, 2022).

While the curriculum is theoretically robust, its practical relevance is constrained by the realities of classroom implementation. In many schools, particularly in underserved areas, instruction is limited to vocabulary memorization and grammar-focused teaching, with little emphasis on communicative interaction. This disconnect between curriculum design and classroom practice undermines the intended learning outcomes and reduces the functional value of French for learners (Awanbor, 2023).

Furthermore, the curriculum remains insufficiently responsive to contemporary linguistic needs. It does not adequately incorporate practical domains such as business communication, digital interaction, or regionally relevant conversational usage. As a result, students often perceive French as abstract and disconnected from real-world application, which negatively affects motivation and engagement.

4.3 Curriculum Implementation Challenges

The implementation of the French curriculum in Nigeria is shaped by a range of structural constraints. One of the most significant challenges is the shortage of qualified French language teachers, which limits both access to and quality of instruction (Onuko, 2011). In many schools, French is either taught by under-qualified personnel or not taught at all. In addition, there is a widespread lack of instructional resources. Essential materials such as textbooks, audio-visual aids, language laboratories, and digital learning tools are either insufficient or entirely absent in many public schools. This resource deficit restricts the adoption of communicative and interactive teaching approaches, reducing language learning to a largely theoretical exercise (Akinpelu & Yegblemenawo, 2023). Regional disparities further complicate curriculum implementation. States in Southern Nigeria, such as Lagos and Ogun, tend to have better access to trained teachers and educational partnerships, while States in Northern Nigeria—including Zamfara, Borno, and Gombe—face severe shortages of both human and material resources (Onuko, 2011; Sanni-Suleiman, 2022). This uneven distribution of educational opportunities undermines national policy objectives and reinforces broader patterns of educational inequality. Taken together, these challenges suggest that the limitations of French language education in Nigeria are not solely due to curriculum design, but rather to the absence of an enabling environment for effective implementation. Without addressing these systemic constraints, policy reforms are unlikely to produce meaningful improvements in learning outcomes.

5. Teacher Training, Pedagogy, and Professional Development

The effectiveness of French language education in Nigeria is closely tied to the quality of teacher preparation, pedagogical practices, and opportunities for continuous professional development. While policy frameworks emphasize the importance of French as a strategic language, the capacity of teachers to deliver meaningful instruction remains a critical limiting factor. The challenges associated with teacher training are not only issues of quantity but also of quality, relevance, and systemic support.

5.1 The Shortage of Qualified French Teachers

One of the most persistent challenges identified in the literature is the shortage of qualified French language teachers across Nigeria (Onuko, 2011; Awanbor, 2023). This shortage is particularly acute in public schools and in rural and northern regions, where access to specialized language educators is severely limited. In many cases, French is taught by teachers who lack formal training in the language or in language pedagogy, resulting in compromised instructional quality. This shortage reflects broader systemic issues in teacher recruitment and training. The limited number of graduates specializing in French education, combined with weak incentives for language teaching careers, has created a structural imbalance between policy expectations and available human resources. Consequently, even where French is included in school timetables, effective delivery is often unattainable.

5.2 Pre-Service and In-Service Training Gaps

Teacher preparation programs in Colleges of Education and universities provide foundational knowledge in French language studies. However, these programs often emphasize literary and grammatical competence at the expense of practical teaching skills. As a result, many teachers enter the classroom with limited capacity to deliver engaging, learner-centered instruction (Offorma, 2012). In addition, in-service training and continuous professional development opportunities remain inconsistent and inadequate. Many French teachers operate for extended periods without exposure to updated pedagogical approaches, curriculum innovations, or technological tools. This lack of ongoing professional development contributes to the persistence of outdated instructional practices and limits the adaptability of teachers to changing educational demands (Onuko, 2011).

5.3 Pedagogical Practices and Student Engagement

Pedagogical approaches employed in French language classrooms in Nigeria are often characterized by traditional, teacher-centered methods. These include

lecture-based instruction, rote memorization, and translation exercises, which place limited emphasis on communicative competence and active learner participation (Awanbor, 2023). Such approaches have significant implications for student engagement and learning outcomes. Language acquisition, particularly in a second language context, requires interactive and communicative practices that allow learners to use the language meaningfully. Where these methods are absent, students are less likely to develop fluency, confidence, or sustained interest in the language. Although some studies suggest that interactive methods such as role-play, dialogue practice, songs, and visual aids can enhance engagement and retention (Awodeha & Chika, 2025), the adoption of such approaches remains limited. Factors such as large class sizes, lack of instructional materials, and insufficient teacher training constrain the implementation of communicative language teaching strategies.

5.4 The Role of Technology in Teacher Support

The integration of technology into language teaching has been identified as a potential avenue for improving both teacher effectiveness and learner outcomes. ICT-based tools, including mobile applications, audio platforms, and interactive learning systems, offer opportunities for enhanced pronunciation practice, individualized learning, and increased student engagement (Ohanma, 2023). However, the application of these technologies in Nigerian schools remains uneven. Many public schools lack the necessary infrastructure, including reliable electricity, internet access, and digital devices, to support technology-enhanced learning. In addition, teachers often lack the training required to effectively integrate digital tools into their instructional practices. As a result, the potential of technology to transform French language education remains largely underutilized.

5.5 International Support and Professional Networks

International collaborations have played a supportive role in enhancing teacher development in French language education. Organizations such as the French Embassy and the Institut Français have provided training workshops, immersion programs, and instructional resources aimed at improving teacher competence (Iteogu, 2016). Language centers such as the Centre for French Teaching and Documentation (CFTD) also contribute to professional development by offering certification programs and training opportunities. However, these initiatives are often limited in scope and accessibility. Their impact is typically concentrated in urban centers, leaving many teachers in rural and underserved areas without access to such support. This uneven distribution of professional development opportunities highlights the need for a more coordinated and scalable national

framework for teacher training. Without such a framework, efforts to improve French language education will remain fragmented and insufficient.

6. Teaching and Learning Challenges

Despite its inclusion in national education policy, the teaching and learning of French in Nigeria continue to face a range of structural and pedagogical challenges that limit effective language acquisition. These challenges are not isolated but interconnected, reflecting broader systemic constraints within the education system. Their impact is most evident at the level of classroom practice, where both teaching effectiveness and learner outcomes are significantly affected.

6.1 Infrastructure and Resource Deficiencies

One of the most significant barriers to effective French language learning in Nigeria is the lack of adequate infrastructure and instructional resources. Many schools, particularly in under-served areas, operate without essential facilities such as language laboratories, audio-visual equipment, and sufficient teaching materials. In such contexts, language instruction is restricted to textbook-based learning, with limited opportunities for listening and speaking practice (Awanbor, 2023). This resource deficit has direct implications for language acquisition. Without exposure to authentic pronunciation models and interactive learning tools, students struggle to develop oral proficiency and listening comprehension skills. Consequently, French learning becomes largely theoretical, limiting learners' ability to use the language in practical contexts.

6.2 Learner Motivation and Sociolinguistic Constraints

Learner motivation represents another critical challenge in French language education. In many cases, students perceive French as a subject with limited practical relevance, particularly when compared to subjects such as English, mathematics, and science. This perception is influenced by the dominance of English in academic and professional domains, as well as the limited visibility of French in everyday communication.

Sociolinguistic factors further complicate the learning process. In multilingual environments, interference from indigenous languages and English can affect learners' ability to grasp French phonology and grammar. Additionally, limited exposure to authentic language use outside the classroom reduces opportunities for practice, reinforcing the perception of French as abstract and disconnected from real-life application (Onuko, 2011).

6.3 Phonetics and Pronunciation Challenges

Pronunciation remains a persistent difficulty for many learners of French in Nigeria. The phonological structure of French differs significantly from both English and most indigenous Nigerian languages, particularly in areas such as nasal vowels, liaison, and intonation patterns. As a result, learners often transfer phonetic patterns from familiar languages, leading to inaccurate pronunciation. The lack of targeted phonetic instruction and limited access to audio resources further exacerbate this challenge. Awodeha and Chika (2025) note that many students complete several years of French study without achieving basic pronunciation accuracy. This not only affects intelligibility but also undermines learner confidence and willingness to participate in oral communication.

6.4 Time Allocation and Curriculum Constraints

Limited instructional time also affects the effectiveness of French language teaching. In many schools, French is allocated minimal contact hours often one or two periods per week which is insufficient for meaningful language acquisition. In some cases, French is treated as a secondary or rotational subject, resulting in inconsistent exposure and discontinuity in learning (Yusuf & Ashiru, 2022). This limited time allocation reflects broader curriculum prioritization issues. Subjects perceived as more critical for examinations and career prospects tend to receive greater attention, while French is marginalized. This institutional positioning reinforces low learner engagement and reduces the perceived importance of the subject.

6.5 Regional Disparities in Learning Opportunities

The quality of French language learning in Nigeria varies significantly across regions. Students in urban centers, particularly in southern states, are more likely to benefit from better infrastructure, qualified teachers, and access to supplementary learning resources. In contrast, learners in northern and rural regions face compounded challenges, including teacher shortages, limited facilities, and reduced institutional support (Sanni-Suleiman, 2022). These disparities create unequal learning opportunities and contribute to a national imbalance in French language proficiency. As a result, access to French education—and its associated academic and professional benefits remains unevenly distributed across the country.

6.6 Assessment Limitations

Assessment practices in French language education also present challenges. While national examination bodies such as WAEC and NECO include French as an elective subject, there is limited standardization in classroom-based assessment. In many schools, evaluation methods focus primarily on written tests and memorization, with insufficient emphasis on communicative competence. This misalignment between assessment practices and curriculum objectives weakens the overall effectiveness of language instruction. Without clear and consistent benchmarks for proficiency, both teachers and learners lack a structured framework for measuring progress and improving performance (Onuko, 2011).

7. Relevance of French to National Development and Integration

The role of French language education in Nigeria extends beyond academic instruction; it is intrinsically linked to national development, regional integration, and global competitiveness. Nigeria's geopolitical position within West Africa, surrounded predominantly by Francophone countries, makes French not merely a foreign language but a strategic necessity. Despite longstanding challenges in its implementation, the relevance of French to Nigeria's socio-economic and political landscape remains significant.

7.1 Geopolitical and Diplomatic Importance

Nigeria shares borders with several French-speaking countries, including Bénin Republic, Niger, Cameroon, and Chad. These borders represent not only geographical proximity but also zones of active diplomatic engagement, trade interaction, and cultural exchange. French serves as a key working language in regional and international organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU), and the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) (Sanni-Suleiman, 2022).

In this context, proficiency in French is essential for effective participation in regional diplomacy and international relations. The declaration of French as Nigeria's second official language reflects this strategic reality. However, the limited proficiency of many Nigerian professionals in French continues to constrain the country's ability to fully engage in multilingual diplomatic spaces. This underscores the need to strengthen French language education as part of broader national development strategies.

7.2 Economic Integration and Cross-Border Commerce

Language plays a critical role in economic interaction, particularly within regional trade networks. French is spoken by millions of people across West and Central Africa, making it a valuable tool for Nigerian entrepreneurs, traders, and professionals seeking to engage with Francophone markets. Border regions, especially in states such as Ogun, Borno, and Sokoto, serve as key points of commercial exchange between Nigeria and neighboring countries. However, language barriers often limit the effectiveness of these interactions. Traders, customs officials, and business people frequently encounter communication challenges that affect negotiations, documentation, and transaction efficiency (Yusuf & Ashiru, 2022). Enhancing French language proficiency among these groups would facilitate smoother cross-border trade and strengthen regional economic integration.

7.3 French and Regional Security Collaboration

French language proficiency also has implications for national and regional security. Nigeria participates in multinational security operations aimed at addressing transnational threats such as terrorism, trafficking, and cross-border crime. These operations often involve collaboration with French-speaking countries in the Sahel region. Effective communication is critical in such contexts. Limited proficiency in French among Nigerian security personnel can hinder coordination, intelligence sharing, and joint operational planning. As Sanni-Suleiman (2022) notes, the development of bilingual professionals in security and defense sectors is essential for navigating complex multilingual environments. In this regard, French is not merely an academic subject but a strategic tool for national security.

7.4 Employment Opportunities and Global Competitiveness

Proficiency in French enhances individual employability in an increasingly globalized world. Graduates with competence in French have access to a wider range of career opportunities, including positions in foreign embassies, multinational organizations, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), translation services, and the tourism and hospitality sectors (Odudigbo & Musa, 2024).

In addition, French proficiency provides access to international educational opportunities, including scholarships, exchange programs, and professional

training in Francophone countries such as France, Canada, and Belgium. Within Nigeria, bilingualism is gradually becoming an asset in both public and private sector employment. As global economic integration intensifies, language competence particularly in widely spoken international languages such as French represents a significant competitive advantage.

7.5 National Unity and Cultural Integration

Beyond its economic and political relevance, French also contributes to cultural and social development. In a linguistically diverse country like Nigeria, language education can serve as a tool for promoting intercultural understanding and national cohesion. Learning French exposes students to different cultural perspectives, fostering openness, tolerance, and global awareness. Furthermore, French provides access to a rich body of Francophone literature, music, cinema, and intellectual traditions, including those rooted in African contexts. This cultural exposure strengthens Nigeria's engagement with the broader African and global community. As such, French language education contributes not only to functional communication but also to the development of culturally informed and globally competent citizens.

8. Policy Gaps, Future Directions, and Recommendations

Despite the formal recognition of French as Nigeria's second official language and its inclusion in successive revisions of the National Policy on Education, the implementation of French language education remains inconsistent and fragmented. The challenges identified across previous sections point to significant policy gaps that must be addressed to achieve meaningful and sustainable outcomes. These gaps are not merely operational but structural, reflecting deeper issues in educational planning, resource allocation, and institutional coordination.

8.1 Disconnect Between Policy and Implementation

One of the most critical gaps in French language education in Nigeria is the disconnect between policy formulation and practical implementation. While French is clearly articulated in national policy documents, many schools lack the necessary conditions to deliver effective instruction. This reflects the absence of clear implementation frameworks, timelines, and accountability mechanisms.

Recommendation:

The Federal Ministry of Education should develop and implement a National French Language Development Plan with clearly defined goals, timelines, and monitoring systems. This plan should include measurable targets for teacher recruitment, curriculum delivery, and student proficiency, as well as mechanisms for regular evaluation and reporting.

8.2 Inadequate Funding and Resource Allocation

The under-funding of French language education remains a major constraint. Limited budgetary allocation has resulted in inadequate teaching materials, poor infrastructure, and insufficient support for teacher development. This disproportionately affects public schools and underserved regions.

Recommendation:

Government funding for language education should be increased and strategically allocated to ensure equitable access to resources. Priority should be given to public schools in underserved areas, with targeted investment in instructional materials, language laboratories, and digital learning tools.

8.3 Weak Teacher Development Systems

The absence of a structured and coordinated framework for teacher development has contributed to the shortage of qualified French teachers and the persistence of outdated pedagogical practices. Current training systems lack consistency, scalability, and alignment with modern teaching approaches.

Recommendation:

A National French Teacher Development Framework should be established to standardize teacher training, certification, and continuous professional development. This framework should include regular in-service training programs, digital learning modules, and partnerships with international language institutions.

8.4 Curriculum Rigidity and Limited Relevance

Although the French curriculum is theoretically aligned with communicative language teaching principles, it remains insufficiently responsive to contemporary needs. Its limited focus on practical application reduces student engagement and perceived relevance.

Recommendation:

The curriculum should be revised to incorporate functional and context-based learning, including business communication, digital interaction, and regionally relevant language use. Greater flexibility should be introduced to allow schools to adapt content to local contexts and learner needs.

8.5 Limited Integration of Technology

The potential of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to enhance language learning remains largely untapped due to infrastructural and capacity constraints. This limits opportunities for interactive and learner-centered instruction.

Recommendation:

Public-private partnerships should be encouraged to develop and deploy low-cost, scalable digital tools for French language learning. These tools should be designed to function in low-resource environments, including offline capabilities, and should be accompanied by teacher training in technology integration.

8.6 Fragmented Institutional Collaboration

Efforts to support French language education are often fragmented across different institutions, including government agencies, international partners, and private organizations. This lack of coordination reduces the overall effectiveness of interventions.

Recommendation:

A coordinated framework should be established to strengthen collaboration between key stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education, NERDC, TRCN, and international partners. This would ensure alignment of objectives, efficient resource utilization, and scalability of successful initiatives.

9. Conclusion

French language education in Nigeria occupies a strategically significant position at the intersection of education, diplomacy, economic development, and regional integration. Despite its formal recognition as Nigeria's second official language

and its inclusion in the National Policy on Education, its implementation within the school system remains inconsistent and constrained by multiple structural challenges. This review has highlighted the key factors limiting the effectiveness of French language education, including inadequate infrastructure, shortage of qualified teachers, weak curriculum implementation, limited learner engagement, and insufficient policy enforcement. These challenges are not isolated but reflect deeper systemic issues within the Nigerian education system, particularly the disconnect between policy formulation and practical execution. At the same time, the analysis underscores the continued relevance of French as a tool for national development. Its importance in regional diplomacy, cross-border trade, security collaboration, and global competitiveness reinforces the need to reposition French language education as a national priority rather than a peripheral subject. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated and sustained effort that goes beyond policy declarations. Strengthening teacher development systems, modernizing curriculum content, improving access to instructional resources, and integrating technology into language teaching are essential steps toward enhancing learning outcomes. Equally important is the establishment of clear implementation frameworks and accountability mechanisms to ensure that policy objectives are effectively translated into classroom practice. Ultimately, the future of French language education in Nigeria depends on a shift from symbolic policy recognition to practical and measurable implementation. By adopting a more integrated and strategic approach, Nigeria can harness the full potential of French as a language of opportunity, positioning its citizens to engage more effectively within the regional and global community.

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IMPACTS OF *AL-SŪQ AL-MĀLIYYAH AL-ISLĀMIYYAH* (ISLAMIC CAPITAL MARKET) ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Al-Sūq al-Māliyyah al-Islāmiyyah presents a sustainable, albeit predominantly neglected, paradigm for mitigating Nigeria's socio-economic exigencies, exacerbated by infrastructural deficits, escalating sovereign indebtedness, and contemporary contractionary cycles. Consequently, the study examined the impact of al-Sūq al-Māliyyah al-Islāmiyyah on Nigeria's economic growth and development, with a view to contributing to the attainment of broader national development objectives. A descriptive research design was adopted, employing a self-designed questionnaire and a structured interview guide to collect data from 4,000 respondents across selected Nigerian states through multi-stage sampling, with Lagos and Abuja purposively included for their strategic significance. Additionally, 13 critical stakeholders from the Nigerian Exchange Group (NGX) were interviewed. Data were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Findings indicated a low level of awareness about the Islamic capital market at the Nigerian Exchange Group ($\bar{x} = 2.4648$, $\sigma = 0.62881$). However, a significant number of respondents believed that the market has promoted financial inclusion ($\bar{x} = 3.8480$, $\sigma = 0.35911$), provided capital to SMEs ($\bar{x} = 3.1775$, $\sigma = 0.93103$), and contributed to job creation ($\bar{x} = 3.8382$, $\sigma = 0.36828$). Furthermore, the market was recognised for facilitating infrastructural development in Nigeria ($\bar{x} = 3.5630$, $\sigma = 0.49608$). The study concluded that al-Sūq al-Māliyyah al-Islāmiyyah had significantly contributed to Nigeria's real sector, particularly through job creation and infrastructure development. To fully harness its potential, it was recommended that regulators and market operators enhance

public awareness through targeted sensitisation campaigns; the Nigerian Exchange Group and Lotus Capital should expand the equities listed on the NSE Lotus Islamic Index, while the government at all levels should increase investment in critical infrastructure through şukūk.

Keywords: *Al-Sūq Al-Māliyyah Al-Islāmiyyah*, Economic Development, Lotus Islamic Index, Nigerian Exchange Group, Nigeria

Introduction

Empirical evidence indicates that Africa has experienced sustained economic growth over the past three decades. In 2022, the continent's real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth was estimated at 3.8%, a decline from 4.8% in 2021, yet surpassing the global average of 3.4%. This deceleration was primarily attributed to the tightening of global financial conditions and persistent supply chain disruptions, both of which were exacerbated by heightened geopolitical tensions, most notably, the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine, which collectively dampened global economic growth (African Development Bank, 2023).

During the same review period, Nigeria's macroeconomic indices reflected a tempered growth pattern. As reported by the African Development Bank (2023), real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth moderated to 3.3% in 2022, compared to 3.6% in 2021. This deceleration was primarily attributable to a sustained decline in crude oil production, which led to a 5% reduction in the industrial sector's real GDP growth. Notwithstanding this decline, positive growth was recorded in the services and agricultural sectors, which expanded by 7% and 2%, respectively. From a demand-side perspective, the decline in GDP growth was driven largely by a 2.5% contraction in public consumption and a pronounced 80% reduction in net exports.

Moreover, per capita income growth decelerated to 0.8%, relative to 1.2% in the preceding year, reflecting persistent economic vulnerabilities. In fiscal terms, the budget deficit narrowed slightly to 4.9% of GDP in 2022 from 5.2% in 2021. This fiscal gap was predominantly financed through increased public borrowing, which resulted in a rise in total public debt to US\$103.1 billion, equivalent to approximately 22% of GDP, up from US\$92.6 billion in 2021. Concurrently, inflation accelerated to a two-decade peak of 18.8%, driven by rising energy and food prices, alongside the pass-through effects of exchange rate depreciation (Oyesanya, 2022).

