



Multimodal analysis of Yoruba language and culture portrayal in contemporary Nigerian superhero comics: Case study of Ireti-Bidemi and Visionary

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CERTIFICATION

I certify that Akintayo Adesoji Ogunsanya (28730135) completed this research under my supervision in the Indigenous Language Media in Africa Research Entity/School of Communication, Faculty of Humanities, North-West University (Mahikeng Campus), South Africa.

Supervisor

Date

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DECLARATION

I, Akintayo Adesoji Ogunsanya, declare that this doctoral thesis entitled, **“Multimodal Analysis of Yoruba Language and Culture Portrayal in Contemporary Nigerian Superhero Comics: Case Study of Irete-Bidemi and Visionary”**, is entirely my original work and has not been submitted for a degree at any other institution. All sources cited in the thesis are acknowledged by comprehensive referencing.

Akintayo Adesoji Ogunsanya



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It is done.

Now, we are free.

DEDICATION

In loving memory of the departed:

My beloved mother:

Mrs. Olufunmilayo Olabimpe Ogunsanya (nee Aroyewun)
August 1960 to October 2021

My brother:

Oluwasegun Ogunsanya
July 1993 to January 2025

And my father:

Mr. Akinpelu Folorunsho Ogunsanya
October 1948 to September 2025

Continue to rest in peace.

It is done.

Now, we are free.

ABSTRACT

After several decades of mixed fortunes and languishing in obscurity, the Nigerian comic industry has been experiencing a phase of silent revitalisation courtesy of the remarkable inroads of indigenous digital publishers such as Comic Republic – reputed as Africa’s largest publisher of superhero comics – are making locally and internationally. Comic Republic’s main objective is to portray and promote African heritage through superhero stories. This study investigated the multimodal portrayal of Yoruba language and culture in text and pictures in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* superhero comics published by Comic Republic. Designed as a qualitative enquiry, the study’s objectives were achieved using relational content analysis of both comics, interviews with the two creators of both comics, and focus group discussion with six audience drawn from a Facebook Comic Republic fan page. Findings revealed that the creators’ motivated sign user agency, determined by their different personal experiences and interests in relation to the Yoruba culture, influenced their respective portrayals. Consequently, *Visionary* exemplified traditional Yoruba identity using Yoruba language for conversations as well as pronounced presence of Yoruba religious, cosmological, and mythological beliefs while *Ireti-Bidemi* mirrored contemporary realities in which Yoruba language and culture conforms to urban trends and external influences. Whereas the discussants’ views align with this finding, majority of them preferred the conversational style in *Ireti-Bidemi* in which English language with urban Yoruba language dominated, because they lacked the proficiency to read and/or write their indigenous Yoruba mother tongue. Institutional intentionality failure (government, Yoruba sociocultural institutions, and the comic industry itself) is the major obstacle constraining culture portrayal through superhero comics. The institutional intentionality factor manifests through disregard for cultural values, culture promotion and protection, and lack of support for and investment in the comic industry as well as the absence of ecosystem mindset and quality control standards in the comic industry. These emerged as the major factors that must be remedied to enhance Yoruba culture and language portrayal through superhero comics.

Key words: Yoruba, Language, Culture, Culture Industry, Multimodal, Comic, Superhero.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which Yoruba language and culture are portrayed through the multimodal interaction between words and images in two superhero comics published by Comic Republic, a Nigerian digital comic publisher whose organisational objective is to portray and promote African heritage through superhero comics. This introductory chapter justifies the study by discussing the context of its foundation, establishes the boundaries it covered, presents the research questions and objectives illuminated through findings, and clarifies the usefulness of the study. The chapter also introduces a range of crucial subjects such as culture, Yoruba culture and language, culture industry, comic industry, superhero concept, fandom, and multimodality, all of which are reserved for further discourse in subsequent chapters.

1.1 Background

In Nigeria, mass communication is understood as a field comprising print (mainly newspapers and magazines) and broadcast stations providing information, education, and entertainment to audiences. This is true elsewhere in the world too. However, unlike in the Global North and despite having requisite and sufficient resources, Nigeria has not developed a media form that has significant socio-cultural and economic benefits: comics.