In response to escalating inflationary pressures, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) implemented successive increases in the monetary policy rate, which rose from 11.5% at the beginning of the year to a peak of 16.5% in November 2022. Concurrently, a modest improvement in oil export performance led to a slight fiscal surplus amounting to 0.1% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022, thereby reversing a trend of fiscal deficits sustained over the preceding three

years. Gross international reserves declined by 7.5% to \$37.1 billion. The non-performing loans ratio stood at 4.2% in 2022, below the regulatory threshold of 5%, while the capital adequacy ratio, at 13.8%, exceeded the regulatory benchmark of 10%. Despite these improvements, multidimensional poverty remained high at 63%, and unemployment was at 33.3%. These indicators suggest that, notwithstanding relative progress, Nigeria continues to face significant economic and financial challenges (Oyesanya, 2022).

The conventional financial system, upon which the economies of many nations, including Nigeria, are based, comprises principles and instruments that do not conform to the Sharī‘ah and are insufficient to address the financial needs of these countries. Islamic finance has thus emerged as an alternative institution. It involves the provision of financial products and services by institutions offering Islamic financial services for Sharī‘ah-approved transactions and economic activities, based on contracts that comply with Islamic law and the financial industry’s rules and regulations (Oyesanya, 2022). Islamic financial markets, integral to this alternative system, encompass money and capital markets and operate free of *ribā* (interest/usury), adhering to principles consistent with the Sharī‘ah.

The development of a distinctive *al-Sūq al-Māliyyah al-Islāmiyyah* is a natural progression in the Islamisation of the global financial services industry. It plays a pivotal role in the global financial ecosystem by providing Sharī‘ah-compliant investment avenues that promote ethical finance, risk-sharing, and socio-economic justice. Unlike conventional financial markets, the Islamic capital market prohibits *ribā*, *gharar*, and investment in non-*ḥalāl* activities, thereby aligning financial transactions with Islamic ethical standards (Usmani, 2020). In recent years, this market has gained considerable recognition globally, including in Nigeria, where it is increasingly viewed as a viable alternative for driving economic development, fostering financial inclusion, and addressing socio-economic disparities (Alaro & Alalubosa, 2018).

To address liquidity management issues and enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of Islamic banks, windows, *takāful* (Islamic insurance), re-*takāful* operators, and other peripheral financial intermediation services, several countries – including Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Sudan, and Iran – have introduced *al-Sūq al-Māliyyah al-Islāmiyyah* to facilitate the management of assets of Islamic financial institutions. Nigeria has embraced this initiative. Consequently, in 2012, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), in partnership with the private Islamic fund management firm Lotus Capital, launched the NSE-Lotus Islamic Index (NSE-LII), which commenced with a combined market capitalisation of approximately ₦2.87 billion (US\$18 million) (Oyesanya, 2022). Although the Islamic capital market in Nigeria remains in its formative stages, its activities have been concentrated in three key sectoral

domains: *ṣukūk* (Islamic bonds), Islamic investment funds, and equities. Moreover, the operations of *al-Sūq al-Mālīyyah al-Islāmiyyah* extend across both the Nigerian Stock Exchange and the Financial Markets Dealers Quotations (FMDQ) Exchange. Therefore, this study assesses the impact of *al-Sūq al-Mālīyyah al-Islāmiyyah* on economic development in Nigeria, with a view to offering policy-relevant recommendations aimed at enhancing its operational efficacy and unlocking its full potential for fostering accelerated national economic growth and development.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the impact of *al-Sūq al-Mālīyyah al-Islāmiyyah* on economic development in Nigeria, with a view to proposing recommendations for enhancing its operational effectiveness and harnessing its full potential in fostering greater national economic growth and development. The specific objectives are as follows:

- i. examining the Nigerian populace's awareness of the existence, nature, and forms of Islamic ethical securities listed on the Nigerian Capital Market;
- ii. assessing the impact of the Islamic Capital Market on economic development in Nigeria;
- iii. identifying the challenges facing the operations of the Islamic securities market in Nigeria; and
- iv. drawing out the prospects of the operations of the Islamic Capital Market in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to enable the study to attain the stated objectives:

- i. What is the level of awareness of the Nigerian populace of the existence, nature, and forms of Islamic ethical securities listed on the Nigerian Capital Market?
- ii. What are the impacts of the Islamic capital market on the economic development of Nigeria?
- iii. What are the challenges confronting the operations of the Islamic securities market in Nigeria?
- iv. What are the prospects of the operations of the Islamic capital market in Nigeria?

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive research design of the ex-post facto type, complemented by an analytical approach, to evaluate the impact of *al-Sūq al-*

Mālīyyah al-Islāmiyyah on Nigeria's economic development. The target population encompassed the Nigerian populace and employed a multistage sampling technique to select respondents. At the first stage, one state was randomly chosen from each of the six geopolitical zones, namely Ogun, Kwara, Kano, Gombe, Rivers, and Enugu States. At the second stage, the state capitals were purposively selected due to their concentration of economic and financial activities, including Nigerian Stock Exchange operations. At the third stage, stratified sampling was used to select 500 respondents from each geopolitical zone, with additional purposive samples of 500 each from Lagos and Abuja, giving a total of 4,000 participants. Furthermore, 13 participants from the Nigerian capital market, including regulatory officials, financial professionals, and Islamic finance institutions, were purposively selected for interviews.

Data collection involved the use of two instruments: a researcher-designed questionnaire for the quantitative component and a structured interview schedule for gathering qualitative data. To ascertain the reliability of these instruments, a pilot study was conducted over three weeks involving 50 participants in Ibadan, Oyo State. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which ranged from 0.501 to 0.766, demonstrated an acceptable level of internal consistency and reliability for the questionnaire (George & Mallery, 2022). Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data from the questionnaire were cleaned, and incomplete responses were excluded. The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 29), with frequency distributions and mean deviation employed to identify trends and measure central tendencies (Pallant, 2023). Qualitative data from the structured interviews were analysed through thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns and expert perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This mixed-methods approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the role of *al-Sūq al-Mālīyyah al-Islāmiyyah* in fostering economic growth while ensuring the integration of both statistical evidence and expert insights to enhance the study's validity and depth.

Review of Related Literature

Islam and Economic Development

Islam conceptualises economic development within the broader framework of human development, integrating moral, spiritual, and socio-economic dimensions (Ahmad, 1981). The religion's primary objective is to guide human development in a manner that fosters a comprehensive and indivisible philosophy of socio-economic welfare. According to Ahmad (1981), the philosophical foundation of Islam's approach to development is entrenched in four main concepts: *tawḥīd* (the unity and sovereignty of God), *rubūbiyyah* (divine provisions for sustenance), *khilāfah* (humanity's vicegerency on earth), and *tazkiyah* (purification and growth). Within this framework, *tazkiyah* serves as the core of the Islamic

development paradigm, reflecting a commitment to holistic growth, ethical refinement, and social justice. This process of self-purification leads to *falāḥ*, prosperity, and success in both worldly life and the hereafter (Ahmad, 1981, p. 179). Islam's view of development is, therefore, not limited to material growth but encompasses the moral and spiritual elevation of individuals and society (Askari et al., 2015).

The Qur'ān provides the foundational normative framework for economic development in Islam, the principles of which are practically operationalised through the Sunnah of the Prophet Muḥammad (SAAS). The Prophetic implementation of Qur'ānic directives in Madīnah represents a historically grounded and practically viable model for integrated socio-economic development (Askari et al., 2015). As articulated by Askari, Iqbal, Krichene, and Mirakhor (2015), the Qur'ānic paradigm of development is structured around three interdependent dimensions: *rushd* (individual moral and intellectual refinement), *isti'mār* (the constructive development and utilisation of the earth), and the collective advancement of human society towards justice and cohesion. The dimension of *isti'mār* is explicitly grounded in the Qur'ānic assertion of humanity's stewardship over the earth and the sufficiency of its resources. Allah declares: "It is He who created for you all that is on the earth..." (Qur'ān 2:29).

This verse underscores the principle that the earth's resources are divinely endowed for human benefit, thereby establishing a theological basis for economic productivity, resource utilisation, and sustainable development. Similarly, the Qur'ān affirms the adequacy and measured distribution of resources: "And there is no creature on earth except that upon Allah is its provision..." (Qur'ān 11:6). This verse challenges the conventional economic assumption of absolute scarcity by asserting that *rizq* (provision) is divinely guaranteed, thereby reframing economic discourse within a paradigm of sufficiency, trust, and responsible management. However, while resources are fundamentally sufficient at the macro level, the Qur'ān recognises that variations in wealth and material conditions occur as part of a divine test. As Allah states: "As for man, when his Lord tests him and honours him and favours him, he says: 'My Lord has honoured me.' But when He tests him and restricts his provision, he says: 'My Lord has humiliated me.' Nay!..." (Qur'ān 89:15–17).

The Qur'ānic framework is further reinforced and operationalised through the Sunnah. The Prophet Muḥammad (SAAS) emphasised the dignity and virtue of productive economic engagement: "No one has ever eaten better food than that which he eats from the work of his own hands" (al-Bukhārī, n.d., ḥadīth no. 2072). This ḥadīth establishes the ethical primacy of lawful labour and self-reliance, thereby encouraging productivity and discouraging dependency. In another tradition, the Prophet (SAAS) underscores the moral value of economic contribution to society: "The best of people are those who are most beneficial to

others” (al-Ṭabarānī, n.d.). This statement situates economic activity within a broader framework of social utility, indicating that development in Islam is inherently people-centred and welfare-oriented. Furthermore, the Prophet (SAAS) strongly emphasised ethical conduct in market transactions: “The truthful and trustworthy merchant will be with the Prophets, the truthful, and the martyrs” (al-Tirmidhī, n.d., ḥadīth no. 1209). The implication of this ḥadīth is that commercial activity, when conducted with integrity and trustworthiness, attains a rank of spiritual excellence, thereby integrating economic life into the broader pursuit of *ihsān* (excellence).

The development of human collectivity in Islam is closely linked to the concept of legitimate authority, which rests upon adherence to divine law. The Qur’ān (59:4) emphasises that those in positions of leadership must demonstrate profound faith and moral integrity. Authority in Islamic governance is legitimised through compliance with Qur’ānic injunctions and the Prophetic traditions, leaving no room for arbitrary rule (Askari et al., 2015). Furthermore, Islam’s emphasis on economic development is inseparable from the principle of social justice. Ahmad (1979) argues that Islamic economic development is a value-driven process that prioritises human well-being and collective prosperity. This holistic vision implies that development must address both material and spiritual dimensions, ensuring the equitable distribution of resources and social welfare.

Islamic economists have identified two primary approaches to economic development: the top-down and bottom-up approaches (Karwai, 2012). The top-down approach asserts that effective economic development requires the central coordination and regulation of economic activities by the government (Karwai, 2012). According to Salleh (1997, as cited in Karwai, 2012), state-driven policies play a critical role in implementing developmental agendas, as demonstrated by the success of Islamic financial and educational institutions such as Islamic banks and universities. Conversely, the bottom-up approach focuses on empowering individuals and communities to drive economic growth through ethical and theological frameworks (Karwai, 2012). This approach emphasises individual agency and grassroots initiatives to achieve sustainable development aligned with Islamic ethical values. Both approaches reflect Islam’s dual commitment to institutional governance and individual responsibility, fostering a balanced model for economic development that is consistent with social justice and moral integrity.

Concept of *Al-Sūq Al-Māliyyah Al-Islāmiyyah*

Operationally, *al-Sūq al-Māliyyah al-Islāmiyyah* comprises two main components: the stock market and the *ṣukūk* market (Oyesanya, 2022). The stock/equity market involves the emergence and development of Sharī‘ah-compliant securities based on *mushārakah* (equity participation). These stocks are classified as Sharī‘ah-compliant only if the business activities of the

companies issuing them are not related to prohibited sectors as identified by Shari‘ah scholars. Prohibited activities include those associated with conventional commercial banks, investment companies, insurance firms, and other financial institutions that violate Islamic law, as well as industries dealing with alcohol, pork products, tobacco, illegal drugs, weapons of mass destruction, and entertainment products that promote pornography (Oyesanya, 2022). The *ṣukūk* market pertains to the sale of debt arising from trade and service transactions, structured as deferred payment sales. This form of debt trading is universally accepted across Islamic juristic schools of thought, provided that the debt is paid in full, ensuring no benefit accrues to the purchaser (Oyesanya, 2022).

Empirical evidence suggests that the most developed Islamic capital markets are currently situated in Malaysia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Qatar (Oyesanya, 2022). The Islamic capital market plays a pivotal role in mobilising savings and allocating them towards productive ventures in accordance with the principles of the Shari‘ah. Analogous to its conventional counterpart, the Islamic capital market comprises both primary and secondary segments. The primary market is directly responsible for facilitating the provision of capital for investment in productive activities, whereas the secondary market supports this process indirectly.

Liquidity and the efficient pricing of risk and return within the secondary market serve to incentivise small-scale savers to augment their savings, while also motivating entrepreneurs to allocate capital more effectively and efficiently. This occurs when the market accurately reflects entrepreneurial performance through corresponding fluctuations in stock values, either appreciation or depreciation. In addition, individual Islamic financial instruments, alongside both static and dynamic portfolios derived from them, offer significant opportunities for risk diversification across different societal groups and temporal horizons. These attributes render the Islamic capital market particularly appealing to both providers and users of capital.

Since 1990, *al-Sūq al-Mālīyyah al-Islāmiyyah* has undergone significant and rapid expansion, transitioning from its initial stronghold in Southeast Asia to encompass the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region and parts of Europe, thereby establishing itself as a genuinely international platform for capital mobilisation (Securities & Exchange Commission, 2014). This remarkable growth has been primarily driven by increased revenues among oil-exporting nations, resulting from elevated global oil prices. The market’s evolution has attracted the participation of a diverse range of institutions, including multilateral organisations such as the World Bank and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), as well as both Islamic and conventional corporate entities.

According to the Islamic Financial Services Board (2013), the introduction of global Islamic indices in 1999 marked a pivotal moment in the development of

Islamic capital markets, leading to a substantial expansion in the range of benchmark indices across diverse regional and economic contexts. At present, four major global providers dominate the Islamic equity market: the Dow Jones Islamic Market Indices (DJIM), S&P Shari'ah Indices, MSCI Global Islamic Indices, and FTSE Global Islamic Indices. The Islamic Financial Services Board (2013) further observes that the DJIM family has broadened its coverage to include Shari'ah-compliant securities across sixty-nine countries, encompassing both developed and emerging economies such as Canada, China, and Kuwait. In addition to a broad geographic reach, DJIM offers indices tailored to regional markets, industry sectors, market capitalisation segments, as well as specialised indices and bespoke benchmarks.

In response to the increasing demand for Islamic equity indices, Standard & Poor's (S&P) initiated the application of Shari'ah screening criteria to three of its major indices, the S&P 500, the S&P Europe 350, and the S&P Japan 500, as early as 2006. According to the Islamic Financial Services Board (2013), S&P expanded its Islamic index offerings in 2007 with the introduction of the S&P GCC Shari'ah and S&P Pan Asia Shari'ah Indices. This expansion continued in 2008 with a comprehensive review of the S&P Global Broad Market Index (BMI), which encompasses more than 11,000 companies globally. As a result of this review, the S&P Global BMI Shari'ah Index was established, incorporating nearly 6,000 Shari'ah-compliant constituents across ten sectors, forty-seven countries, and various regional sub-indices.

Beyond the equity segment, *ṣukūk* have emerged as a rapidly expanding financing instrument within the Islamic capital market, enabling sovereigns and corporate entities to access alternative sources of capital while providing investors with a distinct Shari'ah-compliant asset class (Islamic Financial Services Board [IFSB], 2014). Their utility has been particularly evident in financing infrastructure projects across a range of jurisdictions, as many such assets are inherently Shari'ah-compatible. According to the IFSB (2014), global *ṣukūk* issuance followed an exponential trajectory, despite a brief contraction in 2008, recording a compound annual growth rate of 50.5 per cent between 2008 and 2013; by the end of 2013, outstanding *ṣukūk* totalled US\$ \$270.1 billion. Continued infrastructure funding requirements in the GCC and Asian regions have further fuelled this expansion, while traditional bond issuers have increasingly adopted *ṣukūk* structures to meet the burgeoning demand for Shari'ah-compliant investment products (IFSB, 2014).

Islamic Capital Market in Nigeria

The institutionalisation of Islamic finance in Nigeria can be traced back to 1961, when the first Islamic bank, the Muslim Bank of West Africa Ltd, was established. However, this bank was believed to have been closed by the then Minister of Finance in 1962, following two court cases aimed at defending its

existence (Orisankoko, 2010). This historical fact challenges the common belief that Islamic finance began in 1990 with the enactment of the Banks and Other Financial Institutions Decrees (BOFID) 24 and 25 of 1991, which replaced the Banking Act of 1969 and led to the establishment of Jaiz Bank in the 2000s as the first Islamic bank in the country.

The development of Islamic finance in Nigeria was further bolstered by the Nigerian Securities and Exchange Commission's decision to launch the NSE-Lotus Islamic Index (NSE-LII) in 2012, marking the beginning of the Islamic capital market in Nigeria. In collaboration with Lotus Capital, a private Islamic funds management company, the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE) introduced the NSE-LII, which had an initial market capitalisation of approximately ₦2.87 billion (\$18 million). The index excluded banks, companies with high levels of debt or leverage, and other stocks inconsistent with Islamic principles (Umar, 2013). Notably, Lotus Capital was already operational before the Central Bank of Nigeria's (CBN) conceptualisation of the Nigerian Islamic Financial Institutions (NIFIs).

Lotus Capital, established in 2004, was the first Islamic financial institution to operate within Nigeria's capital market. It was founded with the principal objective of addressing the investment needs of ethically inclined individuals, businesses, and organisations across the West African sub-region. As a pioneer in the nascent field of Islamic finance, Lotus Capital emerged at a time when the sector was recognised as the fastest-growing segment of the global financial industry, with total assets valued at over US\$1.3 trillion by 2013 and exhibiting an annual growth rate of between 15 and 20% since 2006 (Lotus Capital Limited, n.d.). In a parallel development, Jaiz Bank, the only fully fledged Islamic bank in Nigeria at that time (Kareem, 2016), also commenced operations in 2004, having fulfilled all regulatory prerequisites for the issuance of a banking licence in December 2003. The bank successfully raised ₦2.5 billion through a public offering; however, the introduction of new capital requirements by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in July 2004 posed considerable challenges, ultimately hindering the full operationalisation of the bank.

The NSE-Lotus Islamic Index (NSE-LII) was established by the Securities and Exchange Commission as an equity index designed to monitor the performance of selected Sharī'ah-compliant and fundamentally strong equities listed on the Nigerian Stock Exchange. The index comprised fifteen (15) equities drawn from various sub-sectors, including agriculture, consumer goods, conglomerates, and industrial goods. As of June 2014, the market featured five Sharī'ah-compliant unit trust schemes, collectively accounting for a Net Asset Value (NAV) of ₦35.8 billion. This figure represented 19.6% of the total NAV of the unit trust industry at that time (Nigerian Securities and Exchange Commission, 2014).

Table 1: Registered Ethical/*Shari'ah*-Based Fund Managers in Nigeria

S/N	Name of Fund	Fund Manager	Net Asset Value (₦)	Remarks
1.	Zenith Ethical Fund	Zenith Bank Plc.	89,3591,047.14	(Historical – NAV Discontinued)
2.	Lotus <i>Halāl</i> Investment Fund	Lotus Capital Limited	3,500,000,000.00	Active
3.	Afrinvest Halal Fund	Afrinvest Asset Management	2,500,000,000.00	Active
4.	Stanbic IBTC Ethical Fund	Stanbic IBTC Asset Mgt. Co. Limited	3,224,472,849.91	(Historical – NAV Discontinued)
5.	ARM Ethical Fund	Asset & Resources Mgt. Limited	314,105,898	(Historical – NAV Discontinued)
6.	Stanbic IBTC Iman Fund	Stanbic IBTC Asset Mgt. Co. Limited	188,511,090.87	(Historical – NAV Discontinued)
7	CFG Africa Ethical Fund	CFG Africa	1,000,000,000.00	Active
	Total		11,620,680,885.92	

Source: Adapted from Oyesanya (2022), with updates by the authors.

Apart from the ethical funds, fifteen (15) stocks are on the Islamic Capital Market. They are presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Registered Ethical/*Shari'ah*-Based Equities in Nigeria

S/N	Name of Equities	Managers of Equities	Market Capitalisation (₦)
1.	PZ	PZ Cussons Nig. PLC	83,242,423,845.00
2.	Mobil	11 PLC (Mobil Oil)	306,880,281,925.00
3.	Cadbury	Cadbury Nigeria PLC	29,689,124,851.50
4.	DANGCEM	Dangote Cement PLC	1,610,627,849,800.00
5.	CAP	CAP PLC	112,337,020,125.00
6.	PRESCO	PRESCO PLC	257,742,946,645.00
7.	NASCON	NASCON Allied Industries PLC	81,556,209,745.00
8.	OKUMUOIL	OKOMU Oil Palm PLC	370,187,041,967.40
9.	Total	Total Oil PLC	302,154,955,608.00

10.	GLAXOSMITH	Glaxo Smithkline Consumer Nigeria PLC	81,709,691,588.60
11.	DANGSUGAR	Dangote Sugar PLC	293,514,839,803.50
12.	NAHCO	Nigerian Aviation Handling Company PLC	25,828,738,300.56
13.	UNILEVER	UNILEVER PLC	415,825,561,180.50
14.	CCNN	Cement Co. of North Nigeria PLC	152,782,938,850.00
15.	NESTLE	NESTLE Nigeria PLC	1,241,349,200,280.00
16.	JAIZ Bank	JAIZ Bank Plc	15,026,767,143.00

Source: Oyesanya (2022)

In a significant move to develop Nigeria's Islamic capital market, the Federal Government announced the issuance of its first *Ṣukūk* instrument on June 28, 2017, aiming to raise ₦100 billion through the non-interest capital market. The funds raised were to be directed towards infrastructure development and financial inclusion. This initiative was the culmination of years of collaborative efforts by financial service regulators, including the Central Bank of Nigeria, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and other key institutions. The *Ṣukūk* was targeted for the construction of twenty-six major federal roads and bridges across the country's six geopolitical zones (Debt Management Office, 2019). The first *Ṣukūk*, issued by Osun State Government in 2017, yielded a 14.75% gain, valued at ₦11.4 billion (about \$62 million), and was structured based on an *ijārah* (lease) model, marking a milestone for Islamic finance in sub-Saharan Africa (Oyesanya, 2022).

Subsequent *Ṣukūk* offerings included a ₦100 billion Sovereign *Ṣukūk* issued by the Federal Government on December 28, 2018, aimed at financing road projects. This offer garnered significant interest, with total subscriptions amounting to ₦132.2 billion, representing a subscription rate of 132.2% (Debt Management Office, 2019). The third Sovereign *Ṣukūk*, issued in May 2020, attracted a markedly high level of investor confidence, recording total subscriptions of approximately ₦669.124 billion, which represented an oversubscription rate of about 446 per cent, thereby signalling a significant expansion in market participation and acceptance of *Sharī'ah*-compliant instruments within Nigeria's financial system. This positive trajectory was sustained in subsequent issuances, as the fourth Sovereign *Ṣukūk*, issued in December 2021 at ₦250 billion, was fully subscribed, reflecting continued investor appetite and institutional confidence; the fifth issuance in 2022, valued at ₦150 billion, similarly recorded strong demand; while the sixth Sovereign *Ṣukūk*, issued in 2023 with an initial offer of ₦150 billion, attracted subscriptions of about ₦652.827 billion, leading to an increased allotment of ₦350 billion. By this stage, cumulative Sovereign

Şukūk issuances had exceeded ₦1 trillion, financing critical road infrastructure across the federation.

The seventh issuance, structured around ₦300 billion in the 2024/2025 cycle, further underscores the consolidation of Şukūk as a mainstream public financing instrument in Nigeria. Collectively, these trends indicate a deepening domestic capital market, sustained investor confidence, and the growing capacity of *al-Sūq al-Māliyyah al-Islāmiyyah* to mobilise long-term funds for infrastructural development, thereby reinforcing its strategic relevance for sustainable economic growth and financial inclusion in Nigeria.

Table 3: Registered Ethical/Sharī‘ah-Based Bond (Şukūk) in Nigeria

S/N	Name of Bond	Managers of Bond	Market Value (₦)
1	Federal Government Sovereign Şukūk Series I–VII	Federal Government of Nigeria / Debt Management Office (DMO)	1,400,000,000,000.00
2	Osun State Şukūk (2013)	Osun State Government / Osun Sukuk Company Plc	11,000,400,000.00
	Total		1,411,400,000,000.00

Source: Adapted from Oyesanya (2022), with updates by the authors.

This growing trend in the issuance and subscription of Şukūk in Nigeria signals the increasing development and acceptance of Sharī‘ah-compliant financial instruments in the country’s capital markets.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Presentation of Results

A. Distribution of Respondents by Gender



Figure 1: A Histogram Showing the Distribution of Respondents by Gender

The gender-based chart reveals that 55% of the respondents were male, while 45% were female, as reflected in Figure 1. This modest disparity reflects a

relatively balanced representation, although males were marginally more involved. This may suggest greater male engagement in capital market activities or a higher accessibility of men to financial institutions in the surveyed areas.

B. Distribution of Respondents by Age

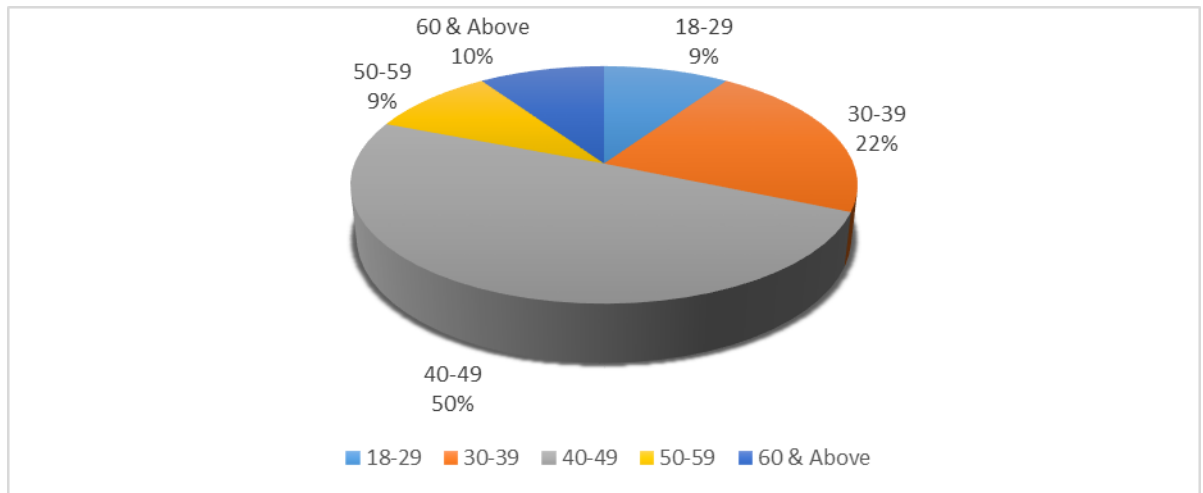


Figure 2: A Pie Chart Showing the Distribution of Respondents by Age

The dominant age group in Figure 2 was 40–49 years, accounting for 50% of the sample. This was followed by respondents aged 30–39 years (22%), 60 years and above (10%), 50–59 years (9%), and 18–29 years (9%). The prevalence of middle-aged participants indicates a mature demographic, likely characterised by economic responsibility, investment experience, and familiarity with financial products; attributes essential for informed responses.

C. Distribution of Respondents by Marital Status

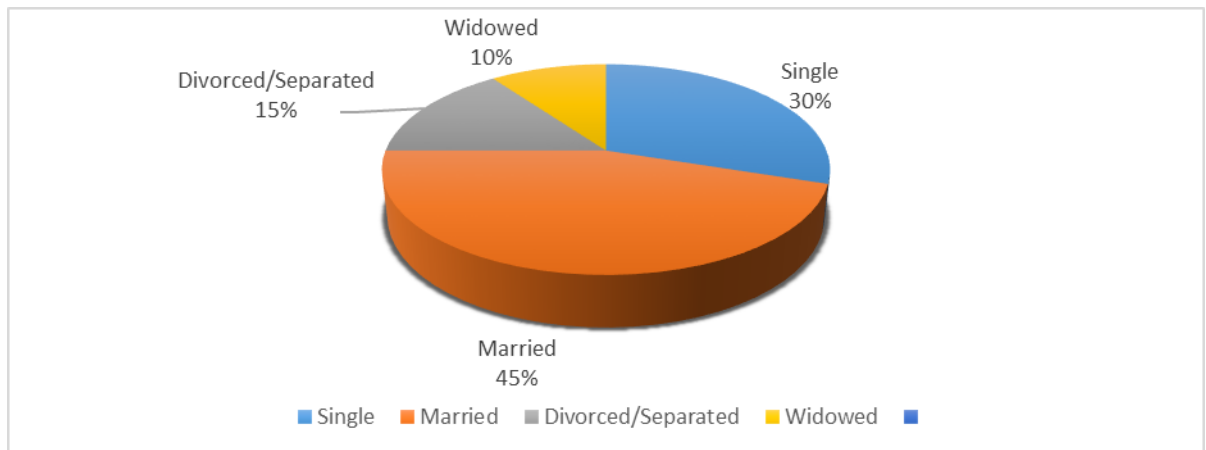


Figure 3: Pie Chart Showing the Distribution of Respondents by Marital Status

A significant majority (45%) of respondents, in Figure 3, were married, while 30% were single, 15% were divorced or separated, and 10% were widowed. This distribution suggests a substantial portion of the sample is in stable family settings, which may influence their financial behaviour and investment decisions, particularly in seeking Sharī'ah-compliant financial alternatives that conform with familial values.

D. Distribution of Respondents by Religion

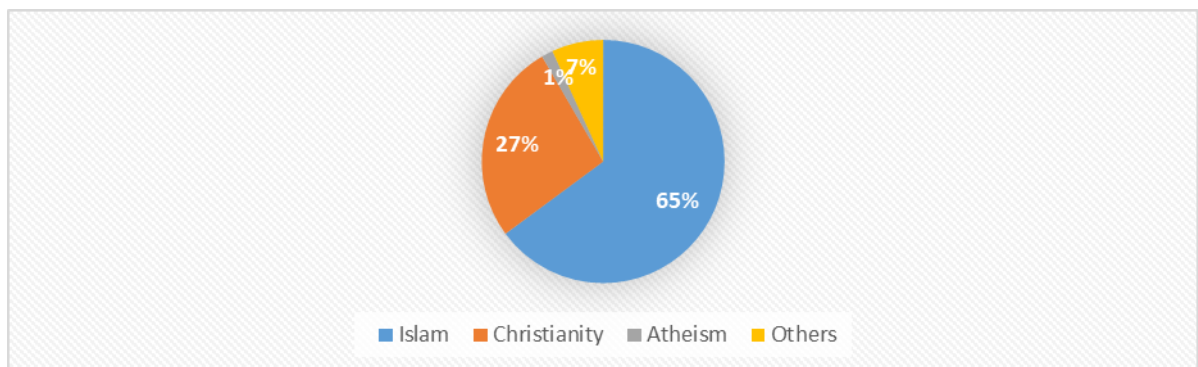


Figure 4: A Pie Chart Showing the Distribution of Respondents by Religion

The data in Figure 4 shows that Muslims constituted 65% of the respondents, while Christians comprised 27%. Those identifying with other religions made up 7%, and atheists accounted for 1%. This predominance of Muslim respondents is contextually appropriate, given the focus on Islamic finance, and reflects the religious demography of the geopolitical zones sampled. It also enhances the credibility of insights drawn on the awareness and perception of Islamic financial instruments.

E. Distribution of Respondents by Geo-Political Zones

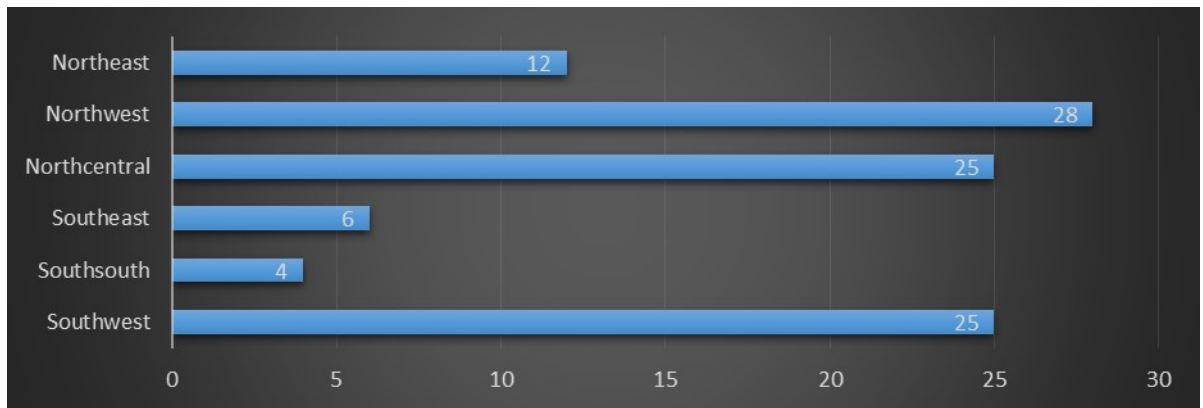


Figure 5: A Bar Chart Showing the Distribution of Respondents by Zones

Respondents in Figure 5 were distributed across Nigeria’s six geopolitical zones. The Northwest recorded the highest participation (28%), followed by the Northcentral and Southwest zones (each at 25%). The Northeast had 12%, while the Southeast and South-South zones had 6% and 4%, respectively. The high representation from northern and southwestern zones is noteworthy, as these areas house a significant Muslim population and active Islamic financial institutions.

F. Distribution of Respondents by Occupation

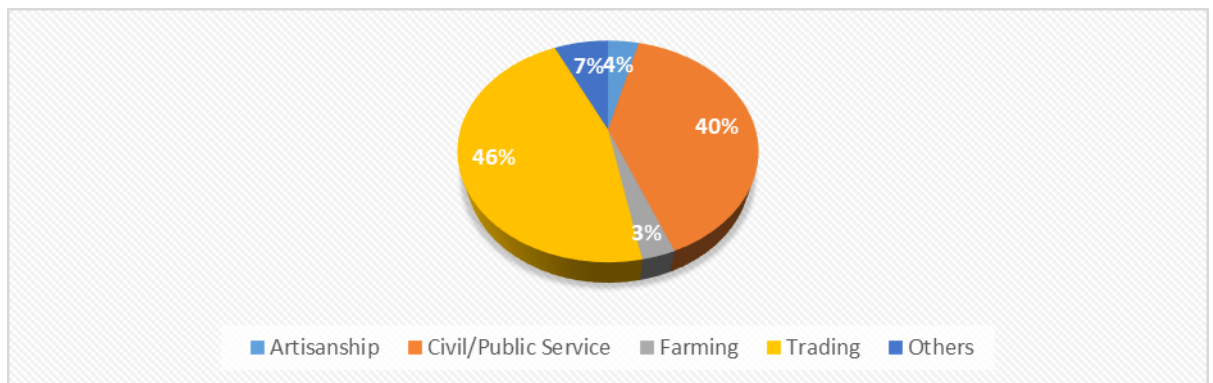


Figure 6: A Pie Chart Showing the Distribution of Respondents by Occupation

Occupational analysis in Figure 6 reveals that traders formed the largest group (46%), followed by civil/public servants (40%). Artisans accounted for 4%, farmers for 3%, and others for 7%. The dominance of traders and public servants may reflect the primary socioeconomic classes engaging with capital market products, including *ṣukūk*, Islamic mutual funds, and Sharī‘ah-compliant equities.

G. Distribution of Respondents by Year of Participation in the Capital Market

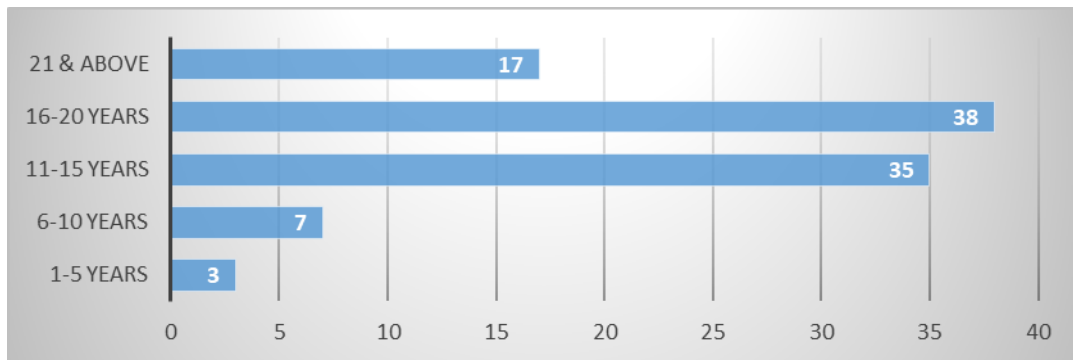


Figure 7: A Bar Chart Showing the Distribution of Respondents by Year of Participation

in the Capital Market

In terms of experience, 38% of respondents had engaged in capital market activities for 16–20 years, while 35% had 11–15 years of experience. 17% had participated for more than 21 years, whereas 7% and 3% had 6–10 years and 1–5 years, respectively. This trend illustrates a knowledgeable and seasoned group of participants, likely to offer reliable evaluations of the market’s performance and Shari’ah-compliance standards.

H. Distribution of Respondents by Forms of Securities

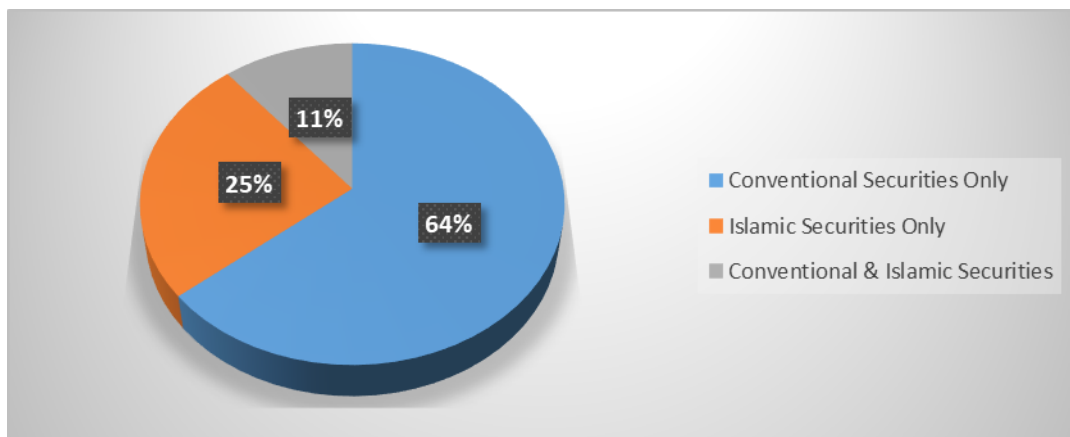


Figure 8: A Pie Chart Showing the Distribution of Respondents by Forms of Securities Involved in

Figure 8 displays the distribution of respondents based on the types of securities they traded. A majority of respondents (64%) traded only in conventional securities, while 25% engaged solely in Islamic securities, and 11% traded in both. This distribution suggests that although Islamic capital market products are gaining visibility, they remain relatively underutilised compared to conventional alternatives. The figures also highlight a growing interest in Sharī'ah-compliant investment options, likely influenced by ethical and religious considerations.

Discussion of Findings

The findings on respondents' perceptions of awareness of *al-Sūq al-Māliyyah al-Islāmiyyah* (Islamic capital market) reveal a pronounced deficit in public knowledge, as the majority of respondents indicated that they were unaware of its existence. This outcome corroborates earlier empirical studies, which consistently identify limited awareness as a critical impediment to the development of Islamic finance in Nigeria. For example, Adepoju (2013) highlights ignorance as a major constraint to the growth of *takāful* (Islamic insurance), noting that even basic conceptual understanding among Muslims remains inadequate. This observation is further substantiated by the works of Kareem (2016), Alaro and Alalubosa (2019), and Baita and Daud (2019), all of whom emphasise the pervasive knowledge gap across different segments of the Islamic financial ecosystem.

Qualitative evidence from expert interviews reinforces this finding. As noted by Mr. Adamu Umar of the International Institute of Islamic Banking and Finance, Bayero University, Kano, even highly educated individuals, including doctoral degree holders, may lack familiarity with fundamental Islamic financial instruments such as *ṣukūk*. The implication of this finding is profound: the challenge facing the Islamic capital market in Nigeria is not merely structural or regulatory, but fundamentally epistemic. Without adequate knowledge dissemination, market participation remains limited, product adoption is constrained, and the broader developmental potential of the sector cannot be realised.

This deficiency in awareness may, in part, be attributed to the generally low level of financial literacy regarding capital market operations in Nigeria. As observed by Professor Binta Tijani Jibril, public understanding of both conventional and Islamic capital markets remains weak, with the latter suffering from even deeper obscurity. While recent *ṣukūk* issuances have marginally improved awareness by stimulating public curiosity and engagement, the overall level of knowledge remains insufficient. The implication here is that episodic financial innovations, such as sovereign *ṣukūk*, are inadequate as standalone awareness mechanisms; rather, a sustained and institutionalised framework for financial education is required.

With respect to the ethical foundations of *al-Sūq al-Māliyyah al-Islāmiyyah*, the majority of respondents correctly acknowledged its unequivocal prohibition of *ribā* (interest/usury), *gharar* (excessive uncertainty), and *maysir* (gambling), as well as transactions characterised by opacity and injustice. This reflects a relatively high level of normative awareness regarding the moral underpinnings of Islamic finance. These prohibitions are grounded not only in theological injunctions but also in their empirically observed adverse effects on economic stability, distributive justice, and social welfare. This finding implies that while conceptual awareness of Islamic financial ethics exists, it has not yet translated into widespread practical engagement with Sharī'ah-compliant financial instruments, thereby indicating a disconnect between ethical cognition and economic behaviour.