The trio of Eisner, Kunzle, and McCloud are renowned for important seminal works in the field of comic scholarship. Eisner (1985) notably defines comics simply as sequential art. For an illustration to qualify as comics four essential features must subsist. According to Kunzle (1973), the features are:

- 1) A sequence of still images,
- 2) Preponderance of image over text,
- 3) The medium of presentation must be mass media, and
- 4) The sequential order of images must convey a story that is both moral and topical.

Kunzle's list of essential features of comics prevents the potential for mis-categorisation and incorrect use of the term 'comics' to describe related works of art. For instance, whereas animations are obvious sequential productions, that their rendition is for motion and speech prevents their misnomer as comics because they are not still images. In contrast, cartoons have closer relationship with comics yet, by the logic of 'sequence', any single frame rendition of a caricature or drawing is not a comic. As such, regardless that a title such as *Mr. and Mrs.* appear in Vanguard newspaper, it does not qualify as comics because it is single frame art; however, *Terror Muda* in the same newspaper is a comic strip because it narrates a story in sequence. The image in figure 1.1 depicts this difference.

Figure 1.1: Sequential and non-sequential art in mass media



Source: *Terror Muda* (Vanguard, 2024), *Mr. and Mrs.* (Thefacelessman, 2021).

It is correct to describe comics as sequential art because they deploy images, text, and other graphical elements in a sequential manner to create meaningful imagery. What is missing in the Eisner definition is a statement of purpose, a loophole McCloud (1993, p. 3) fixed by including that the purpose of comics is to, "...convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer." This statement of purpose and Kunzle's idea of comics telling a moral and topical story correlate because they associate social impact and consequence to the medium. The association of impact and consequence to comics embodies the entire range of cultural, social, political, economic, and other complex exotic subjects for which the medium is applied and around

which critical scholarly discourses and controversial audience conversations revolve. Consequently, whereas the notion was that comics are juvenile fantasies suited for kids' entertainment, the medium's transformation into adult interest is because it embraces complex and nuanced subjects of consequence (Baetens & Frey, 2015). Regarding control of the global comic industry, again, Baetens and Frey identified the three leading comic traditions in the world as:

1. The European *bande dessinée* genre (which produced titles such as *Tintin*, *The Smurfs*, and *Asterix*),
2. The American universes-heroes-villain style (from which titles like *Superman*, *Spiderman*, and *X-Men* emerged), and
3. Japanese manga (out of which came *Dragon Ball* and *Naruto*).

Societies from which these dominant comic models originated have all exploited – and continue to exploit – comic media for the diffusion and marketing of their cultures and ideologies. For instance, superhero comics are instrumental in spreading language conventions (slangs and word coinage) and mythology (for example, *Asgard*, *Ragnarok*, and *Valhalla* associated with Norse mythology) of a Western origin to other cultures. In addition, mythological characters have gained global traction through superhero comics. For example, *Thor*, the Norse god of thunder, is a well-known figure in Nigeria and, compared to *Sango*, his counterpart in Yoruba mythology, enjoys favourable perception as a benevolent supernatural hero in line with the persona framed in comics. Likewise, the idea of superheroes dressed in body fitting costumes and having superhuman abilities (such as *Superman*, *Wonder Woman*, and *Wolverine*) and so-called woke or liberal gender ideologies have all been infused into comic stories, exported to the Global South and become popular with audiences in Nigeria.

When the relationship between media and society is considered, the significance of the foregoing becomes apparent. Perhaps the most critical functions of the mass media are socialisation and transmission of cultural heritage as suggested by Lasswell (1948). It is through socialisation and transmission of cultural heritage that societies retain and perpetuate the legacies of their culture and ideology. In addition to ensuring internal continuity, they also perform the external function

of portrayal and diffusion such that ideology and culture previously indigenous to or originating from one society moves gradually, in an osmotic manner, into new audience spheres until it takes root. Comics disseminated from the Global North perform this diffusion function.

Consider that language, an aspect of culture, is an important factor in comics given that the world has one hundred and ninety-five countries comprising over eight billion peoples and many ethnicities. The language barrier that would have limited global readership and popularity of comics from the dominant traditions is resolved by resorting to English language owing to its global currency; with the language spoken by 1.5 billion people worldwide (Statista, 2023). Apart from the functional purpose that English language serves in comics, the hegemonic influence of the culture industry is also crucial.