In terms of the structural components of the Islamic capital market, respondents demonstrated adequate awareness of core instruments such as Sharī'ah-compliant equities, Islamic mutual funds, and *ṣukūk*. However, there was noticeable inconsistency in responses relating to Islamic venture capital and Islamic stockbroking services. This disparity can be attributed to the absence of these instruments within the Nigerian financial landscape. Empirical verification through expert interviews confirms that, unlike in more developed Islamic finance jurisdictions such as Malaysia and the Gulf states, these products have not yet been operationalised in Nigeria. The implication is that market awareness is closely correlated with product availability, where instruments are absent, knowledge remains abstract and fragmented, thereby limiting the depth and sophistication of market participation.

A significant empirical contribution of *al-Sūq al-Māliyyah al-Islāmiyyah* to Nigeria's economic landscape, as affirmed by the majority of respondents, lies in its role in facilitating infrastructural development. Sovereign *ṣukūk* issuances by the Federal Government between 2017 and 2020 financed the construction and rehabilitation of major road networks across the country. The first two issuances supported 53 road projects, while the third financed an additional 44. Similarly, the Osun State Government's pioneering *ṣukūk* issuance in 2013, valued at ₦11.4 billion under an *al-ijārah* structure, was directed towards the development of educational infrastructure, resulting in the construction and renovation of 23 public schools.

Field verification and independent monitoring confirm that these projects have been substantially executed, with key infrastructures such as the Lokoja–Benin Road and the Oju–Loko–Oweto Bridge reaching advanced stages of completion. The implication of these findings is unequivocal: Islamic capital market instruments, particularly *ṣukūk*, demonstrate a high degree of efficiency, transparency, and asset-backing, making them especially suitable for financing

public infrastructure in developing economies. Road projects supported under the first phase of *ṣukūk* utilisation include:

1. Oju/Loko–Oweto Bridge over River Benue (Nasarawa/Benue States)
2. Suleja–Minna Road (Phase II) in Niger State
3. Kano–Maiduguri Road (linking Kano, Jigawa, Bauchi, and Yobe)
4. Onitsha–Enugu Expressway (Amansea–Enugu border)
5. Enugu–Port Harcourt Road (Section IV: Aba–Port Harcourt)
6. Lokoja–Benin Road (Section II: Okene–Auchi, Kogi/Edo States)
7. Benin–Ofosu–Ore–Ajebandele–Shagamu Carriageway (Phase IV)
8. Ibadan–Ilorin Road (Section II: Oyo–Ogbomoso, Oyo State)

Moreover, their alignment with Nigeria’s Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) underscores their strategic relevance within national development frameworks.

Further evidence from Osun State, as reported by Oyesanya (2022), indicates that *ṣukūk*-financed projects have had a measurable impact on the education sector, particularly in Osogbo and its environs, where multiple schools have been successfully reconstructed and upgraded. Among the reconstructed schools were:

- a. Osogbo High School
- b. AUD Elementary School, Isale Agbaara
- c. St. Andrew Elementary School, Oke Baale
- d. AUD Elementary School, Sabo
- e. Oduduwa College, Ile-Ife
- f. Ataoja School of Science
- g. Adenle Middle School, Ayetoro

These outcomes reinforce earlier studies, particularly those of Mustafa and Adebayo (2015) and Baita and Daud (2019), which identify the Osun *ṣukūk* as a benchmark for Islamic infrastructure financing in Africa. The implication here is that subnational adoption of Islamic financial instruments can serve as a viable model for decentralised development financing, thereby expanding the scope of the Islamic capital market beyond federal initiatives.

Respondents affirmed the capacity of the Islamic capital market to strengthen Nigeria’s real sector. Given that Islamic financial instruments are inherently asset-backed and project-oriented, they maintain a strong linkage between financial flows and real economic activities. The channelling of *ṣukūk* proceeds into tangible infrastructure, coupled with the dominance of real-sector companies within indices such as the Lotus Islamic Index, underscores this relationship. The implication is that the Islamic capital market offers a structurally resilient alternative to speculative financial systems, with the potential to promote sustainable growth, reduce systemic risk, and enhance economic stability.

Employment generation constitutes a remarkable, albeit still developing, benefit of *al-Sūq al-Māliyyah al-Islāmiyyah* in Nigeria. While the aggregate employment figures remain relatively modest, the market has demonstrably generated both direct and indirect job opportunities across multiple sectors. These include highly skilled professionals, such as accountants, auditors, fund managers, legal practitioners, and stockbrokers, as well as semi-skilled and skilled labour within ancillary industries, particularly artisans and construction workers. Empirical evidence underscores this contribution: Jaiz Bank Plc alone employed 808 staff members as of 2018, excluding contract-based and project-specific engagements. This suggests that the employment impact of Islamic financial institutions, when fully accounted for, is likely to be significantly higher, reflecting their multiplier effect within the broader economy.

Notwithstanding these gains, the data reveal several structural and operational challenges. Foremost among these is the acute deficit of technical expertise in Islamic finance. This concern is quantitatively reinforced by respondents' perceptions of systemic constraints. For instance, Nigeria's multi-religious composition was identified as a significant challenge ($\bar{x} = 3.2910$, $\sigma = 0.86820$), indicating a moderately strong consensus, albeit with some variation in opinion. In contrast, multiculturalism per se was perceived as a less substantial impediment ($\bar{x} = 2.7211$, $\sigma = 0.76601$), suggesting that the issue lies not in diversity itself but in its management and socio-political interpretation. More pronounced challenges include insufficient capital ($\bar{x} = 3.4732$, $\sigma = 0.81089$) and a shortage of skilled professionals ($\bar{x} = 3.4840$, $\sigma = 0.49981$), both of which exhibit relatively high mean scores, indicating strong agreement among respondents. Particularly noteworthy is the issue of low public awareness, which recorded the highest mean score ($\bar{x} = 3.8435$, $\sigma = 0.36483$). This reflects a near-consensus view and minimal dispersion, thereby identifying inadequate awareness as the most critical impediment to the growth and sustainability of the Islamic capital market in Nigeria.

Conversely, certain perceived barriers appear to lack empirical significance. The notion of inadequate liquidity in the secondary market ($\bar{x} = 2.4157$, $\sigma = 0.76723$) was largely dismissed by respondents, as reflected in its relatively low mean score. Similarly, the absence of a unified Islamic commercial legal framework did not attract strong concern, suggesting either a level of adaptability within existing legal structures or a limited appreciation of its long-term implications. However, the absence of independent legal and supervisory institutions was clearly recognised as a major constraint ($\bar{x} = 3.3193$, $\sigma = 0.63782$), indicating the need for more robust governance and regulatory autonomy to ensure Shari'ah compliance and institutional credibility.

Furthermore, while respondents expressed a degree of scepticism regarding Nigeria's population size and natural resource endowment as immediate catalysts

for market expansion, other structural variables were identified as more compelling drivers. Infrastructural deficits ($\bar{x} = 3.2266$, $\sigma = 0.76834$) were acknowledged as a significant constraint, implicitly highlighting the necessity of systemic investment in enabling facilities. More importantly, the imperative of financial inclusion ($\bar{x} = 3.5575$, $\sigma = 0.55090$) emerged as a strong justification for the future expansion of *al-Sūq al-Māliyyah al-Islāmiyyah* in Nigeria. This indicates a broad recognition that Islamic finance possesses both the ethical framework and operational capacity to integrate underserved populations into the formal financial system.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has established that the Islamic capital market (ICM) has made significant contributions to Nigeria's economic development and holds substantial potential for future growth. Several factors, including the increasing demand for Islamic capital market products from both Muslim and non-Muslim populations, the market's ethical principles, its socio-economic impact, institutional and legal acceptance, and the country's pressing infrastructural deficits, are identified as key drivers of this potential. Additionally, urbanisation trends, such as population growth in major urban centres and large-scale infrastructure projects in sectors like transportation, energy, water, education, and health, further strengthen the market's outlook.

Although still in its early stages, the Islamic capital market has demonstrated its capacity to support Nigeria's real sector, reduce unemployment, and foster infrastructural development, all of which are crucial for driving economic growth and ensuring sustainable development. In light of these findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Regulators, operators, and stakeholders should enhance public awareness through targeted sensitisation campaigns, workshops, seminars, and conferences, aimed at educating the public on the benefits and potential of the Islamic capital market.
2. Greater collaboration between regulators, operators, and other Islamic financial institutions should be prioritised to optimise the mobilisation and utilisation of funds, thereby increasing the market's overall efficiency.
3. The Nigerian Exchange Group (NGX) and Lotus Capital Fund should expand the scope of equities listed on the NSE Lotus Islamic Index by incorporating commodities, euro-ṣukūk, and Sharī'ah-compliant insurance products, thereby broadening market participation.
4. NGX and Lotus Capital Fund should further promote the use of ṣukūk instruments, including contracts such as *mudārabah*, *mushārahah*, *murābahah*, *salam*, and *istisnā'*, to drive infrastructure development and foster broader economic growth.

5. The government at all levels should leverage ṣukūk bonds to fund critical infrastructure projects, including the upgrading of airports and seaports, energy infrastructure, environmental restoration, and the expansion of the railway system.

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THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SUPERNATURAL UNCANNY IN *AL-FIL AL-AZRAQ*: AN ANALYSIS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ARAB WORLD AND ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

*This study examines the manifestation of the supernatural uncanny in *Al-fil al-azraq* by Ahmad Mourad, focusing on how supernatural elements generate psychological unease and challenge perceptions of reality within an Arab-Islamic context. Drawing on Sigmund Freud's theory of the uncanny as the return of the repressed, the research analyses how the novel blurs the boundary between the real and the unreal through motifs such as doubling, repetition, and ambiguity. Employing a qualitative methodology based on close textual and discourse analysis, the study examines key scenes involving the character of Sherif to demonstrate how uncanny effects are constructed narratively and psychologically. In addition, the study explicitly maps an Islamic perspective by engaging concepts such as jinn possession, spiritual affliction, and the unseen (*al-ghayb*), as articulated in classical Islamic thought, to interpret behaviors that may otherwise be pathologised within Western psychiatric frameworks. The findings reveal that the supernatural uncanny in the novel operates as a dual interpretive space where psychological disturbance and spiritual explanation coexist, thereby destabilising fixed notions of reality, identity, and rationality. The study argues that this interplay not only deepens the representation of existential and psychological conflict but also reflects broader tensions in Arab societies between modern psychiatry and religious epistemologies. Finally, the research contributes to scholarship on Arabic fiction by demonstrating how the uncanny, when read through both psychoanalytic and Islamic lenses, offers a more culturally grounded understanding of fear, belief, and human consciousness.*

Keywords: Uncanny, Freud, *Al-fil Al-azraq*, Supernatural, Psychology

Introduction

The uncanny is a phenomenon where something appears simultaneously familiar and foreign, invoking fear and discomfort. Sigmund Freud's (1919) theory of the uncanny defines it as the return of the repressed, where hidden fears and subconscious elements manifest in ways that disturb the rational mind. The uncanny describes the eerie sensation that arises when something familiar becomes disturbingly strange. This concept is often intertwined with supernatural elements, especially in literature where characters exhibit psychological disturbances perceived as otherworldly. In Arab narratives, the supernatural frequently coexists with religious and cultural beliefs, shaping perceptions of mental illness, identity, and the unknown (Oladosu, 2019). In *Al-fil Al-azraq*, the character of Sherif, with his dissociative tendencies and supernatural encounters, serves as an exemplary case of how the uncanny manifests in an Islamic-Arab context.

In literary studies, the uncanny remains central to Gothic and psychological fiction, where it functions as a mechanism for exposing hidden fears and unconscious tensions. Recent studies of diasporic and postcolonial literature (Rasheed & Abdulhamed, 2023) show that the uncanny is increasingly linked to themes of displacement, identity crisis, and socio-political instability, thereby extending Freud's original formulation into broader cultural and existential domains.

Despite these advancements, much of the existing scholarship remains grounded in Western epistemological frameworks, often treating the uncanny as a purely psychological or cognitive phenomenon. This limitation becomes particularly evident when examining non-Western literary traditions, where supernatural beliefs and metaphysical worldviews are integral to narrative meaning.

Within Arabic literature, recent studies have begun to foreground the importance of supernatural and cultural frameworks in shaping uncanny experiences. For instance, Hurley and Hojeij (2023) demonstrate that the figure of the jinn functions as a central Gothic trope in Arab narratives, embodying collective fears, gender anxieties, and cultural tensions. Further research into Arab Gothic imaginaries (Hurley, 2025) highlights how contemporary narratives continue to reinterpret jinn and supernatural figures within modern and digital contexts,

suggesting the persistence and transformation of the uncanny within evolving cultural environments.

These studies indicate that, unlike Western traditions where the uncanny is often co-opted as a psychological phenomenon, Arabic narratives frequently situate it at the intersection of the psychological and the supernatural. This intersection is further reinforced by Islamic epistemology, which distinguishes the existence of unseen entities such as jinn and affirms the concept of *al-ghayb*. Classical scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah have discussed the potential influence of jinn on human behaviour, while contemporary research (El-Zein, 2009) emphasises an integrative approach that accommodates both mental illness and spiritual affliction.

Recent scholarship has also begun to explore the uncanny in Arabic fiction through specific authors and texts. In this regard, Bisiriyu and Akewula (2025), in *Echoes of the Uncanny: Psychological Disorientation and Political Anxiety in Ahmad Mourad's Firtijo*, demonstrate that the uncanny in Mourad's work can reflect psychological fragmentation and socio-political instability. The study shows how disorientation, paranoia, and identity breakdown function as key mechanisms through which the uncanny is produced.

However, while these studies provide valuable insights into the psychological, political, and cultural dimensions of the uncanny, they often underexplore its supernatural and religious grounding within Islamic thought. In particular, there remains a gap in examining how Islamic epistemology – especially concepts such as *al-ghayb*, jinn, and spiritual affliction – actively shapes the experience and interpretation of the uncanny in Arabic fiction.

The present study addresses this gap by analysing *Al-fil al-azraq* by Ahmad Mourad through an integrated framework that combines psychoanalytic theory with Islamic theological perspectives. It argues that the uncanny in the novel emerges from a dual interpretive structure, where psychological explanations coexist with supernatural possibilities. By situating the uncanny within this culturally embedded framework, this study extends existing scholarship and offers a more nuanced understanding of how fear, identity, and reality are constructed in contemporary Arabic literature.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach through literary analysis of the novel *Al-fil Al-azraq*. By examining dialogues, character development, and thematic elements, the study deconstructs how Sherif's experiences align with Freud's theory of the uncanny. Additionally, cultural and Islamic theological perspectives are incorporated to contextualise supernatural elements. Primary data is drawn from the literary text, with secondary sources including psychological theories, Islamic theological interpretations, and relevant literary critiques. The study employs discourse analysis to examine how language and narrative structure contribute to the construction of the uncanny.

Theoretical Framework

The Uncanny

The concept of the uncanny has its roots in German philosophy and psychology, with early considerations appearing in Nietzsche's "The Will to Power" before being examined more formally by Ernst Jentsch in his 1906 essay "On the Psychology of the Uncanny" (Miller, 2015). However, it was Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay "The Uncanny" ("Das Unheimliche") that provided the most influential and comprehensive exploration of this phenomenon, defining it as something "that belongs to all that is terrible – to all that arouses dread and creeping horror" and as something "undoubtedly related to what is frightening – to what arouses dread and horror" (Windsor, 2019: 149).

At its core, the uncanny describes the disorienting experience when something is simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar. This duality creates a psychological tension, as Freud explains that the uncanny is an occurrence in which something can be unfamiliar and familiar at the same time. The term derives from the German word "unheimlich" (literally "unhomely"), which Freud contrasted with "heimlich" ("homely," "familiar," "belonging to the home") (Miller, 2015). The linguistic analysis reveals that "heimlich" can paradoxically merge with its antonym "unheimlich," contributing to the concept's inherent ambiguity (Rahman et al., 2022).

Freud proposed that the uncanny arises from two primary mechanisms. First, it emerges when repressed issues resurfaces in consciousness, described as a familiar situation that has been repressed and then reappears. Specifically, Freud theorised that repressed infantile sexual complexes, when revived in the subconscious by some impression, generate uncanny feelings. Second, the uncanny can manifest when surmounted primitive beliefs appear to be confirmed

i.e. when experiences seem to validate animistic or magical beliefs that most people have ostensibly outgrown (Windsor, 2019).

The uncanny has a distinctive artistic function, particularly in Gothic and horror literature, where it “designates how the uncomfortably acquainted is rendered comfortably bizarre or how the unfamiliar is brought to light and becomes familiar” (Karam, 2020: 236). It creates an ambiguous emotional response of both attraction and repulsion – the uncanny generates both fear and allurement.

Since its formulation, the concept has proven difficult to precisely define, with scholars acknowledging that the word itself is untranslatable qua form and content. Nevertheless, its fundamental characteristic remains consistent: the uncanny represents “the unsettling revival of what was once familiar, now transformed into something strangely unfamiliar” (Balkaya, 2024: 8).

Synopsis of *Al-fil Al-azraq*

Al-fil Al-azraq is one of the most renowned novels by Egyptian writer Ahmad Mourad. Following the commercial success of his previous works, *Firtijo* and *Turab al-Mas*, Mourad published this novel through Dar Al-Shorouk in 2012. Spanning 443 pages, *Al-fil Al-azraq* is a psychological thriller that delves into the complexities of the human psyche. The novel follows Yahya, a psychiatrist grappling with intense emotional and psychological turmoil. After the tragic death of his wife and daughter in a car accident – an incident for which he blames himself – Yahya withdraws from his profession and social life, seeking solace in meaningless physical relationships. Having surrendered to the emptiness of his existence, he is unexpectedly compelled to return to work at Abbasiya Hospital’s notorious Ward 8 West after a five-year hiatus. This ward houses criminals awaiting psychiatric evaluation to determine whether they are mentally ill or merely feigning insanity.

Yahya’s return takes an unsettling turn when he discovers that one of the patients is Sherif, a former close friend and psychiatrist. Their history is marred by conflict, as Sherif had once prevented Yahya from marrying his sister. Now, Sherif stands accused of murdering his wife, and it is Yahya’s responsibility to assess whether he acted under the influence of a mental disorder or with full awareness. As Yahya investigates, he is drawn into a web of eerie occurrences that challenge his perception of reality. Simultaneously, his past resurfaces, forcing him to confront unresolved emotions, unrequited love, and professional rivalry. Torn between duty, guilt, and personal desire, Yahya is ultimately faced

with an unsettling question – does he, too, suffer from the very affliction he is meant to diagnose?

A masterful blend of psychological depth, mystery, and supernatural elements, *Al-fil Al-azraq* captivates readers with its intricate narrative and compelling exploration of the human mind.

Sherif and the Uncanny: A Psychological and Supernatural Duality

The concept of the uncanny, as defined by Freud (1919), refers to something that is strangely familiar yet deeply unsettling. In the case of Sherif, his behaviours and experiences blur the boundaries between reality and delusion, making him a vessel for the uncanny.

The uncanny often emerges through characters that exist on the threshold between reality and the unknown. In *Al-fil Al-azraq*, Sherif's character represents a compelling case where the supernatural intersects with Islamic beliefs on the unseen, mystical numerology, jinn possession, and mental health. Sherif embodies this liminality through his ambiguous mental state. Sherif, previously a psychiatrist was accused of killing his beloved wife Basma, this event led to his admission in Abasiyyah psychiatric hospital, a popular hospital in Egypt to ascertain if the crime had been committed intentionally or under the influence mental disorder. However, his file case was handled by his classmate Yahya who was in great shock. Thus, as Yahya interrogates Sherif with regards the crime he was accused of, to ascertain if he had committed the crime. His responses are mysterious as depicted below:

أنا ما قتلتش.

جميل ..مين اللي قتل؟

هو.

هو مين؟

استغرق ثواني لجيبيني:

اللي قاعد جنبك دلوقت.

التفت إلى يساري حيث أشار.

هو فيه حد تاني معنا في الأوضة؟!

رمقني بغضب لإنكاري ما يدّعي وجوده، فتصدق المريض
ضلالات مرضه جزء لا يتجزأ من أعراضه..

أنا بس مش شايف حد.

حذق شريف في وجهي بعيني تمثال فرعوني زجاجية.

أنت سامع صوته دلوقت؟ سألته.

شريف.. أنت دكتور.. خلي عندك وعي بالحالة بتاعتك..

تفتكر لجنة دكاترة، عقر هتصدق بسهولة دكتور حافظ الأعراض؟

خليك منطقي..

ليس ينبس بكلمة! أحتاج لبداية جديدة (Mourad, 2012: 53).

Translation:

I didn't kill.

Nice... who did?

Him.

Who is "him"?

He took a few seconds before answering:

The one sitting next to you right now.

I turned to my left where he pointed.

Is there someone else in the room with us?!

He glared at me angrily for denying what he claimed to be real, as believing a patient's delusions is an inseparable part of their symptoms...

I just don't see anyone.

Sherif stared at me with glassy, pharaoh-like eyes.

Can you hear his voice right now? I asked.

Sherif... You're a doctor... Try to be aware of your condition.

Do you think a panel of doctors would so easily believe a doctor who merely memorised the symptoms?

Be logical...

He didn't utter a word! I need a fresh start.

One of the most unsettling aspects of Sherif's character is his apparent ability to perceive things that others cannot. When confronted about a murder, he insists that the real killer is "the one sitting next to you". This assertion immediately introduces a sense of dread and uncertainty – does Sherif possess supernatural insight, or is he suffering from a psychological disorder? His refusal to acknowledge that he is alone, despite Yahya's insistence, aligns with the Freudian uncanny because it suggests a hidden reality that exists beyond ordinary perception (Freud, 1919).

Yahya's response -"I just don't see anyone"- further amplifies the uncanny effect. The doctor, although trained in psychiatry, hesitates when confronting Sherif's conviction. His internal struggle is evident when he states, "Try to be aware of your condition." This moment underscores Freud's idea that the uncanny unsettles not only the subject experiencing it but also the observer, who is forced to question their own perception of reality.

Yahya's insistence that Sherif is a doctor and should be aware of his condition ("Sherif, you're a doctor... be conscious of your state") suggests that his affliction is not merely psychological but something more enigmatic. This self-awareness, coupled with his apparent descent into the unknown, makes him a figure of both horror and fascination.

Also, Sherif's character presents a dichotomy between psychological disorder and supernatural possession. His ability to switch between personalities is depicted in the following excerpt:

ما تقعد يا شريف

لم يستجب لندائي

شريف

نظر لي ثواني ثم أجابني

شريف خرج

نعم

خرج

مين اللي خرج؟

شريف

يدا شريف منبسطة بجانبه منفرجة اصابع ووجهه مسترخ ظاهريا
هو لا يكذب

أمر عادي فقط هو ينفني وجود نفسه

أمال أنت مين؟

صديق

وصديق ده ليه اسم؟

مممكن تنادينى نائل

نائل (Mourad, 2012: 100)

Translation:

Wont you sit down, Sherif.?

He didn't respond to my call.

Sherif.

He looked at me for a few seconds and then answered me.

Sherif left.

Yes,

He left

Who left?

Sherif.

Sherif's hand resting on his side, fingers relaxed and a relaxed face, apparently not lying.

An ordinary thing, he just denies his presence.

So who are you?

A friend.

And does this friend have a name?

You can call me Nahel.

Nahel.

Furthermore, his engagement with unseen entities, and his obsessive writing of numbers reflect symptoms that could be medically classified as schizophrenia or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) as reflected in the conversation between Yahya and Lubna as they searched Sherif's house for evidences on the cause of Sherif's mental disorder.

والتفت للبنى التي وقفت تتأمل الأرقام على الحائط:

مش دي نفس ال...؟

هي. واضح إن شريف بتزاوله فكرة OCD، "وسواسي قهري، بيلح عليه بكتب أرقام...بيبقى لها عنده مدلول إحنا ما نفهموش.

حتى لو دكتور ما يقدرش يحس إن دي هلاوس؟

ممكن يحس لو هلاوس، جلستين كهريا، وأدوية نقدر نفصله عنها واحدة واحدة، المشكلة لو Delusions.. ضلالات.

Translation:

And she turned to Lubna, who stood staring at the numbers on the wall:

Isn't this the same...?

She: It's clear that Sherif is obsessed with the idea of OCD, obsessive-compulsive disorder. He compulsively writes numbers... They must have a meaning for him that we don't understand.

Even if he's a doctor, can't he realise these are hallucinations?

He might, if they are hallucinations. Two electroshock therapy sessions and some medication can gradually disconnect him from them. The real problem is if they are Delusions...

This conversation explores Sherif's compulsive fixation on numbers, positioning his mental state within the Freudian uncanny where the familiar (numbers) takes on a disturbing, incomprehensible significance. The dialogue also contrasts hallucinations and delusions, accentuating the eerie persistence of delusional belief systems.

Lubna's staring at the numbers signals recognition that something feels disturbingly familiar. This moment aligns with Freud's (1919) theory of the uncanny, where a familiar object (numbers) becomes unnervingly mysterious because its true meaning remains elusive.

Sherif's compulsive number-writing reflects the uncanny power of repetition, which Freud associates with the return of the repressed. The numbers seem meaningless to Yahya and other doctors investigating Sherif's mental health, but they have a secret significance to Sherif, making them both familiar and alien-an unreadable code that only he understands.

Sherif's obsessive number-writing symbolises his inability to control his own thoughts, a hallmark of the uncanny. The fact that he is a psychiatric doctor makes this all the more disturbing-he should understand what's happening to him, but he remains trapped in it.

This reflects the theory of the uncanny as intellectual uncertainty – when someone who should “know” reality can no longer distinguish it from delusion, their condition becomes terrifying.

Ultimately, Yahya was summoned to present his findings on Sherif's case. His submission amused the panels as it contradicts the medical practices as depicted below:

في المكتب كانت دكتورة صفاء على كرسيها، ...

أقعد يا يحيى.

قعدت في مواجهة اللزج أرتقب أول غيث التحقيق، دقيقة مُملة قبل
أن تترك أوراقها وتلفتت لي:

أحكى لي يا يحيى عن الحالة اللي معاك؟ شريف الكردي.

بداية غريبة لم أوقعها.. اتخذ الأمر مني ثواني تابعت فيها وجه
سامح قبل أن أجيبها:

شريف الكردي عنده أعراض مركبة يا دكتور، سكيذوفرينيا،
OCD سكيذوجرافيا، وفي آخر يومين لاحظت...

ازدواج! د. كيلاني حكى لي عن آخر كلام دار بينكم. طبعاً آخر
حاجة دي مش محتاجة أقول لك إنها عاوزة قاعدة يا يحيى.

يا دكتورة شريف بيقاله يومين بيتكلم معايا بشخصيتين منفصلتين.
أنا عارف إن ده صعب.. بس ده اللي حصل.

شريف يقدر يتكلم بشخصيتين في أي وقت لو حب يا يحيى.

ده دكتور..

أنا عارف يا دكتور إن الازدواج نظري، بس شريف لو بيمثل ما
كانش حاول ينتحر، أنا شفت شخصيتين، وبينهم خناقة..

محاولة الانتحار دي تدخله في خانة الاكتئاب، لا سكيذ، ولا ازدواج
يا يحيى، وده ما بعفيهوش من المسؤولية.. (Mourad, 2012: 144)

Translation:

In the office, Dr. Safaa sat in her chair,

Sit down, Yahya.

I sat facing the slippery character, anticipating the first drops of
the interrogation. A tedious minute passed before she set down her
papers and turned to me.

“Tell me, Yahya, about the case you’re handling – Sherif El-Kurdi.”

An unexpected opening. It took me a few seconds to glance at Samah’s face before responding.

Sherif El-Kurdi exhibits complex symptoms, Doctor – schizophrenia, OCD, schizography. And in the last two days, I’ve noticed...

Dissociative identity disorder? Dr. Kilani told me about the last conversation between you two. Obviously, this latest development requires a proper session, Yahya.

Doctor, Sherif has been speaking to me in two separate personalities for the past two days. I know it sounds unbelievable... but that’s exactly what happened.

Sherif can switch between two personalities anytime he wants, Yahya.

That’s a doctor speaking...

I know, Doctor, that dissociation is theoretical, but if Sherif were faking it, he wouldn’t have attempted suicide. I saw two personalities – fighting each other!

A suicide attempt places him under depression, not schizophrenia or dissociative identity disorder, Yahya. And that doesn’t absolve him of responsibility.

This passage explores the blurred lines between mental illness, deception, and legal responsibility, creating an uncanny atmosphere where reality itself is unstable. The clash between medical rationality and psychological horror echoes Freud’s (1919) concept of the uncanny – when something familiar (identity, sanity, medical authority) becomes disturbingly unfamiliar.

Dr. Safaa and Yahya’s discussion revolves around whether Sherif is experiencing genuine dissociation or fabricating symptoms. Yahya insists that Sherif’s personalities are fighting each other, which contradicts conventional medical

classifications. Dr. Safaa dismisses Yahya's observation, reinforcing the idea that Sherif's condition is either manipulable or misunderstood.

This creates an uncanny fear of the instability of identity – is Sherif truly fragmented, or is he a master of deception?

Freud (1919) posited that the uncanny often arises from the “double” (Doppelgänger) – a psychological division where one's sense of self is duplicated, leading to existential horror. Sherif embodies this uncanny doubling-if he has two personalities, which one is real?

Yahya points to Sherif's suicide attempt as proof of genuine dissociation, but Dr. Safaa immediately reinterprets it: “A suicide attempt places him under depression, not schizophrenia or dissociative identity disorder.”

The uncanny arises because one medical act (suicide) can be interpreted in radically different ways, shifting between classifications without a stable reality. This also reflects the institutional control over identity-mental illness is not defined by the patient's experience but by the doctor's authority to categorise it.

This uncertainty aligns with Kristeva's (1982) concept of abjection – when the boundaries between the self and the other break down, causing existential dread. If Sherif is both victim and manipulator, how do we classify him?

Yahya's inner conflict mirrors his power struggle with Dr. Safaa: He is being pushed into a specific interpretation of Sherif's case, yet he instinctively resists. The exchange feels like a calculated game, where each move – whether a medical diagnosis or a legal classification – determines Sherif's fate. This reflects the uncanny fear of being controlled by unseen forces, whether institutional, psychological, or legal. The ambiguity of Sherif's condition is weaponised – if he can switch between personalities, does that mean he can control them at will? This raises a disturbing question:

Is Sherif a victim of his own mind, or is he using his mind to manipulate reality itself?

Sherif's “two personalities” act as an uncanny rupture in reality, where the boundaries between genuine mental illness and deception dissolve. The medical discourse itself becomes a tool of power, deciding not just how Sherif is perceived, but what he is allowed to be.

However, from an Islamic perspective, these signs could also be interpreted as supernatural afflictions such as jinn possession or divine punishment. The juxtaposition of these interpretations enhances the uncanny effect, as it blurs the boundary between reality and delusion. Sherif's experiences blend psychological distress with supernatural perception, making his condition an ideal representation of the uncanny. His ability to perceive an unseen entity, engage in dual-personality conversations, and exhibit obsessive behaviours aligns with Freud's assertion that the uncanny arises when repressed fears surface (Freud, 1919). In an Islamic context, this can be linked to the concept of Jinn possession, where mental illness and supernatural explanations intertwine (Al-Ashqar, 2003).

Sherif's Deterioration and the Uncanny's Climax

Sherif's descent into madness intensifies when he isolates himself, refuses to engage with his wife, and ultimately commits acts of violence. However, Sherif's wife, Basma perceived Sherif's madness was caused by infertility as depicted below:

تكلمت ثانية بعدما كانت يتعيط، وقالت إنها حاسة إن فيه واحدة .تأخر الحمل هو السبب
عازل نفسه وبتغيب كثير ولما بييجي .ما بقتش تعرف أي تفاصيل عن حياته ..ثانية
بقى عنيف جدًا During Sex بيقفل على نفسه بالمفتاح بالأيام في أوضة،
(Mourad, 2012: 68)

Translation:

The reason was delayed pregnancy. She spoke again after she had been crying and said that she felt there was another woman... She no longer knew any details about his life. He isolated himself and disappeared a lot, and when he returned, he would lock himself in his room for days. During sex, he became very violent.

In Basma's perception of Sherif's sudden change, her unease stems from the feeling that the man she married has become someone entirely unfamiliar. Her description of his isolation, secrecy, and violent tendencies aligns with the uncanny's core principle: the disruption of identity and the eerie sensation that something or someone is not as they should be. Basma's words reflect a fear that Sherif is no longer the person she once knew:

"She felt there was another woman... She no longer knew any details about his life."

This reflects not just emotional detachment, but a deeper transformation in Sherif's identity. The idea that her husband is present yet absent-physically the same but mentally and emotionally distant – aligns with Freud's notion of the double (Doppelgänger), where an individual appears to split into two distinct versions of themselves, creating an eerie experience for those around them (Freud, 1919).

In literature and psychology, the double often symbolises an unconscious force taking over, leading to erratic or even dangerous behaviour (Royle, 2003). Sherif's sudden mood swings and prolonged disappearances reinforce this uncanny effect, making Basma feel like she is living with a stranger rather than her husband.

Also, Basma's most disturbing observation is Sherif's increased aggression during intimacy:

“During sex, he became very violent.”

This shift from tenderness to aggression is particularly unsettling because it turns an act of love into an act of fear. In Basma's case, her husband's behaviour no longer aligns with her understanding of him, making even their most private moments feel foreign and dangerous.

Violent shifts in sexual behaviour are often associated with themes of possession and loss of control-both in psychological and supernatural interpretations of the uncanny.

In the Arab world, sudden personality changes and unexplained violence are sometimes linked to jinn possession, (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000) adding a folkloric dimension to Basma's fear. While a medical diagnosis might point toward psychological disorders like schizophrenia or trauma-induced dissociation, cultural beliefs could lead Basma to suspect that something beyond the natural realm is influencing Sherif's transformation.

Another key aspect of Basma's experience is Sherif's growing isolation: “He isolated himself and disappeared a lot, and when he returned, he would lock himself in his room for days.”

Isolation is a major theme in uncanny experiences, as it fosters fear and speculation. When someone we love withdraws completely, leaving behind an emotional void, the absence itself becomes haunting. In Basma's case, Sherif's

secrecy transforms him into a mystery, making her suspect infidelity at first but later leading her to deeper anxieties about his mental state.

By shutting himself away, Sherif creates an air of mystery around his condition, reinforcing Basma's sense of powerlessness and fear.

Furthermore, Sherif's mental deterioration led to violent acts as depicted below:

فجأة شريف طرد بسمه وغير كالون الباب .. راحت عند مامتها
ماحاولش يكلمها أسبوع، وبعدين أتصل بيها واترجاها ترجع . راحت
له، فتح لها الباب عريان وراسم Tattoo أكيد شفته .. همّا

الأتنين مجانين تاتوهات أصلا.. تخيل يعمل إيه؟ He raped ..
her بمنتهى العنف

اغتصاب .. اغتصاب؟

ده اللي قالته في التلفون وهي منهارة 69-70: Mourad,2012)

Translation:

Suddenly, Sherif kicked Basma out and changed the door lock. She went to her mother's house, and he didn't try to contact her for a week. Then, he called her and begged her to come back. When she went to see him, he opened the door naked... and had a tattoo – you must have seen it... right here.

Both of them are crazy, covered in tattoos... Imagine what he did? He raped her – he raped her with extreme violence... Raped her?

That's what she said on the phone while she was breaking down.

Sherif's sudden transformation, from a loving husband to an unpredictable, violent figure, embodies Freud's (1919) concept of the uncanny – the unsettling experience when something familiar becomes disturbingly strange. His actions, particularly locking Basma out, changing the door locks, and then later luring her back with a dramatic shift in behaviour, evoke a sense of dread and unpredictability that aligns with key aspects of the uncanny.

The narrative initially establishes Sherif as someone who deeply loved Basma. However, his sudden cruelty and erratic behaviour create a psychological rupture. Freud (1919) posited that when something known and safe (a husband) becomes

unknown and threatening (a violent aggressor), it produces the uncanny effect. Sherif's actions are disturbing because they betray the stability of identity – the same man who once cherished Basma now physically and emotionally torments her. His dramatic swings between rejection and desperate pleas introduce an unsettling ambiguity: is he fully aware of his actions, or is he losing control of himself?

This instability mirrors Gothic horror narratives where characters struggle with fractured selves, reflecting a psychological Doppelgänger – a dual identity where one side is familiar, and the other is monstrous (Rank, 1971).

Sherif's nudity and the tattoo serve as visual manifestations of his transformation. The act of opening the door naked can be seen as an aggressive display of dominance, rejecting social norms of decency and exposing an altered version of himself.

Tattoos, in Arab and Islamic contexts, carries negative connotations, often associated with outsiders, rebellion, or even demonic possession (El-Zein, 2009).

The rape scene adds another layer of horrific uncanniness – it is not just an act of brutality but an act committed by someone Basma once loved and trusted. Sherif's transformation into a sexual aggressor is particularly unsettling because it fractures the expected boundaries of love and violence. The dialogue stresses Basma's shock and psychological breakdown – her trauma reflects the uncanny horror of being unable to recognise someone you thought you knew (Royle, 2003).

In Freudian terms, this could be seen as the return of the repressed – deeply buried fears (about masculinity, dominance, and control) emerging in their most violent form.

From an Islamic and Arab cultural perspective, Sherif's behaviour becomes even more disturbing. The idea of demonic possession (jinn) is often invoked in cases of extreme personality changes or violent behaviour, (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000) making Sherif's sudden shift almost supernatural in its horror.

The narrative also challenges traditional masculinity- Sherif, once a protector, becomes a monster within the household, embodying the uncanny fear that safety within domestic spaces is an illusion.

Sherif's descent into unpredictable, violent madness aligns with the uncanny theme of the double and the loss of identity. His split self- loving husband and violent aggressor - turns him into a figure of terror. The scene is particularly chilling because it plays on deep-rooted fears about control, masculinity, and trust, making Sherif's transformation one of the most disturbing manifestations of the uncanny in the text.

His unexplained tattoo and obsessive numerical inscriptions further highlight his detachment from reality. Yahya was frustrated with Sherif's response; however, he decided to deploy another technique to reveal the murderer of Basma which also ends in frustration as depicted below:

ابتسم..

أنا مش فاهم أنت بتضحك على إيه؟

الشخص اللي قتلها تقدر ترسمه؟

لم أمهله وقتًا للتفكير، قرّبت الورقة منه ودسست القلم بين أصابعه.

ارسم يا شريف.. أي حاجة.

لم يرسم.. كتب ٩ ٠ ٠ ٢ ٠ ٠ ١ ١ ٠ ٤ ..

لم أتمالك نفسي غضبًا.

شريف مش كلام ده! أنت كده بتعجزني!! (Mourad, 2012: 56)

Translation:

He smiled...

I don't understand, what are you laughing at?

Can you draw the person who killed her?

I didn't give him time to think. I moved the paper closer to him and pressed the pen between his fingers.

Draw, Sherif... anything.

He didn't draw... He wrote: 91002001104...

I couldn't hold back my anger.

Sherif, this isn't making sense! You're just stalling me!!

The above has continually been the response of Sherif in respect to the crime he committed. During the interrogation of medical experts, Sherif forcefully wrote the above numbers as the perpetrator of the crime. Sherif's initial reaction – a smile – creates an immediate sense of unease. Laughter, typically associated with amusement, is rendered uncanny in this context because it emerges in a situation where distress and clarity are expected. Freud (1919) notes that the uncanny arises when something seemingly normal is rendered abnormal, not limited to inappropriate emotional responses in tense situations. Sherif's smile suggests either detachment from reality or an internal logic that remains inaccessible to Dr. Yahya, aligning with Freud's notion of the uncanny as an encounter with the inexplicable.

The second uncanny element lies in Sherif's refusal to directly engage with Yahya's command to draw the killer. Instead of producing an image, he writes a string of numbers: 91002001104. This deviation from expected behaviour introduces an eerie ambiguity. According to Jentsch (1919), intellectual uncertainty plays a central role in the uncanny, where the observer (Dr. Yahya) is left unable to ascertain whether Sherif's response holds hidden meaning or is purely nonsensical. This numerical sequence, devoid of context, functions similarly to cryptic messages in horror and thriller narratives, heightening the sense of unease and defamiliarisation.

Furthermore, Yahya's frustration - "Sherif, this isn't making sense! You're just stalling me!!"- reflects the uncanny disruption of logical progression. The anticipation of a clear answer is subverted by an enigmatic response, reinforcing Freud's claim that the uncanny often emerges from "something repressed which recurs" (Freud, 1919, p. 241). Here, the act of writing numbers instead of drawing could signify a subconscious defense mechanism, where Sherif, rather than confronting the trauma of identifying a killer, resorts to a coded or dissociative response.

The eerie ambiguity of whether his actions stem from psychosis or an external force aligns with Freud's notion of the uncanny: the fear of an unresolved, hidden truth. The moment when he is seen smiling in court, detached from the gravity of his actions, is the culmination of this uncanny horror.

The Arab Cultural Lens: Between Religion and Mental Health

In many Arab societies, the supernatural is deeply embedded in cultural and religious narratives. Mental illnesses are often viewed through the lens of spiritual disturbances. Sherif's case, where his erratic behaviour and hallucinations are met with both medical and mystical explanations, reflects the tension between modern psychiatric understanding and traditional beliefs. Islamic teachings acknowledge mental disorders but also recognise the influence of unseen entities. Islamic teachings present a nuanced and non-reductive understanding of human behaviour by acknowledging both psychological disorders and the possible influence of unseen metaphysical entities. On one hand, the Qur'an affirms human cognitive and emotional vulnerability, underlining that, individuals are not burdened beyond their capacity (Qur'an 2:286), which has been interpreted by scholars as recognition of mental and emotional limitations (Rassool, 2015). Classical and contemporary Islamic thought therefore does not deny the existence of mental illness; rather, it encourages care, compassion, and treatment for those experiencing psychological distress (Awaad & Ali, 2015).