Pioneer critical theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer (1944/2002) and Benjamin (1936/2005) argued that the essence of creative outputs in the age of capitalism and mass production is lost, replaced by standardisation – referring to the business model that favours rehashing and repeating similar ideas and tropes in creative works, which are distributed to mass audiences – for profits. In other words, capitalist fueled mass production and distribution of media content through mass media to audiences is culturally debasing. A Marxist undertone is evident in this position emphasising the connection between mass media production, distribution, and consumption, on the one hand, and capitalism and mass culture, on the other hand. This perspective implies that creative outputs such as superhero comics, regardless of origin and content, must conform to industry standards that gives profitable return on investment.

Language wise, English is a standardised tool instrumental for the achievement of this capitalist objective. This is because English is the language of the vast and powerful Hollywood infrastructure through which the United States controls significant portions of the global media and entertainment (movies, music, and comics) industry. For this reason and the fact that it has been the leading producer and influencer of popular culture since the twentieth century, Horkheimer and Adorno (1944/2002) christened the Hollywood behemoth ‘culture industry.’ Indeed, American publishers DC and Marvel, each having its own universe or constellation of heroes, villains and storylines, dominate the superhero comic culture industry. As such, titles such as *Batman*, *Shazam*, *Aquaman*, *The Flash*, *Green Lantern*, and *Justice League* (DC) and *Black*

Widow, Black Panther, Incredible Hulk, Captain America, Iron Man and Avengers (Marvel) are ubiquitous superhero franchises around the world.

Although published in English language for strategic commercial and diffusion reasons, it would be inaccurate to say comics are exclusively published in English, or even French or Japanese, all being the languages of the leading societies that dominate the global comic scene. On the contrary, popular and successful comics have been translated into other languages that are widely spoken around the world. Figure 1.2 shows *bande dessinée* and American superhero comics in language versions other than their original language of publication.

Figure 1.2: *Bande dessinée* and American superhero comics in other language versions.



Afrikaans version of *Asterix and The Big Fight* (Hoogeboom & Selles, 2024); Arabic version of *The Superior Spider-Man* (Amazon, 2024).

In the examples in figure 1.2, the nuanced relationship between hegemonic objectives of the culture industry and multimodal depictions in comics is worth emphasising. In many cases where images in a comic depict or suggest a particular social context and setting, for example European, but the same comic appears in many other languages, the objective is more than mere entertainment. Using the case of *Asterix*, published in eighty-nine (89) languages and thirty-one (31) dialects (Hoogeboom & Selles, 2024), the objective of comics from the dominant models translated into

other languages is both commercial advancement of the comic as well as increased global visibility for the cultural context and diffusion of its worldviews. Considering that there are six thousand five hundred languages in the world (WorldData, 2024), it is reasonable to suggest that the languages in which popular comics are adapted still derive status and recognition benefits even if their culture is not portrayed through image in the story. In respect of image representation or the depiction of Yoruba culture in comics with global footprints, the output is almost non-existent. In fact, no internationally reputable comics is translated into Yoruba language; yet, Yoruba is spoken by about forty million people mainly in Nigeria, to a lesser degree in Benin and Togo, and including sizeable groups of speakers in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States due to immigration (WorldData, 2024).

It is logical to argue that since Yoruba culture and language are distinctively Nigerian, the country itself should lead the production of comics portraying the culture. In reality, Nigeria does have a history in comic production. *Powerman*, a superhero character who protects the country from dinosaurs, robots, and other threats, is the first Nigerian oriented comic published in 1975 (Pijnaker, 2018a). However, the title is not indigenous Nigerian comic because of its creation background narrated, again, by Pijnaker (2018a, para. 10) as follows:

This comic was an initiative from Pikin Press (or Pican Publications), a Nigerian advertising agency [...] In the 1970s, most of the comics sold on the Nigerian market were reprints of British comics [...] Pikin Press wanted to develop a comic with black superheroes and heroines both to fill this gap in the market and because they thought it would be a good way to promote literacy in Nigeria. The executives of Pikin Press approached the British agency Bardon Press Features, who commissioned comic book artists Dave Gibbons and Brian Bollard for the job. Pikin Press did not approach any African artists, because they assumed that African comic book artists did not yet exist and would only emerge once comics became popular in Africa.

Few Nigerians remember *Powerman* but many do remember and are fond of Wale Adenuga's popular [now discontinued] *Ikebe Super*, a monthly, hilarious, slice-of-life, comic magazine which

appeared first in 1976 (Shehu, 2022). The main characters in *Ikebe Super* were the bald-headed and womanising *Papa Ajasco*, his wife *Mama Ajasco*, *Boy Alinco* the playboy and opportunist, *Miss Pepeiyé* characterised as a streetwise, promiscuous, and gold-digging woman, and the illiterate *Pa James*. In terms of wholly comic content in form of a book or magazine as is the practice among the dominant global comic models, *Ikebe Super* is Nigeria's first indigenous comic. In view of the foregoing, the indigenous Nigerian comic industry is at least forty-nine (49) years old as of 2025. Nevertheless, the comic industry in Nigeria could be described as outlier media since titles are neither consistent in output because they vanish almost immediately as they start publishing nor are they mainstream as radio, newspaper, and magazine. Consequently, the country has not produced any comic character with sustained and remarkable impact in the country, Africa, and the world.

However, from the start of the twenty-first century, African comic creators and publishers have had a spark of cultural (re)awakening, leading to an Afrocentric motivation of portraying 'African-ness' through superhero comics popularised by the United States of America. Nigerian comic creators and publishers have also embraced the portrayal of Nigerian cultures in comic stories. One of such Nigerian comic publishers is Comic Republic, a digital comic publisher reputed as Africa's largest publisher of superhero comics. On its website, the comic publisher declares its organisational objective thus:

Comic Republic produces digital comic books [...] that showcase the African heritage, culture, and history through quality art and stories nationwide. Over the years, we have etched a lasting imprint in the history of African art and illustrations capturing eyes from all over the world as the thirst for African content remains insatiable. Our stories inspire heroes as icons and encourages inclusion and diversity in comic books (Comic Republic, 2024. About Us).

Given the foregoing African culture portrayal and promotion agenda of the publisher, the purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which Yoruba language and culture are portrayed through the multimodal interaction of words and images in two Yoruba themed superhero comics of Comic Republic. The superhero comics of reference for this purpose are *Ireti-Bidemi*, the story of a crime-fighting female university student whose powers come from a legendary Yoruba female warrior,

and *Visionary*, the story of a young hero who bears ancestral powers and must stop ravaging gods from wreaking havoc in present day Nigeria in continuation of a rekindled mythological war. Ironically, despite their objective to showcase African heritage, cultures and history, neither *Ireti-Bidemi* nor *Visionary* is published in Yoruba language alone. In fact, none of the publisher's other titles is published in a wholly Nigerian language. In the case of the selected comics, the conversational style combines both English and Yoruba languages.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's comic industry history with superheroes started in 1975 with *Powerman*. Therefore, Comic Republic has not introduced anything new with its collection of superheroes. The new dimension introduced by the publisher is that, unlike *Powerman*, its superheroes are wholly of Nigerian origin, created exclusively by Nigerians, and they portray Nigerian cultures. Whereas the comic publisher attempts to portray or showcase African cultural heritage to audiences in the continent and around the world, it is necessary to examine the framing, presentation, and achievement of this objective as executed through words and pictures using the American superhero model.

The American superhero model is an established genre with characteristic attributes as well as fan expectation and culture. Attribute wise, superhuman abilities such as heat vision, X-ray vision, energy absorption, shape-shifting, water control, indestructibility, size alteration, super speed, web-slinging, as well as body-fitting costumes [with or without capes] are properties distinctively associated with the superhero fantasy culture. Storytelling wise, superhero comics have a definite style typically about a hero or coalition of heroes preventing some crime or catastrophe mostly involving United States or a fictional city representing the country, for example Metropolis and Gotham City in *Superman* and *Batman* respectively. Comic Republic enters this defined landscape offering Yoruba themed superhero comics with a cultural narrative that runs contrary to genre norms, which have been deliberately cultivated for almost a century. Comic Republic's Yoruba themed comics are published in English language although the publisher bends this linguistic convention by infusing Yoruba language in its stories. This strategy creates a dual textual

multimodality in which Yoruba and English interact. Given the foregoing context, the multimodal use of and interaction between Yoruba, English, and images to portray Yoruba identity in the Yoruba themed *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* superhero comics require scrutiny.