At the same time, Islamic epistemology affirms the existence of the unseen (al-ghayb), including jinn, as explicitly stated in Surah al-Jinn (Qur'an 72:1–15). Within this framework, jinn are understood as sentient beings capable of interaction with humans and, in some interpretations, capable of influencing human perception, emotion, and behaviour (El-Zein, 2009). This dual recognition creates a broader interpretive spectrum in which unusual or disturbed behaviour may be attributed either to internal psychological conditions or to external metaphysical interference.

Classical scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah argue that cases of possession (sihr) or spiritual affliction can manifest in ways that resemble what modern psychiatry classifies as mental illness, including altered consciousness, voice changes, or erratic behaviour (Ibn Taymiyyah, 2005). However, he maintains that not all such cases should be reduced to supernatural causes; rather, careful discernment is required to distinguish between physiological, psychological, and spiritual conditions. This position reflects an integrative approach in Islamic thought, where medical treatment and spiritual intervention (such as ruqyah) are not mutually exclusive but can operate concurrently (Awaad & Ali, 2015).

This epistemological openness complicates the boundary between pathology and metaphysics. Behaviour that may be clinically diagnosed as schizophrenia or dissociative identity disorder within Western psychiatry can, in an Islamic

context, also be interpreted as possible evidence of jinn influence or spiritual disturbance (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000). Consequently, the subject is situated within a space of interpretive ambiguity, where multiple explanatory models coexist without one necessarily invalidating the other.

Sherif's descent into a state of duality, where he speaks as two different personalities and claims to see an invisible presence, challenges the boundaries of psychological disorder and supernatural interference. Western psychology might diagnose schizophrenia or dissociative identity disorder, yet within the Arab world, his symptoms might also be interpreted as spiritual affliction or divine punishment (El-Zein, 2009).

Islamic scholarship differentiates between mental illness and supernatural afflictions. The Quran highlights that the mind is a divine trust (Amanah) and must be cared for (Quran 2:286). However, the belief in supernatural forces, such as possession by jinn, is also prevalent (Quran 72:1-15). In Sherif's case, his actions – locking himself away, hearing voices, and engaging in violent behavior – could be interpreted as either a psychiatric disorder or an external supernatural force. The inability to distinguish between these realms creates an unsettling feeling, reinforcing the uncanny.

Sherif's hallucinations and violent tendencies could be interpreted through the lens of possession or divine test. Unlike Freud's secular explanation of the uncanny as a psychological disturbance, Islamic thought allows for both spiritual and medical interpretations.

This dual framework intensifies the uncanny effect. The inability to definitively determine whether a character's experiences stem from internal psychological fragmentation or external unseen forces produces a sustained sense of epistemological instability. Thus, Islamic teachings do not merely provide an alternative explanation for abnormal conduct; they actively contribute to the construction of the uncanny by legitimising the coexistence of the rational and the supernatural within the same experiential reality.

Conclusion

This study examines how the supernatural uncanny operates in *Al-fil al-azraq* by Ahmad Mourad, with particular attention to its psychological effects and its interpretation within an Arab-Islamic framework. Drawing on Sigmund Freud's theory of the uncanny, the analysis has shown that the novel constructs unease

through recurring motifs of doubling, repetition, and ambiguity, which blur the boundaries between reality and illusion. These narrative strategies are most clearly embodied in the character of Sherif, whose fragmented identity, perception of unseen entities, and compulsive behaviours create a sustained atmosphere of uncertainty that subverts both characters and readers.

In line with the study's objective, the findings further demonstrate that the uncanny in the text is not confined to psychological interpretation alone. Rather, it emerges from the tension between psychiatric explanations and Islamic conceptions of the unseen (al-ghayb), including the possibility of jinn influence as articulated by scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah. This dual interpretive framework produces a persistent epistemological ambiguity, where neither the rational nor the supernatural fully resolves Sherif's condition. It is precisely this coexistence of explanatory systems that intensifies the uncanny effect in the novel. This study concludes that the supernatural uncanny in *Al-fil al-azraq* functions as a narrative and conceptual space in which psychological disturbance and spiritual interpretation intersect. By demonstrating how these overlapping frameworks shape the representation of fear, identity, and reality, this research affirms that the uncanny in Arabic fiction is deeply mediated by cultural and religious contexts, rather than being solely a product of universal psychological processes.

This study extends the application of the uncanny by integrating psychoanalytic theory with Islamic epistemology, thereby offering a more culturally grounded model for interpreting supernatural phenomena in Arabic literature. It also highlights the importance of reading mental disturbance in literary texts through multiple knowledge systems, particularly in contexts where religious and metaphysical beliefs remain influential. This approach opens pathways for further interdisciplinary research at the intersection of literature, psychology, and Islamic thought.

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LA REPRESENTATION MULTIMODALE DE LA MÉMOIRE TRAUMATIQUE DE LA GUERRE CENTRAFRICAINE À TRAVERS *TEMPETE SUR BANGUI* DE DIDIER KASSAI

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RÉSUMÉ

Le traumatisme a longtemps été décrit dans d'autres genres littéraires tels que les mémoires, les poèmes, les romans et les autobiographies, cependant, il a une présence relativement nouvelle à travers la forme de la bande dessinée. Mais, nous savons que la représentation de la réalité est une tâche toujours insaisissable, et également, documenter les expériences traumatiques de la vie vécues lors de guerres violentes est plus problématique. Laissant à se demander si la bande dessinée, déjà reléguée au second plan comme enfantine, sera capable de chroniquer des expériences traumatiques de la guerre centrafricaine. En appuyant sur l'étude de traumatisme et de la théorie postcoloniale dans Tempête sur Bangui tome 1 & 2 de Didier Kassai, ce travail applique la méthode qualitative de l'analyse textuelle et visuelle pour étudier ces récits graphiques de guerre centrafricaine, en montrant la représentation multimodale de la mémoire traumatique. Notre étude conclut que ces récits graphiques à travers leur multimodalité sont très efficaces pour transmettre la violence, le désespoir, la douleur et le traumatisme lorsque les mots seuls ne suffisent pas, en garantissant le passage du « tout dire » au « tout montrer ».

Mots-clés : Mémoire traumatique, Récits graphiques, Traumatisme, Étude postcoloniale, Multimodalité.

INTRODUCTION

La bande dessinée qui est un art hybride mélange l'image, l'illustration, le dessin, la peinture, la narrative et l'onomatopée. Scott Mc Cloud (1993) est en accord avec la bande dessinée comme un art hybride, c'est pourquoi il constate que : « c'est une erreur de ne voir en la bande dessinée qu'un genre hybride entre les arts graphiques et le récit littérature. Ce qui se passe entre les cases est une sorte de magie que seule la bande dessinée sait créer » (p. 100). La bande dessinée est donc un art narratif, graphique et séquentiel. Rosa Rabadan (1991) au domaine de linguistique dit que : « les bandes dessinées consistent en une partie iconique (une suite statique d'images) en synchronie spatiale avec un

message linguistique » (cité par Padilla, 2015). Cela veut dire que la bande dessinée doit avoir des images qui se suivent synchroniquement, il peut avoir un message linguistique comme des runes picturales, des mots, des sons onomatopéiques etc. Cela parle de la nature multimodale de la bande dessinée.

La représentation multimodale dans la bande dessinée implique une combinaison d'images et de textes pour raconter une histoire. Dans cette multimodalité, il y a la combinaison d'images, de textes, de couleurs, et de tons pour raconter ces guerres. Ces aspects multimodaux sont ce que ce travail veut appliquer pour montrer la guerre centrafricaine et le traumatisme de ces citoyens. Donc, ce travail a pour objectif d'examiner les récits graphiques de Didier Kassaï pour montrer la représentation multimodale de la guerre centrafricaine et la mémoire collective des victimes. Démontrer comment l'auteur peut représenter la mémoire traumatique des citoyens centrafricains à travers des récits graphique. Finalement montrer ces récits graphiques de la guerre centrafricaine comme des archives pour l'immortalité symbolique des victimes en appuyant sur la théorie postcoloniale et l'étude de traumatisme.

L'ÉTUDE DE TRAUMATISME ET LA THÉORIE POSTCOLONIALE

A partir de 1870 et 1930, le concept de *trauma studies* (étude de traumatisme) s'enrichit de nouvelles significations. Tout en gardant sa connotation médico-chirurgicale, il commence à être utilisé dans une perspective psychologique pour qualifier les lésions psychiques laissées par un événement inattendu et d'une violence extrême sur un sujet qui peut avoir l'impression d'une mort imminente. Puis avec les dommages causés par les catastrophes naturelles et les guerres civiles, que les survivants, les témoins oculaires et les sympathisants ont racontés de leurs différentes manières, il est important d'étudier les représentations de ces catastrophes naturelles et de ces guerres civiles dans les œuvres littéraires, et cela peut être fait en appliquant l'étude de traumatisme dans les œuvres littéraires. C'est ainsi que le concept de traumatisme a ensuite été repris dans une perspective littéraire comme une théorie.

Comme Geoffrey Hartman (1995) le dit, il s'agit d'une théorie qui émerge se concentrant sur la relation des mots et des traumatismes et nous aidant à lire la plaie à l'aide de la littérature (p. 537) et ceci peut être appliqué à deux niveaux différents : au niveau de l'auteur et au niveau de la narration, mais ce travail se fait dans les deux niveaux. Dans sa conception du traumatisme, Caruth s'inspire de la notion de *Nachträglichkeit* de Sigmund Freud - un concept freudien précoce développé dans ses études sur l'hystérie et qui fait référence à un mouvement de mémorisation non chronologique impliquant un lien entre deux événements; à un moment critique de détresse psychologique, les traces de mémoire précédemment oubliées reviennent et sont retravaillées ou réinterprétées pour correspondre aux

événements, aux désirs et aux développements psychiques ultérieurs. C'est à travers cela qu'émerge la *réactualisation* comme un stress post-traumatique que Dominick Lacapra (1998) appelle « acting out » (Dannels, 2013). Il y a la deuxième phase identifiée par Lacapra qui est le « working through » dans lequel la personne traumatisée tente d'affronter et de sortir de son traumatisme en mettant en mots le traumatisme que lui, jusqu'à ce moment, n'avait pu accéder que de façon inconsciente sous forme de flashbacks, cauchemars ou reconstitution. Lorsque ce traumatisme a été mis en mots ou raconté pour devenir une œuvre d'art, il sert de transmission intergénérationnelle (Lacapra, 2004) de la postmémoire (Hirsch, 2001) pour conserver la mémoire de l'événement. Philippe Codde (2011) soutient que le terme « postmémoire » peut être étendu à toutes les générations qui suivent. (p. 676), c'est les générations après le désastre. Il y a plusieurs concepts de l'étude de traumatisme comme le concept de *Testimonio* (Poole, 2015) l'*Intergénérationnel* et *transgénérationnel*. Un autre concept est le *Témoin Oculaire*, la *génération secondaire* ou le témoin de *troisième génération*

Cette théorie, comme nous le savons, a été eurocentrique. Pour l'amener à la périphérie, il est étudié à côté de la théorie postcoloniale. Ce n'est pas ambigu si la théorie de l'étude de traumatisme est liée au concept de la théorie postcoloniale, c'est parce que les deux théories se préoccupent des événements passés, des survivants, des mémoires collectives etc. (Ajah, 2016, p. 30). Le postcolonialisme en littérature s'intéresse au rôle de la mémoire dans la représentation de l'histoire : marchandisation de la mémoire, fictionnalisation de la représentation, détronement du concept d'Histoire, fragmentarité, politique identitaire, dynamique centre-périphérie, tous indiquant des connexions entre la mémoire et le traumatisme. En ce qui concerne la fiction postcoloniale, elle est traumatisante en raison de son souci de la récupération de la mémoire et de la reconnaissance de ceux qui sont niés, supprimés ou oubliés.

L'application de la théorie du traumatisme à l'étude du postcolonialisme offre un aperçu non seulement des expériences de ceux qui subissent des traumatismes coloniaux tels que la migration forcée et la colonisation, mais elle aide également à relier les sites de traumatisme des XXe et XXIe siècles, tels que la guerre et le génocide, au monde postcolonial (Ward, 2013 ; 2015). Donc, ce travail étudie *Tempête sur Bangui 1 & 2* de Didier Kassaï qui narrent la guerre centrafricaine en appuyant sur le traumatisme et la théorie postcoloniale pour être capable de tracer le traumatisme historique de la république centrafricaine qui aboutisse à la guerre civile de 2013.

LE TRAUMATISME HISTORIQUE DE LA GUERRE CENTRAFRIQUE

La guerre centrafricaine découle d'un traumatisme historique et politique. Le traumatisme historique est « une grappe d'événements, de faits historiques

traumatisants qui troublent durablement les rapports individuels et collectifs » (Touaibia, 2013, p. 139). Chaque événement individuel est profondément choquant et quand vous regardez les événements dans leur ensemble, ils représentent un historique continu de perturbation culturelle et de destruction de la communauté. La recherche explorant les traumatismes historiques examine comment le traumatisme de ces événements est incarné ou transmis personnellement de génération en génération, de sorte que même les membres de la famille qui n'ont pas directement subi le traumatisme peuvent en ressentir les effets des générations plus tard (Walters et al, 2011). Le traumatisme historique est un élément de perturbation de vies sociales, culturelles et politiques.

Le traumatisme historique de la République Centrafricaine est politique parce qu'il provient du coup d'État constant dans le pays. Le coup d'État est un renversement soudain et souvent violent d'un gouvernement, généralement effectué par un petit groupe d'individus, tels que des officiers militaires ou des élites politiques, dans le but de s'emparer du pouvoir. Les coups d'État de la Centrafrique ont été un phénomène récurrent tout au long de l'histoire et ont eu des implications historiques et politiques importantes, entraînant souvent des traumatismes.

Ces coups d'Etat centrafricains successifs créent un sentiment de traumatisme collectif dans la société. La nature soudaine et souvent violente de tels événements laisse des cicatrices psychologiques durables sur les personnes qui ont été témoins ou qui ont vécu le bouleversement. Cela dure de générations à générations parce qu'il y a ces successions qui existent toujours.

Ainsi le traumatisme historique de la guerre centrafricaine découle d'un long coup d'état qui a eu l'influence des colonisateurs dès son indépendance. C'est pourquoi Gino Vlavanou (2016) postule que « la république centrafricaine (RCA) est politiquement instable depuis son indépendance en 1960. Différents coups d'état se sont succédé dont le plus récent date de mars 2013. Du régime autoritaire de David Dacko en 1960 à celui de François Bozize en 2013, La RCA vit une instabilité politique chronique » (p.42). C'est le coup d'état qui date de 2013 que nos récits graphiques narrent dans *Tempête sur Bangui 1 & 2* de Didier Kassaï. Ces récits graphiques nous montrent que le traumatisme historique des coups d'état chroniques influencé par les colonisateurs court de génération en génération pour rendre le pays instable. Kassaï illustre cette situation :



Figure 1 (Kassai, 2015, p. 17)

Cette image décrit un homme avec tant de micros devant lui et sa veste écrit « président, Bozizé, KNK », montre qu'il est le président du pays avec son affiliation politique. Nous pouvons voir que le président parle à un groupe de personnes selon l'image. Ce groupe de personnes sont représentés par leurs têtes qui ne sont pas bien illustrées visiblement. Le texte « les occidentaux nous imposent la guerre pour empêcher l'exploitation de notre pétrole ! » (Kassai, 2015, p. 17) montre que cette guerre c'est à cause de l'influence des occidentaux pour le contrôle de leurs ressources naturelles. Donc, la figure 1 illustre François Bozizé qui charge son armée à la guerre parce que sa position de président est menacée. Cela est un nouveau coup d'état influencé par les Blancs à cause de leurs ressources naturelles. C'est pour cela que la violence de 2013 commence. Cette violence a causé tant de morts. Les survivants de cette guerre à travers plusieurs façons sont capables de représenter leurs expériences traumatiques. C'est ainsi que Didier Kassai est capable de transférer la mémoire traumatique de ses concitoyens à la mémoire narrative et illustrative.

DE LA MÉMOIRE TRAUMATIQUE À LA MÉMOIRE NARRATIVE ET ILLUSTRATIVE

Il est difficile de représenter la mémoire traumatique des victimes, mais ces événements traumatiques devraient être représentés. Judith Herman (1997) dit que : « traumatic memories lack verbal narrative and context rather they are encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images (les mémoires traumatiques manquent de narration verbale et de contexte. Ils sont plutôt codés sous la forme de sensations vives et d'images) (p. 38) ». Cela montre que les mots seuls ne suffisent pas à représenter l'événement traumatisant. C'est pourquoi Kassai utilise non seulement des mots mais aussi des images pour parler de la guerre centrafricaine. Sa narration et son illustration du premier tome du livre commence avec le siège par les différents groupes de miliciens puis jusqu'à la fuite et le déplacement des citoyens, le viol et le pillage. La guerre qui était politique devient maintenant tribale et religieuse. La guerre est maintenant

groupe contre groupe, voisins contre eux-mêmes, tribu contre une autre tribu et chrétiens contre musulmans et vice versa. La guerre n'a exempté personne, hommes, femmes, enfants, vieux et jeunes ont tous été touchés. L'auteur, sachant pertinemment que les mots ne suffisent pas pour décrire la guerre meurtrière et la destruction gratuite de la vie, mélange des mots et des images comme le montre la figure suivante :



Figure 2 (2018, p. 57)

Dans cette figure nous pouvons voir comment l'auteur représente les sons des armes de guerre « Bang ! Braoum, Ratatata, blam, boum, paw, Ratoutoutou » (Kassaï, 2018, p. 57). Il utilise ces onomatopées pour représenter les éclats des équipements de guerres. Ce style d'illustration et d'écriture de Kassaï nous conduit à l'idée de symbolisme sonore. Otto Jespersen (1964) donne l'idée qu'il existe une correspondance naturelle entre le son et le sens. Les mots acquièrent leur contenu et leur valeur à travers un certain symbolisme sonore. Les exemples les plus connus de symbolisme sonore se trouvent dans le *Kratylos* de Platon (Jespersen, 1964, p. 396). Platon, dans son célèbre dialogue, affirme que « the ideal name is one that imitates its designee (le nom idéal est celui qui imite son destinataire) » (cité par Robinson, 2013 :190). C'est-à-dire que le son doit imiter ce qu'il représente. Les deux dispositifs les plus répandus employés dans cette imitation sont l'étymologie et ce que Gérard Genette (1995) appelle la « mimophony (mimophonie) » ou l'imitation par le son et la forme (cité par Robinson, 2013, p. 190). L'auteur utilise cette imitation pour montrer non seulement des sons mais la destruction. Car on peut voir les bruits des engins de guerre représentés par l'auteur. La destruction de l'environnement, les sons des équipements de guerre, des cadavres avec du sang qui coule sur le sol. Également, le grondement des sables, l'ouverture du sol par des bombes, l'éclair de lumière des fusils et des bombes et le sauvagement du coutelas taché de sang comme le montre l'image. Tous ce que nous voyons dans cette image

sont pour représenter les armes, la destruction, les troubles et le traumatisme de cette guerre meurtrière qui importe la tempête à Bangui.

La théorie postcoloniale tente d'étudier les relations et la dynamique du pouvoir entre les colonisateurs et les colonisés, ainsi que les impacts politiques et culturels des colonisateurs sur les colonisés (Lappalainen, 2022, p. 27) cela veut dire que la théorie postcoloniale s'intéresse à la relation entre les colonisés et leurs colonisateurs. Lorsque cette guerre a commencé, les occidentaux ont rapatriés leurs citoyens conformément au texte. La guerre est devenue meurtrière au point que même les citoyens centrafricains ont plaidé pour l'aide. Les citoyens sont désespérés dans la mesure où ils ne se soucient plus d'où vient l'aide et c'est pourquoi lorsque les troupes françaises sont venues, ils se sont réjouis et les ont accueillies comme le messie biblique.



Figure 3 (2018, p. 99)

Avec l'image de la figure 3, nous constatons que c'est la troupe française face au public centrafricaine. On peut comparer les troupes de France et leur accueil, à l'entrée triomphale de Jésus à Jérusalem. Cette scène donne des sensations de soulagement aux centrafricains ; il y a une ambiance et une extase dans l'air. Les femmes enlèvent leurs emballages et leurs pagnes et les placent sur le sol pour que leurs chars de guerre passent. Les soldats sur ces chars de guerre sont représentés avec la peau claire montrant qu'il s'agit de troupes blanches. Une foule est montrée autour d'eux pendant qu'ils passent. Parmi cette foule, nous pouvons voir les gens avec leurs mains levées, certains sautent et d'autres dansent, on voit qu'ils sont contents de voir ces soldats blancs. Même le texte de l'image confirme que « l'émotion est forte cet après-midi-là, sur l'avenue de l'indépendance... » (Kassaï, 2018 :99). L'image montre également des personnes que l'on voit avec des feuilles de palmier et certaines femmes

dénouent leurs emballages afin de les déposer sur le sol pour que ces troupes et leurs chars de guerre passent. Il en est ainsi parce que de leur désespoir les Blancs « le Messie de l'homme noir » représenté par la France sont venus à leur secours. Cette situation est telle à cause des meurtres horribles du peuple, à cause de la guerre, du désespoir et de l'impuissance des citoyens centrafricains. Toutes ces situations dans le pays sont ce qui a fait Kassaï à devenir traumatisé.

L'événement traumatique est encodé dans l'imagerie et la sensation corporelle, et en leur absence de récit verbal, les récits traumatiques ressemblent aux souvenirs de jeunes enfants (Herman, 1997, p. 38). Essentiellement, lorsque les mots ne suffisent plus à exprimer ce que l'auteur et la victime a vécu, les images peuvent améliorer et aider l'auteur et même la victime à combler les lacunes, et à travers cette interaction peuvent créer une vision unique dans l'esprit d'une victime du traumatisme (Beskow, 2011, p. 5). Kassaï a été tellement traumatisé, donc il utilise les images pour représenter son traumatisme qui lui vient à travers la réactualisation.

La réactualisation signifie une forme de trouble de stress post-traumatique qui est commun chez de nombreux individus traumatisés. Lise De Mey (2012) dit que la condition peut se manifester de différentes manières, l'une d'elles consiste à revivre l'événement traumatisant, dans ce cas, la personne traumatisée est susceptible d'avoir des rêves, faire des cauchemars ou des illusions qui la ramènent à cet événement (p. 8). Donc, la réactualisation de Kassai se produit à travers le cauchemar et l'insomnie.



Figure 4. (2015, p. 132)

Kassaï nous montre à travers la figure 4 qu'il a été hanté par les événements de la guerre centrafricaine. La figure 4 nous montre des bulles qui contiennent de l'incertitude avec trois points dans l'un, une autre montre un pistolet émettant du feu. Une bulle illustre un crâne avec un explosif enfoncé dans l'orbite vide de l'œil, l'une des bulles est une main avec un couteau tenu dans la position de

poignarder. Toutes ces images sont représentées à l'aide de bulles noires. Ces bulles proviennent des souvenirs et des cauchemars de Kassaï car il est montré avec toutes les orbites blanches très visibles nous indiquant à quel point il est terrifié par tout l'événement. Le texte dit : « Ainsi commencent pour moi des nuits blanches à chasser des cafards » (Kassaï, 2015, p.132), montre que son sommeil est toujours troublé par ces images horribles et il se trouve très difficile à dormir parce qu'il est traumatisé. Être traumatisé, c'est précisément être possédé par une image ou un événement (Caruth, 1995, p.5). Cette image sera toujours déformée et monstrueuse ; elle se cache dans l'esprit pour être revisitée donnant l'expérience traumatisante. C'est ainsi que Kassaï est hanté par une image déformée et monstrueuse. Il utilise son traumatisme pour représenter la mémoire traumatique de cette guerre en tant que telle représentant le traumatisme collectif et la mémoire collective de tous les citoyens centrafricains. Ces récits graphiques de Kassaï qui portent la mémoire collective de cette guerre devient des outils postmémoriels et intergénérationnels pour l'immortalité symbolique.

LA MÉMOIRE COLLECTIVE ET L'IMMORTALITÉ SYMBOLIQUE DES RÉCITS DE GUERRE.

La mémoire collective est l'ensemble de chose ou d'histoire qu'une communauté ou un groupe de personnes connaissent d'elles-mêmes. La mémoire collective, le sens que toute une communauté a de son passé, abrite des aspects critiques de la culture politique, de la tradition communautaire et de l'identité sociale (Edy, 1999, p. 71). Il forme notre compréhension des événements passés et des relations présentes et il contribue à nos attentes quant à l'avenir. La mémoire collective est comme une métaphore qui formule la rétention et la perte d'information de la société sur son passé dans les termes familiers de souvenir et d'oubli individuel (Edy, 1999, p.72). On peut dire que les œuvres de notre corpus, produites de la mémoire collective, formulent la rétention centrafricaine et de leurs histoires de guerres. Les gens peuvent apprendre l'histoire de la guerre centrafricaine à l'école mais l'histoire qu'on apprend à l'école sera objectivement des faits présentés, mais nos textes d'étude comme récits graphiques non seulement transmettent l'histoire, mais aussi les sentiments, les traumatismes de cette guerre et aussi les nouvelles identités provoquées par la guerre. C'est pourquoi Kassaï ne raconte pas d'histoires personnelles, mais collectives. Kassaï est un survivant qui a vécu la guerre, il nous raconte comment cette guerre a coûté tant de vies. À travers ses récits, il représente la mémoire collective des citoyens centrafricains, c'est pourquoi au premier tome de son roman graphique, il dit selon un de personnage qu'il n'a pas nommé : « Sauvons-nous ! Ils arrivent ! » (2015, p. 46). Pour nous dire qu'il parle d'une menace qui affecte tous les citoyens centrafricains. Au deuxième tome du récit graphique, l'auteur dit à travers une femme : « les

séléka sont en train de nous tuer comme des animaux ! Sauvez-nous ! » (2018, p. 20), Une autre femme dit : « ils nous traquent partout ! Nous vivons en brousse, nos enfants sont malades ! Sauvez-les, s'il vous plaît ! » (2018, p. 22). Tout cela est pour étayer le fait que cette guerre a une influence négative sur chaque citoyen du pays, même les enfants. Même en utilisant le traumatisme individuel, il nous montre le traumatisme collectif de la guerre centrafricaine.

Cela prouve également le point de vue de Ron Eyerman (2013) sur les traumatismes individuels et collectifs. Selon lui, ce que les traumatismes individuels et collectifs ont en commun, c'est qu'ils procèdent d'un choc. Les blessures subies sont autant collectives et sociales qu'individuelles (p.43). Kassaï utilise tous des dessins animés, et la bande dessinée est un médium adéquat pour représenter la mémoire collective des gens parce qu'un visage de dessin animé peut décrire n'importe qui. C'est une coquille vide qu'on habite et qui se permet de voyager dans un autre royaume. On ne se contente pas d'observer le dessin animé, on le devient. À travers les dessins, le traumatisme semble plus accessible et plus facilement retransmis, car il devient plus général (McCloud, 1993, pp.31 -36). Plus un visage est caricatural, plus il pourrait décrire n'importe qui. Donc, ces mémoires collectives représentent également la mémoire culturelle. D'après Jan Assman (2008), la mémoire culturelle est une forme de mémoire collective au sens où elle est partagée par un certain nombre de personnes (p. 110) et ces gens partagent beaucoup de choses en commun, ce qui leur donne la même identité culturelle. Par conséquent, préservant la mémoire collective des personnes, leur identité culturelle est également préservée. C'est pourquoi Kassaï, pour préserver l'histoire préserve également des souvenirs ainsi la culture et la connaissance. Comme le dit Assman (2008, p. 114), la mémoire est la connaissance avec un « indice d'identité » c'est la connaissance de soi, c'est-à-dire sa propre « identité diachronique », que ce soit en tant qu'individu ou membre d'une famille, génération, communauté, une nation ou une tradition culturelle et religieuse. En tant que connaissance, elle englobe le culturel et le collectif. De ce fait, la mémoire peut être transmise à une autre génération. Un aspect unique de la mémoire collective est qu'elle survit à des durées de vie individuelles (Edy, 1999, p. 75), nous montrant ainsi que ces textes sont des outils postmémoriels et intergénérationnels.

Marianne Hirsch dit que, la postmémoire décrit plus spécifiquement le rapport entre des enfants des survivants de traumatismes culturels ou collectifs et les expériences de leurs parents, expériences dont ils ne se souviennent qu'à travers des récits et des images avec lesquels ils ont grandi, mais qui sont si puissants, si monumentaux, pour constituer des souvenirs à part entière (2001, p. 16). Ces récits, si puissants et monumentaux, peuvent être liés à nos récits graphiques ; *Tempêtes sur Bangui 1 & 2* de Kassaï. Ces textes, en tant qu'outils

postmémoriels et intergénérationnels peuvent survivre, parce que les œuvres sur le colonialisme comme *Things Fall Apart* de Chinua Achebe, *Une vie de Boy* de Ferdinand Oyono et *La rue-cases nègres* de Joseph Zobel existent toujours pour nous permettre de connaître la vie de nos ancêtres avant l'ère coloniale et aussi l'esclavage et le racisme qui ont eu lieu à cette époque-là. Joke de Mey en citant Hirsch indique également que le «poste» de postmémoire tente de définir à la fois un acte de transfert spécifiquement inter et transgénérationnelle et un effet de résonance après un traumatisme (De Mey, 2011), ce qui signifie que cet outil postmémoriel connecte tant de générations à naître qui partagent cette mémoire à travers ces œuvres littéraires et, si possible, pleure et immortalise ces âmes qu'elles n'ont jamais rencontrées mais avec lesquelles elles ont des contacts à travers des artefacts. C'est pourquoi De Mey (2011) dit que la postmémoire se crée là où elle ne peut pas se rétablir, elle imagine ce qu'elle ne peut pas se rappeler. Ces textes littéraires ont créé des souvenirs qui dureront plus longtemps que de nombreuses générations ce qui conduit à l'immortalité symbolique.

Le terme « immortalité symbolique » désigne simplement ce qui reste de vies après la mort. Il s'agit des bonnes actions, des inventions, des œuvres, de l'histoire ou de la biographie, ou parfois de la notice nécrologique et des arts littéraires, etc. ; en bref, tout ce qui reste d'une personne aide à immortaliser la personne après sa mort. Il est possible de penser à tout moment à la vie humaine comme se déplaçant entre deux pôles : l'image de la rupture totale [l'image de la mort] et l'image de la continuité [l'immortalité symbolique] (Lifton & Oslon, 1974, p. 34) et quand c'est ainsi, il y a la vie après la mort qui signifie ce qui peut être utilisé pour se souvenir d'une personne morte.

Par conséquent, les récits de guerre remplissent la fonction d'immortalité symbolique, ce qui implique qu'ils peuvent être utilisés pour se souvenir de la mort et des victimes de la guerre civile en Afrique. Comme produits de l'immortalité symbolique, ils sont des espaces d'enterrement ou de cimetière pour les morts. En tant que tels, les auteurs de ces récits de guerre deviennent maintenant des pleureurs nationaux pour pleurer les personnes qui n'ont laissé personne pour les pleurer. Kassai dans son récit graphique crée des personnages qui sont mort mais ne sont pas enterrés. Les gens qui ont été tués par les balles et les bombes, ceux que les gros véhicules ont écrasés. Ceux qui ont été enterrés dans une fosse commune sans que leurs familles leurs rendent le dernier hommage. Les gens tués parce qu'ils sont de différentes religions et tribus. Les cadavres de ceux d'individus enlevés et visiblement torturés à mort. Les gens que leur cadavre a été vu flottant au-dessus de la rivière :



Figure 5 (2015, p. 98)

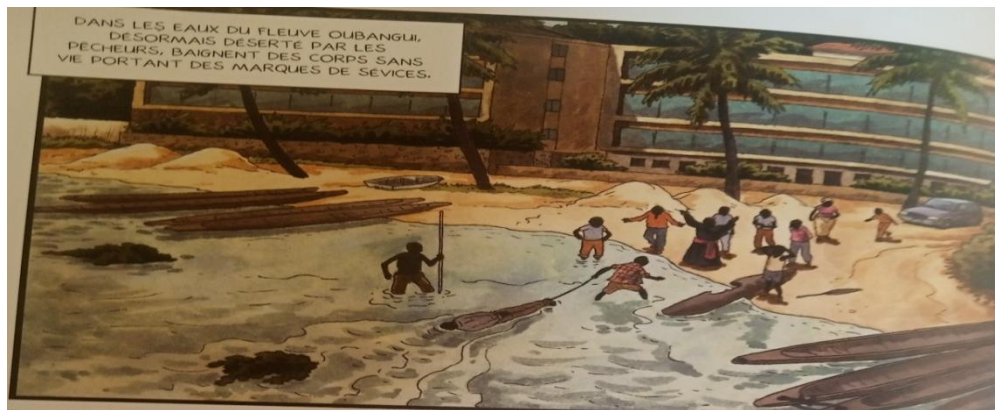


Figure 6 (2018, p.30)

Dans la figure 5 un homme est près de la mer, l'éclaboussure d'eau dans l'image montre qu'il a jeté quelque chose à l'intérieur de la mer. Une partie supérieure du corps flotte sur la mer. Un autre homme traîne un autre corps sans vie à l'intérieur de la mer, et un homme en tissu kaki avec une cravate et un fusil est vu dans la région. La position de l'homme au fusil montre que c'est lui qui donne les ordres exécutés dans l'image, car il dit « Magnez-vous ». La figure 6 montre un corps sans vie traîné hors de la mer. Les personnes vues dans la scène sont si impuissantes qu'elles regardent simplement avec une émotion abattue. Celui qui a les mains levées est comme un prêtre à cause de sa longue robe noire et d'une corde rose autour de sa taille. Avec sa main levée, nous pouvons dire qu'il offre des prières aux corps dans la mer qui ne sont pas enterrés. Ces images montrant ces corps flottants sans vie sont des représentations de tous les citoyens décédés de la république centrafricaine dont les cadavres ont été jetés sans les rites funéraires appropriés. Les récits graphiques de Kassai sont comme des pierres tombales ou des cimetières pour

pleurer les morts, leur donnant une immortalité symbolique. Ce que nous pouvons voir avec les images qui suivent c'est :



Figure 7 (2015, p. 61)



Figure 8 (2018, p. 140)

La figure 7 montre une image de trois hommes transportant un corps sans vie ensanglanté dans une brouette. Ils courent la bouche et les yeux ouverts. Les gouttelettes et les runes picturales autour de leur tête montrent qu'ils halètent, ce qui signifie qu'ils ont soulevé les cadavres de différentes personnes autour de la ville. Cette partie n'a pas montré où ils emmenaient les cadavres, mais on peut dire qu'ils ont été jetés dans une fosse commune. Une main dans l'image prend une photo de cette scène et le texte dit « ...Sur mon téléphone, j'immortalise chaque instant mémorable... » (Kassaï, 2015, p.61). Dans la figure 8 il y a un corps sans vie entouré de pierres et de bâton qui montre que la personne dans l'image a été lynchée et lapidée à mort. Une main avec un

téléphone est vue en train de prendre des photos avec le texte disant « Avec mon téléphone portable, j’immortalise cette scène, d’une rare sauvagerie » (Kassai, 2018, p. 140). Nous savons tous que Kassai est le narrateur, après avoir pris les photos de ces morts, il les illustre et les raconte dans ses récits graphiques en créant un espace pour « leur enterrement », « leur deuil » et « leur souvenir », quoiqu’imaginaire, avec ces pièces littéraires.

Kassai décide d’immortaliser ou d’historiciser l’immortalité des morts à travers leurs récits qui fournissent un nouveau et rare espace de deuil (Ajah, 2016, p. 36). On peut dire que l’exécution des rites funéraires pour les morts est destinée à assurer son confort dans l’après-vie (Aborampah, 1999, p. 260). Cela nous amène à la tradition mythologique africaine de pleurer les morts. Avec ces textes comme récits de guerre et les auteurs comme pleureurs s’engageant dans les rites funéraires des morts, la mythologie africaine sur l’immortalité des âmes humaines renforce le concept d’immortalité symbolique (Ajah, 2016, p. 37). Quand ces rites funéraires ne sont pas accomplis, il y a cette croyance que les morts ne reposeront pas en paix. Cependant, les auteurs sachant très bien que ces victimes de la guerre sont mortes tragiquement, ont décidé d'utiliser leurs œuvres comme une forme de cimetière pour accomplir les rites funéraires de ces morts qui n’ont pas été enterrés, en les immortalisant ainsi. Ce faisant, les auteurs ne sont pas seulement des pleureurs nationaux, mais ils créent aussi une représentation et préservation de l’immortalité qui a des influences durables sur les autres êtres humains (Lifton & Oslon, 1974), créant ainsi des souvenirs qui dureront de générations en générations. L’écriture est commémorative car elle parle des morts et pour les morts, c’est comme cela nos récits graphiques narrent, illustrent et parlent pour les morts de la guerre centrafricaine. Ces textes comme produits de l’immortalité symbolique resteront si longtemps et auront un niveau d’immortalité parce qu’ils ne peuvent être effacés. De nombreuses générations à venir les liront et immortaliseront encore les romans qui représentent la mémoire collective du peuple, et aussi immortaliseront les sujets traumatisés.

CONCLUSION

Les études postcoloniales se concentrent souvent sur le traumatisme collectif vécu par les communautés colonisées et sur la manière dont ces expériences traumatisantes continuent de façonner leurs identités et leurs cultures. Notre étude nous fait comprendre que la bande dessinée incarne : « the iconic nature of the traumatic image (la nature iconique de l’image traumatique) » (Chute & Dekoven, 2012 ; Munslow Ong, 2016), car l’intensité du traumatisme produit des souvenirs fragmentés et imagistes. Les récits graphiques de Kassai, à travers leur multimodalité sont très capables à transmettre la violence, le désespoir, la douleur et le traumatisme pour nous dire que ces récits graphiques

sont très efficaces de chroniquer les événements traumatiques. Nous constatons que les mots seuls ne suffisent pas pour raconter l'histoire de cette guerre barbare, mais avec le mélange des textes, des couleurs et des tons, ces récits graphiques garantissent le passage du « tout dire » au « tout montrer ». À fin ces romans graphiques illustrent comment ce traumatisme collectif se transmet de génération en génération à travers son immortalité symbolique.

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A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF SHAYKH MUSA YAHYA AGBOOLA'S SERMON, "KI LAWĀ SE L'AYE"? (WHAT IS MAN'S MISSION ON EARTH?)

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Abstract

The article provides a textual interpretation of the sermon of a leading Yoruba Muslim scholar in southwest Nigeria, Shaykh Musa Yahya Agboola, titled, "Ki Lawa Se L'aye"? (What is man's mission on earth?). The learned scholar argues in the sermon that a Muslim was first required to discover his mission on earth through active participation in a fulfilling life ambition that is not in contradiction with his/her obligation to worship God. He draws an inference from Surah Adh-Dharyat (51:56) which reveals that man and jinn were not created except to worship God alone. What this suggests is that all rational beings were obliged to devote their lifetime to Ibadah (service or worship to God). This verse may appear strongly assertive in interpretation since, in Islamic belief, God commands Muslims against associating partners with Him and rather enjoins Islamic monotheism. This, however, does not condition Muslims to worship God alone as they are also expected to perform acts outside worship within the bounds stipulated by the Sharī'ah. Shaykh Agboola contends that following both paths was, indeed, crucial, without which the Muslims may lose focus. He contends that a deeper understanding of a Muslim's earthly mission, both religious and existential, earns him/her not only earthly safety nets but also several rewards both in this world and the hereafter.

Keywords: earthly mission, sermon, Shaykh Musa Yahya Agboola, worship, God, Yoruba

Introduction

There are various ways through which Muslims worship God. Aside from the regular five daily prayers prescribed in Islam, *Jihād* (striving for the cause of God) also counts as an important act of worship. By the same token, and based on the

general consensus among scholars, engaging in *halāl* (legitimate) activity could be regarded as a form of worship, since it provides a means of survival for the individual. By taking an active part in legitimate activity, a Muslim fulfils a ‘mission’ on earth. In the sermon, “*Ki lawa se l’aye*”? by renowned Muslim scholar, Shaykh Musa Yahya Agboola (Shaykh Agboola hereinafter), legitimate acts are considered a secondary mission of the Muslim’s existence but equally as important as his primary mission, which is to worship God. Shaykh Agboola notes that a Muslim was first expected to discover his mission on earth through active participation in a legitimate activity that is not in conflict with the obligation to worship God. He draws an inference from Surah Adh-Dhariyat (51:56) which reveals that man and jinn were not created except to worship God alone. What this suggests is that all rational beings were obliged to devote their lifetime to *Ibadah* (service or worship to God). This verse may appear strongly assertive in interpretation since, in Islamic belief, God commands Muslims against associating partners with Him and rather enjoins Islamic monotheism. This, however, does not condition Muslims to worship God alone as they are also expected to perform acts outside worship within the bounds stipulated by the Shari’ah. Shaykh Agboola contends that following both paths was, indeed, crucial, without which the Muslims may lose focus. He contends that a deeper understanding of a Muslim’s earthly mission, both religious and existential, earns him/her not only earthly safety nets but also several rewards both in this world and the hereafter. The article examines the sermon, *Ki lawa se l’aye*? (What is man’s mission on earth?) through a textual analysis associated with the secondary mission of a Muslim. We identify a few themes in Shaykh Agboola’s sermon to illustrate the implications of not performing these earthly requirements. Unless otherwise stated, all translations of Qur’anic verses used in the article are taken from al-Hilali and Khan (1426), while all hadith are cited from Khan, (1997). It is also necessary to state that the analysis in the article is drawn from the CD recording of Shaykh Agboola’s sermon with the same title, *Ki lawa se l’aye*? Against this background, therefore, the sermon will be cited as VCD “*Ki lawa se l’aye*?” The sermon was both recorded and directed by Prince Ganiyu Wasiu Olaiya of Ajepeola Music and Films Centre, Aradagun, Badagry, Lagos, Nigeria.