In addition to this principal quest, the preponderance of comic scholarship is from the Global North. Naturally, critical discourses and analyses of comic narratives have centered on experiences from societies that comprise that geographic description. Perhaps it is because the Nigerian comic industry has lacked consistency and variety that little to no research exists in respect of this critical field. As a result, there is scant academic research on [superhero] comics from Nigeria. Presently, there is an increase in Nigerian comic publishers and they include indigenous cultural properties in their stories. Importantly, some of the indigenous publishers are getting the attention of Hollywood and their comics are undergoing gradual cross-fertilisation into other media forms for international reach. Comic Republic, for example, has penned a production deal with Hollywood companies to adapt its stories into films (Jackson, 2021; Roxborough, 2021; J. Martins, personal communication, October 30, 2023). These suggest the comic industry in Nigeria is on a new trajectory. Unlike their progenitors such as *Ikebe Super*, the fact that the current crop of indigenous Nigerian comic publishers are gaining international recognition means the status quo regarding scholarly interrogation must change.

By examining the use of Yoruba language and culture in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*, this study addresses the notion of cultural identity portrayal and the extent to which it is achieved multimodally through the interaction of words and images using the American superhero model.

1.3 Research Objectives

Since Comic Republic made showcasing African culture an agenda for their stories, the broad objective of this research is to examine the extent to which Yoruba language and culture are portrayed in their superhero comics in words and images. Four specific objectives derive from this generic aim, these are:

1. Interrogate the various ways in which Yoruba language and culture are portrayed in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*,

2. Assess the factors that influence the comic creators (writer and/or artist) in portraying Yoruba identity in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*,
3. Clarify the challenges confronting comic creators in the publication and management of superhero comics intended for portrayal of African cultures, and
4. Examine audience interpretation of *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* as portrayals of Yoruba identity.

1.4 Research Questions

Broadly, this study sought answers to the question: to what extent is Yoruba language and culture portrayed in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* in both words and images? Four sub-questions derive from the general questions. The questions are:

1. In what ways are Yoruba language and culture portrayed in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*?
2. What are the factors that influenced the comic creators' (writer and/or artist) decisions to portray Yoruba identity the way they did in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*?
3. What challenges do comic creators encounter in publication and management of superhero comics intended for portraying African cultures?
4. What factors inform how audience interpret *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* as portrayals of Yoruba identity?

1.5 Comic Republic

Formed in 2013 by Jide Martin, the entrepreneur describes the motivation behind Comic Republic in an interview thus:

There was a moral vacuum in the present generation, a lack of icons. People stopped believing in the institutions of old. To fill this gap, I went back to my childhood and I remembered that I used to reflect on what

Superman or *Batman* would do when I wanted to make decisions; so I decided to use the same medium to give this and the next generation something to believe in.

I don't think Africa and Africans are well represented in mainstream western comics. That is why we are here...to give us a place in this genre and to show the world what Africans are capable of (Barnett, 2016, para. 7-8).

The view expressed by the initiator of Comic Republic in the statement above is significant for three reasons: it emphasises the popularity of the superhero genre, demonstrates the fascination the superhero narrative style has in the mind of creators and audiences, and indicates a clear agenda of portraying African cultures through the superhero genre. Currently, Comic Republic has over thirty superhero comic titles in which Nigeria and reference to different Nigerian cultures are centerpiece of the stories in line with its creed to promote the African identity to the world. Several themes in its stories indicate Comic Republic conforms to the superhero narrative style. For instance, its *Guardian Prime* character is a Nigerian nationalist, beacon of justice, and messianic protector of the human race; in appearance and characterisation, *Guardian Prime* is similar to DC's *Superman*. In addition, while DC has its own alliance of evil-fighting superheroes in *Justice League* and Marvel in *Avengers*, Comic Republic has *Vanguard Union* for same purpose. Invasions and attacks on earth by extraterrestrial creatures, gods, and human criminal masterminds is a present theme in the comics and, finally, Comic Republic's superheroes are also typically clad in body fitting costumes, possess spectacular superhuman abilities, and some have their identities kept secret from public knowledge.