Shaykh Agboola: A Brief Biography

Shaykh Agboola is from Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. He enrolled for his Arabic and Islamic education at the Institute of Arabic and Islamic Training Centre, Markaz, Agege, Lagos, in the 1960s and later proceeded to Libya for further Arabic studies. Shaykh Agboola is the founder and Mudir (Principal) of the renowned Daarul Falahi Arabic and Islamic Studies School located at Aro Lane, Ifelodun Local Council Development Area, Amukoko, Lagos State, Nigeria.

The Nature of the Sermon

In a personal communication with Ustadh Abdur-Rasheed Mohammed of *Daarul Falahi* Arabic and Islamic Studies School, Lagos State, the sermon, *Ki lawa se l'aye?*, was delivered as part of the programme organised by Luqman Gharub As-Shazili, proprietor of a Lagos-based Muslim organisation, *Quwwatullah* Society of Nigeria (founded in 2001), and a former student of Shaykh Agboola. The programme was organised to formally launch the society and to celebrate the *Mawlid an-nabiyy*, an important occasion for Muslims in Nigeria and across the world to celebrate the birth of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). The *Mawlid an-nabiyy* celebration is often contentious among Muslims globally (See, for instance, Asian Image). There are two major consensuses among Muslim scholars on the celebration. While a group of scholars openly fault the celebration as *Bid'ah* (innovation) (Katz, 2007), which they argued the Prophet himself disapproved of and did not request any of his followers to celebrate his birth in his lifetime (Al-Suyuti, 2013), another group of scholars, of which Shaykh Agboola belong argue otherwise (Schussman, 1998). The official launch of *Quwwatullah*, accompanied by the celebration of the *Mawlid an-nabiyy*, was, therefore, an opportunity for the learned Shaykh to share his views on the raging controversy.

Shaykh Agboola commences his sermon by explaining the term, *Quwwatullah* (power of God), which he contends illustrate a very powerful meaning. In religious terms, all power belongs to God and is eternal. In the hands of a Muslim, power is ephemeral, hence one of what differentiates man from God. A Muslim who is in a position of power is believed to have been bequeathed to him/her by God in trust for which he/she will be held accountable (See commentary 3777-3784 by Ali, 1975; Surah An Nisa (4:58) & Surah Anfal [8:27]). Trust, as used here and its relationship with power, is illustrated in Surah Al Ahzab (33:72), where trust was said to have been offered to the heavens, earth and mountains, all of whom refused to accept it except mankind. The Qur'an considered mankind's response to trust "unjust and foolish".

Shaykh Agboola's sermon moves to another subject, although related by citing the example of the *ruh* (soul) which he argues is a 'creation' made for, and breathed into, man, for which God warned to be valued as doing otherwise attracted severe punishment. Here, he draw our attention to Surah Al-Hijr (15:29) which speaks of God's possession of the soul: "*So, when I have fashioned him completely and breathed into him (Adam) the soul which I created for him, then fall (you) down prostrating yourselves to him*" [emphasis ours]. The valued nature of the soul and as a distinct creation of God explains why Islam forbids unlawful murder, a crime so severe that the *Shari'ah* prescribes nothing short of the death penalty (Anon, 2006. See also Surah Nisa (4:93) & Surah Ma'idah [5:32]). As stated above, power is ephemeral, which explains the temporality of life. In Shaykh Agboola's view, the state of temporality should, therefore, be the

reason for a Muslim to discover his/her mission on earth. He further states that a Muslim's search for his/her mission in life is expedient and must not be attempted in haste, as doing so is likely to lead to unsettling life challenges (VCD "Ki lawa se l'aye?").

Further explaining the term, *Quwwatullah* and its connection with mankind's mission on earth, Shaykh Agboola notes that the formation of an organisation is usually conceived by an individual with a vision who then invites others of similar orientation to complement the original vision (VCD "Ki lawa se l'aye?"). This vision, according to Shaykh Agboola, would not likely have any meaningful impact if the founder did not consider it a mission. This explains why a Muslim is expected to discover his mission on earth; otherwise, he/she is thrown off balance. The formation of *Quwwatullah* and its launch in 2011 underscores the founder's discovery of his earthly mission, which Shaykh Agboola emphasised in his sermon, *Ki lawa se l'aye?*

Ki Lawa Se L'aye?: Man's Earthly Mission in the Perspective of the Sermon

In Islam, Muslims are expected to pursue a life mission which is inscribed 140 days after human conception (VCD "Ki lawa se l'aye?"). However, it is understood that man's earthly mission is expected to be accomplished regardless of whether such a mission is unlawful under the *Sharī'ah* or the secular laws. For instance, a person will continue to commit a criminal act regardless of the consequences of such actions. This is because the person chose criminality as his/her mission on earth. It is important to point out that all life missions can either be good or evil. Shaykh Agboola, although did not quote a source of the hadith, supports this view in the sermon with the following rendition:

ومن الناس من خلق للخير فالخير يعمل

ومن الناس من خلق للشر فالشر يعمل

And among mankind are those created to do good, and shall continue to do good;
And among mankind are those created to do evil, and shall continue to do evil.

The hadith affirms that no person is created without a mission, regardless of whether such a mission is good or evil. Using a tree as an example, Shaykh Agboola notes that trees were made with the mission to produce leaves and fruits for human and animal consumption, the same way the mission of animals is to provide meat for human consumption, as beasts of burden among other uses. In a similar category is the air or wind, one of whose missions is to serve as an agent of fertilisation for plants. Surah Al-Hijr (15:22) provides proof: "And We send the winds fertilising." According to Ibn Kathir, the term fertilizing (*Lawāqih*) rendered in the Qur'anic verse could be viewed from two frames. The first means the fertilisation of the clouds, which causes the rain to pour in abundance upon

the earth, and the second is the fertilisation of trees to unlock their leaves for them to blossom (Ibn Kathir, n.d). Similarly, Ali (1975) in his commentary on number 160 describes *Lawāqih* as: “impregnate or fecundate the female date-palm by putting the pollen of the male tree onto the ovaries of the female tree.” This view, as Ali suggests, is explained in metaphoric terms, that is, apart from the wind acting as an agent for seeds to germinate and many flowers to blossom, its fertilising mission is to ensure that an atmospheric procedure occurs which causes rainfall that subsequently produces the varieties of fruits, vegetation and grains every season.

In addition to this are the stars whose mission, according to Shaykh Agboola, is to beautify the skyline and universe and also as guardians against the rebellious *Iblīs* (Satan) (VCD “Ki lawa se l’aye?”. See also Surah As-Saffat [37:6-7]). The above is symptomatic of the diverse missions expected of every earthly creature) which, as a necessity, must be discovered and pursued for existential purposes.

What is man’s earthly mission? To respond to this question is to ask who precisely a man is. Shaykh Agboola’s sermon explains “man” in three life phases. Man is first a creation moulded from clay. Second, man is a creation imbued with a soul and third, man is appointed to live on earth for a limited time, die and then be resurrected. Surah Al-A’raf (7:24-25) mentions these life phases: “On earth will be a dwelling-place for you and an enjoyment for a time... Therein you shall live, and therein you shall die, and from it, you shall be brought out (that is, resurrected).” In an effort to live, survive and “enjoy” this “dwelling-place,” man is expected to seek means to replenish itself if it must continue to exist. How does this occur? When man becomes conscious (or mature), he is expected to pursue various missions to preserve or abort the soul until death terminates the mission. This decision to “function” on earth is the mission expected of man to pursue on earth, on which the soul rests and is sustained.

Among God’s creations, Shaykh Agboola notes that man represents the least or smallest of them all. Although the learned scholar did not provide any evidence to support his position in the sermon, he is of the view that there are bigger and more powerful creations than man, but the latter is considered superior mainly because of the honour and preference God granted to man over all other creations. This is captured in Surah Al-Isra (17:70): “*And We have certainly honoured the children of Adam and carried them on land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference*” [emphasis ours].

Indeed, God created man and confined him to earth. Man’s existence did not occur in a vacuum, nor without a process. According to Shaykh Agboola, man passed through several stages, the earliest starting from conception in the womb through the combination of the male sperm (nutfah) and the female reproductive

egg. Shaykh Agboola explains this further by dividing the creation of man into two distinct categories. The first category is associated with Adam and Hawā'u (Eve), the first creation made from dust or sand. Adam and Hawā'u were not conceived nor born by man (VCD "Ki lawa se l'aye?". See also Surah An-Nisa [4:1]). The second category belongs to all other creations conceived and born through the children of Adam and Hawā'u, except for Isa (Jesus Christ), whose conception, according to the Qur'an, was miraculous. We must state categorically that this is the general opinion of scholars, which Shaykh Agboola similarly referred to in his sermon. In the sermon, the Muslim scholar draws on verses from the Qur'an to describe the process of man's creation. We shall examine this adequately since it has a strong connection with man's mission on earth. It similarly helps us to further appreciate why mankind was created in the first place as well as the reasons man is expected to pursue a mission throughout his earthly sojourn. We commence with Surah Al-Hajj (22:5):

O mankind! If you are in doubt about the Resurrection, then verily, We have created you (i.e. Adam) from dust, then from a *Nutfah* (mixed drops of male and female sexual discharge i.e. the offspring of Adam), then from a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood) then from a little lump of flesh – some formed and some unformed (as in the case of miscarriage) – that We may make (it) clear to you (i.e. show you Our Power and Ability to do what We will). And we cause whom We will to remain in the wombs for an appointed term, *then We bring you out as infants, then (give you growth) that you may reach your age of full strength.* And among you, there is he who dies (young), and among you, there is he who is brought back to the miserable old age, so that he knows nothing after having known. And you see the earth barren, but when We send down water (rain) on it, it is stirred (to life), and it swells and puts forth every lovely kind (of growth). [emphasis ours]

In support of the above Qur'anic verse are a few *hadith* such as Sahih Al-Bukhari, Vol. 4, Hadith 3208, Sahih Al-Bukhari, Vol. 4, Hadith 3332 and 3333, and Sahih Al-Bukhari, Vol. 1, Hadith 318, that narrate the several stages involved in the creation of man. The fundamental part of the hadith that is linked to man's mission on earth is the description of the development of the embryo after 120 days, when God requests an angel to write or decree four words for the creature in the womb of a woman. These words are: the child's earthly deeds, his means

of livelihood, the day of his death, and whether he will be blessed or wretched. After this task, the angel is commanded to breathe life into the body. At the appointed time of birth, Shaykh Agboola notes that the child is naturally expected to cry out loud. This is attributed to *Iblīs*'s painful pinch on the leg of the baby, forcing it to make an instant loud cry (Ansari, 2006). There is no consensus on the hadith, but we are referred to Surah Al Hajr (15:37-40), where *Iblīs*, in conversation with God, was said to have vowed to lead all of His creation astray. Muslim exegetes believe that this particular vow commences at birth. Although a group of scholars acknowledge the authenticity of the hadith, they believe, however, that this phenomenon is caused by several other factors. Ibn Rum Al-Filasuphy, in a line of poetry, roughly translated into English by the authors, observes thus:

لما تؤذن الدنيا به من صروفها # يكون بكاء الطفل ساعة يولد

والا فما يبكيه منها وإنها # لأفسح مما كان فيه وأرغد

إذا ابصر الدنيا إستهل كأنه # بما سوف يلقي من أذاها يهدد

Due to life's turbulence which it is not oblivious of, a child cries when it is born

If not why does a child cry? Because he was initially in a tight and constricted corner (womb) but found himself in a spacious area (earth).

The moment he finds himself on earth, he again bursts into tears with the fear of the pain he will have to endure in the world (Ibn al-Rumi, 1991).

A Creation Moulded to Worship God Alone: A Textual Analysis of Shaykh Agboola's Sermon

What precisely is man's mission on earth? As explained in previous paragraphs, all creation is prescribed with a mission by God within a few months after conception. While this varies from person to person, one mission appears generic, which is the mission to worship God. In affirming this, Surah Adh-Dhariyat (51:56) explicitly states that: "And I (God) created not the jinn and mankind except that they should worship Me (Alone)." Surah Al 'Imran (3:191), al-Anbiya' (21:16), Sad (38:27) and al-Dukhan (44:38) also share the same views. Creation, therefore, has a deeper purpose. As creations impacted by life's challenges, man is often resolute to seek God (or a higher being, depending on belief). As Ali, in commentary 5031 rightly suggests, man's well-being "depends upon our putting ourselves into accord with His (God's) will." Thus, at the centre of man's existence and the reason for his creation is his capacity to remain in accord, at all times, with God.

While the above verse may be subject to one clear and distinct meaning, which is the dedication to the worship of God alone, its interpretation is ambivalent. Worship holds a primal role in man's everyday life. Regardless of what or whom man regards as an object of veneration, worship serves as a potent avenue to connect with a higher power. In Islam and among several 'monotheistic' faiths, worship is often performed to address existential challenges, among other desires, which explains why worship is very crucial for a Muslim. As seen in Surah Imran (3:189-191), it is a window of opportunity to value God and ask for protection against the evil of the hereafter.

Indeed, worship for the Muslim does not include only such acts as adherence to the five pillars or other articles of faith and rarely signifies every second of our lives' preoccupation. This is certainly an impossible task since the Qur'an, as seen in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:286) and Sahih Al-Bukhari, Vol. 1, Hadith No. 41, reveals that God would not overburden His creation beyond what they can bear. Hence, worship is an all-encompassing term that includes words, actions and sacrifices – both inward and outward – that God is pleased with. In other words, beyond the compulsory acts of worship, everyday pursuits associated with man's earthly mission could similarly be regarded as acts of worship for which rewards are earned accordingly.

Man's earthly mission is expected to be carried out for the sake of God and with the clear intention to please Him through it. Therefore, man's mission on earth is precisely to worship God at all times and without ascribing partners with Him. Shaykh Agboola observes that man is built to revere, deify or worship an object (VCD "Ki lawa se l'aye?"). In other words, the obligation to worship God is not mandatory for man, unlike angels, because of the gift of free will. Man's decision to worship an object, whether it is God or any other superior being, comes from a place of what is called *al-Khawf* (fear). Fear is a dominant feature of man's existence, and as long as man is not immune to fear, he is conditioned to worship a power superior to him to conquer fear, even if temporarily. To keep man from the worship of an object below God explains why prophets and messengers were sent by God to the world as evidenced in Surah An-Nahl (16:36). As God calls on man to worship Him at all times, it provides a suitable reason why mankind was created to make Himself evident to them (See Surah Al-Baqarah (2:21-22) & Sahih Al-Bukhari, Vol. 6, Hadith No. 4). Shaykh Agboola corroborates this view, drawing on a prophetic tradition often quoted within *Sufi* circles;

كنت كنزاً مخفياً فأحببت أن أعرف

فخلقت الخلق فيه عرفوني

I was a hidden treasure, and I wanted to be known

So I created a creation (man) so they might know me (VCD “Ki lawa se l’aye?”). See also Al-Ajluni, 1988).

Shaykh Agboola argues that God desires man to refer to themselves as ‘*Abd*’ (slave) and He, the Supreme (VCD “Ki lawa se l’aye?”). Furthermore, God reveals in Surah Ghaafir (40:60) that when His creation calls Him in worship, they should do so in total submission and expect their supplication to be addressed. God does not see His creations in any way other than as slaves before Him. This explains why God refers to all His prophets/messengers as slaves. Two Qur’anic verses emphasise this belief. Surah Zukhruf (43:59) says: “*He [Isa (Jesus)] was not more than a slave. We granted Our Favour to him, and We made him an example for the Children of Israel (that is, his creation without a father)*” [emphasis ours]. Surah Baqara (2:23) says, “*And if you are in doubt concerning that which We reveal to Our Slave (Muhammed), then produce a surah of the like thereof, and call your witness beside God if you are truthful*” [emphasis ours]. Surah Maryam (19:2) also noted thus: “(This is) a mention of your Lord to *His slave Zakariyyaa (Zachariah)*” [emphasis ours]. The Qur’an in Surah Furqan (25:63) equally refers to those who walk with “humility and sedateness” on earth as *Ibad-ur-Rahmān* (faithful slaves of the Most Gracious).

As observed earlier, there are two types of earthly missions expected of man. While the first is bequeathed and must necessarily be discovered as part of life’s existence, the second, although not bequeathed and cannot be discovered, forms part of the religious obligations to which a Muslim must oblige throughout his life. A Muslim is expected to identify a craft to engage in based on his ability and talent, which is then pursued for as long as it entails. This usually ends on account of retirement, incapacitation or old age. This is a mission that has a closed chapter in the sense that at death, man becomes known for what he spent his life doing to sustain himself, his family and society at large. A Muslim may be known for his great skill in carpentry, through which he built a fortune and used it to better the *Ummah* (Muslim community). The moment he passes on, his mission on earth as a carpenter ceases. In the case of the other mission, which is to worship God, this does not represent a closed chapter since man earns reward for adhering to God’s obligations to worship Him while on earth and even greater rewards in the hereafter.

Drawing a strict example from the life of the Prophet Muhammed, his mission was principally to invite the people of the world to Islam, which he vigorously pursued for 23 years, after which he left the stage. Having completed his mission (prophethood), he (Muhammed) delivered what is popularly referred to as *Hajatul-wadā’* (farewell pilgrimage). To illustrate this event, *Surah Nasr* was revealed, but while the chapter may be viewed within the wider context of the decisive conquest of Mecca and how the Prophet's victory drew many into

accepting Islam, it has a much deeper meaning and interpretation. Apart from the fact that *Surah Nasr* was the last complete chapter revealed to the Prophet and a few months into his death, it also signified the end of Muhammed's prophetic mission and a sign that the hour (of his death) had come. The last verse of *Surah Nasri* (110:3) reads thus: "So glorify the Praises of your Lord, and ask His Forgiveness," is suggestive of the fact that the Prophet's mission, which God had earlier informed him of, was almost or already over. He was, therefore, requested to round off his mission first, by glorifying, praising and thanking God for a victorious mission and second, by seeking forgiveness for any of his shortcomings in the course of his earthly mission.

How does a Muslim identify the specific mission he is bequeathed? Shaykh Agboola contends that one must be very circumspect. First, earthly missions are discovered from childhood, nurtured by family members and developed by social 'outsiders' such as teachers, and mentors among others. This individual develops his talents and abilities further formally or informally, after which he finds fulfilment in his chosen mission. Second, a child may not necessarily be influenced by family or social outsiders but rather discovers his innate abilities himself and goes on to pursue them. For instance, a very good footballer does not need to be told of his footballing skills because he knows within himself that he is skilful and would secure a footballing contract if he does not relent on that goal or pursuit. The same could be said of an armed robber who learns the ropes and then turns out to become a serial killer who is never known or caught. What this means, in essence, is that there is a strong sign in the mind that often pushes the individual to pursue a mission that gives him ultimate satisfaction. Failure to show circumspection in this regard is likely to lead one into a futile mission and the possibility of a disenchanting existence.

Shaykh Agboola's sermon further shows that apart from being circumspect, the individual must go in search of knowledge. For example, all of God's Messengers and the Prophets are specially gifted with the knowledge to assist them in conveying their mission effectively. In the case of Prophets Adam and Yusuf (A.S.W), *Surah Al-Baqarah* (2:31-33) and *Surah Yusuf* (12:22), respectively, mentions this. Similarly, every creation must exhibit a level of knowledge against the task before it to make its mission less strenuous. Knowledge, in this case, is divided into two. First is to be aware of the existence of God, and second, to understand the reasons and purpose of man's existence on earth. This notwithstanding, what is the fate of the individual who pursues a different mission altogether but later discovers his true mission? The sermon did not in any way state categorically a practical response. Yet, the possibility of accomplishing such a mission in its finality, as posited by the learned scholar, remains very slim and is not likely to succeed in the long run.

Conclusion

It is important to state here that while God has commanded His creation to worship Him alone, which is the purpose of man's existence in the first place, this decision could be exercised willingly or otherwise. And so, whether man chooses to worship God or not, as Surah Adh-Dhariyat (51:57 and 59) affirms, He demands nothing of man's provision other than for mankind to worship Him alone, the consequences of which are clear at the moment this obligation is disobeyed. A hadith narration says: "O Son of Adam! Busy yourself in worshipping Me, and I will fill your chest with riches and dissipate your meekness. Otherwise, I will fill your chest with distracting affairs and will not do away with your meekness" (Cited in Abdul-Rahman, 2012).

Shaykh Agboola's sermon represents an intervention into the question of man's mission on earth and the roles he is meant to play in it. In Islam, the worship of God is an undeniable obligation. Then again, as a creation given free will, man is in no way obliged to comply with this obligation. As earlier stated, man is indeed a creation bound to go astray. As Surah Abasa (80:17) reveals, man is an ungrateful creation. His ungrateful actions are linked to his persistent inability to welcome admonition. Worship and belief in God as part of man's major earthly mission are anchored on God's love for His creature, whom He vows to shield from *Iblīs*'s whisperings and evil machinations (See Surah Al Nahl (16:99-100). & Surah An-Nisa [4:122]). While several issues raised in Shaykh Agboola's sermon remain debatable and to some degree open to further scrutiny, it is well assumed that man's mission on earth, worship and engagement in lawful work being two vivid examples, cannot be wished away in light of several available scriptural evidence.

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