Nevertheless, a distinctive feature of the Comic Republic universe is the framing of many of its superhero stories as conflicts and collaborations between mythology, the supernatural, and mysticism from mainly ancient Nigerian civilisations and the science and technology of the contemporary twenty-first century society. With this technique for instance, Comic Republic introduced 'science witchcraft' as a worldview in its superhero narrative. Thus, the science witchcraft notion is a noteworthy concept through which Comic Republic incorporates African mysticism into its superhero stories to various extents. For both *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*, which this study focuses on, this same technique underlies the narration – both modern technology and

African mysticism collide. Both comics are available on the Comic Republic application or on the web. While most digital comics in Nigeria have a paywall, thus requiring payment to access their content, Comic Republic titles are freely available operating without paywall restriction or subscription fee as of the time this study became actionable.

1.6 Synopsis of *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*

Ireti-Bidemi is the story of Bidemi Ogunde, a young female vigilante superhero who is an archaeology undergraduate at the Ibadan University. An otherwise ordinary person, Bidemi acquired superpowers when she visited a museum and accidentally recited an ancient incantation engraved on the stone corpse of *Ireti Moremi*, a fearsome and powerful mythical queen warrior of ancient Ile-Ife born of the gods and man. Hence, *Ireti-Bidemi* is a portmanteau name comprising the first name of the mythical warrior and that of her twenty-first century avatar. When she transforms into her superhero form, Bidemi appears in a mystical body armour and metallic shoulder cover as her ancestor did. As is usually the case with most superheroes, Bidemi's superhero identity is a secret even to her family.

Bidemi typically acts as a masked vigilante fighting criminals off the streets of Ibadan until a series of curious events befell her middle-class family. Her mother is abducted during a bank robbery, an assassin impersonating her attacks her detective father and kills his colleague thereby setting both father and daughter on a collision course, and her adopted elder sibling turns out to be a wanted international arms dealer and terrorist who has acquired superpowers that he puts to criminal enterprise. Her bid to resolve these situations will lead to confrontations with formidable villains foremost of which is *Ajalu*, the mastermind who orchestrated the mishaps. Michael Olasubomi Balogun is the creator of *Ireti-Bidemi* and, as of the time this study received formal approval, had seven issues.

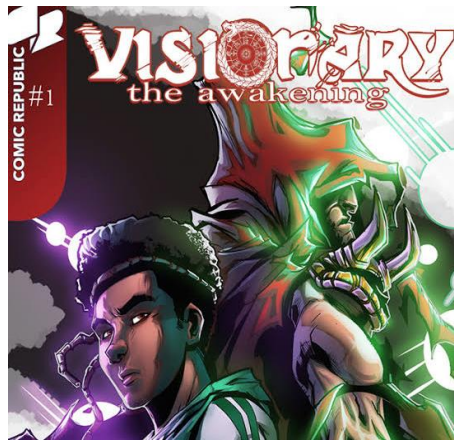
Figure 1.3: Cover image of Ireti-Bidemi



Source: Comic Republic (2024)

Visionary is the story of in fighting among rogue gods of so-called first race in a covetous crave for powers of the creator and, against divine design, interference in the affairs of humans. Danmole Ajanaku, a teenage secondary school boy descended from the lineage of *Osossi*, the Yoruba god of hunting and forests, is the *Visionary*, an individual of immense power appointed to prevent errant and warring gods from corrupting the creator's cosmic plan, especially the prevention of their interference in human affairs. Additionally, Danmole is the avatar of *Osossi*, who has several millennia old feud with *Sango*, the god of lightning, thunder, fire, and storm. As both the *Visionary* and avatar of the god hunter, Danmole is a contradiction having the responsibility to prevent perversion of the creator's plan and simultaneously embodying the powers and presence of a god whose mission contravenes the divine design.

Figure 1.4: Cover image of Visionary



Source: Comic Republic (2024)

Following the murder of his father and elder sister, Danmole, his grandmother, and younger sister visits the mystical seat of the Ifa cult in Iganle to seek assistance of the custodian regarding a cure for an ailment afflicting Danmole's sister. However, a rogue Ifa priest, who has also laid a snare for the visitors and attempted to kill them, has murdered the custodian of Ifa. As a battle of spells ensued at Iganle on earth, gods in a spiritual dimension prime a forbidden intervention in the affairs of men. Osossi is blackmailed by a female god for allowing Danmole's father and sister get killed and watching as the remainder of his family is about to be destroyed. Osossi then possess the *Visionary's* body and unleashes his fury. In a connected development elsewhere, a specialised military unit called Magical Entity Takedown Squad (METS) went on a mission to summon and kill *Sango*. The METS team were deceived to believe that *Sango* would be easy prey like the previous gods they destroyed. In the end, the deity annihilated them despite their spell-backed firepower. Thereafter, *Sango* roams earth once again and heads to Iganle to confront Osossi, his old foe who has taken control of the *Visionary's* body. A destructive battle of gods, spirits, and beasts that puts humanity in jeopardy follows thereafter. Akintoba Kalejaye is the creator of *Visionary* and the story had five issues as of when this study received formal approval.

1.7 Anatomy of Comics

Writing a comic involves ideation, arranging image in specific sequence to convey narration, and inserting dialogues and other types of textual elements (Eisner, 1985). This is a simplified summation of the basic stages in the process of producing a comic. This summation is sufficient since artistic technicalities is not the concern of this research. As a finished product made available for readers' consumption, the ability of readers to comprehend the multimodal narrative of a comic is the function of narrative devices that work in unity to unravel plots of a story, along with nuanced ideas and situations portrayed in the narrative, in a meaningful manner. This section explains those narrative devices as they appear in all comics because they are terminologies that copiously appear in later chapters of this research. Although the meaning and function of each device is fixed and unaltered in this research, the application context of icons in this work is briefly expatiated. Devices one to three explained hereafter are according to Saraceni (2003):

- 1) Panels (or Frames): panels are the building blocks of comic narrative. A panel is a self-contained block depicting an action in either or both words and images. By arrangement, the layout of panels is according to artistic choice but every comic page contains a number of panels.
- 2) Text container (balloons or boxes): the use of text containers is to contain speech (speech balloons) or thoughts (thought balloons) of characters. Consequently, text containers enclose words expressed by characters in conversations or soliloquies. It has a tail or pointer that help readers identify speeches or thoughts belonging to different characters in a conversation or soliloquy. By shape, text container is usually oval but can be rectangular or any other shape according to artistic choice, by location it appears within a panel.
- 3) Captions: the use of captions is to provide additional information, explanation, or context to help the reader connect developments between panels, for example, time lapse. It can be located either within a panel or outside it either at the bottom or above or anywhere else according to artistic choice.
- 4) Icons: In semiotics, icons are a type of sign used to signify a concept by close resemblance to the signified. In comics, pictorial contents or images are icons used to represent ideas,

people, locations, or things, relying on already existing, real-life associations (McCloud, 1993). In this study therefore, icons are the varieties of images used to portray the Yoruba culture through depictions a variety of artefacts.

1.8 Scope of the Study

This study is a multimodal social semiotic inquiry concerned with the portrayal of Yoruba culture and language through the combination of English Language, Yoruba Language, and images in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* superhero comics published by Comic Republic. By adopting a social semiotic paradigm, the scope is limited to how these multimodal elements are used to create socially specific and distinctive meanings which accentuate Yoruba identity or otherwise. The study is not an historical account of Yoruba history nor is it a linguistic exercise focusing on rules of grammar of the language. As such, the study is not concerned with the accuracy of histories and mythologies incorporated in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*. As is the norm with superhero stories and other fictional works that infuse real occurrences into their narrative but modify them, the creative license of creators in this regard is recognised and not contested. What suffices in the context of this study is portrayal, which signifies a socially specific meaning and identification in respect of Yoruba language and culture.

1.9 Significance of the Study

At a time when comic media and digital superhero comics claiming African cultural portrayal are gaining traction in Nigeria and comic studies and research in the country is almost non-existent, this study channels intellectual attention to the medium and its products for three main reasons. First is establishing comic media as a distinct and valid field of academic study and research in Nigeria while the second and third are stimulating interest in comics as cultural items capable of representing and transmitting values and ideologies internally and externally even as it serves a commercial objective.

1.10 Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted with regard to standard research protocol of ethical compliance. Being the property of a corporate organisation, access and permission to use both comic titles for academic purpose was an important first step. On this, the researcher held several initial meetings with the comic publisher and the creators of the superhero comics of interest during which the researcher explained the purpose and boundaries of the research. Consequently, the researcher secured access and written consent from the creators. Anonymity is a critical aspect of research and although the researcher pursued this ethical principle, both creators indicated that they preferred the use of their real name in the research.

For audiences that participated in focus group discussion, the researcher sought and received consent in writing. The identity of all participants in this category is entirely anonymous in the research. For both categories of participants, confidentiality is observed especially in respect of information indicated as off record by the comic creators.

Regarding data protection, record of the interviews and focus group discussions is in electronic form, secured with password protection, and kept in a flash disc to prevent unauthorised access.

1.11 Structure of Chapters

This research has six chapters namely:

1. Chapter One: focusing on general background of the study including the rationale behind it and objectives it will achieve,
2. Chapter Two: dealing with review of relevant conceptual and empirical research on important subjects that are relevant to the study,
3. Chapter Three: where the theoretical frameworks adopted for the study is discussed,
4. Chapter Four: focusing on the methodology and processes through which data was collected and analysed,

5. Chapter Five: this penultimate chapter is where findings of the study were presented and discussed. It also contains a model which illustrates the nature of the phenomenon that was studied, and
6. Chapter Six: this last part deals with summary, conclusion, and recommendations of the study. It also contains researcher reflectivity.

1.12 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter centered on providing a general background to and the rationale for the study as well as the exact structure of the entire research. In the following chapter, the discussion focuses on the nature of culture followed by the culture industry and superhero comics in respect to the Yoruba culture and language and portrayals in culture industry products.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The main concepts examined in this chapter are culture, Yoruba culture and language, culture industry, superhero comics and fandom with concluding discourses on portrayal of the Yoruba culture in the culture industry and the nuanced dynamics relating to interpretation of portrayals.

The chapter begins from a generic view with a brief examination of the nature of culture, an exercise performed to lay bare the complexity of the concept in terms of meaning, what it does to people, and its extensions to more complicated subjects of domination and hegemony. A definition and framework for the purpose of this study emerge from this exercise and thereafter applied. The discourse proceeds to the origin histories of the Yoruba people, their culture, and language with copious attention given to the influences of internal and external factors on the current state of Yoruba culture and language. In this portion of the discourse and extending to later sections, institutional intentionality emerged as a concept and subsequently used for the contextual analysis of Yoruba culture and its entanglements with the complicated subjects previously mentioned in the preceding generic section on culture. Next is a treatment of the culture industry both as political economic institution and as an agent that modifies, creates, entrenches, and diffuses cultures and ideologies through creative portrayals in culture products. The history of the global comic industry and superhero comic genre as an ideology of the powerful American culture industry, its global footholds and consequent audience culture and fandom it has cultivated, including, finally, dimensions of its manifestations in Nigeria as per its application to portrayal of Yoruba language and culture completes the chapter.

2.2 Overview of Culture: Meaning, Nature, Features

The elementary understanding of culture is that it is the comprehensive ways of life of a people. Beyond the elementary, culture is a complex and fluid terminology amenable to different ideas, making the concept ambiguous, problematic, and lacking a precise definition (Spencer-Oatey, 2012; Johnson, 2013; Boyer, 2015; Tooby, 2015; Wason, 2017). For instance, that the literature survey of Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) found over one hundred and sixty-four (164) definitional conceptualisations of culture starting from the late nineteenth century buttresses the consensus that fixing a definite meaning to culture can be a conundrum. More recently, Hofstede (2011) and Storey (2015) add an illuminating perspective to the definition fluidity of culture. They note that culture has broad usage in various disciplines including in anthropology where it is used in reference to ethnic and tribal groups; for nations in sociology, politics, and management; for organisations in sociology and management and, finally, to describe the intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic growth as is usually done in respect of Western European civilisation. The denominator here is, of course, to distinguish one thing from the other with reference to a set of peculiar traits. In addition to the professional usage, culture is also generally ubiquitous among laymen and loosely used in a variety of circumstances to, also, essentially refer to ways of doing or acting that distinguishes ‘self’ from the ‘other’. The salient point in this seemingly perpetual state of impreciseness regarding meaning specificity of culture is that whether explicitly or impliedly, the typical use of the concept is in a localised sense with reference to a specific domain of meaning that eliminates other possible interpretations. Thus, context is key. In other words, demarcating the domain of interest is necessary to clarify the context culture is applied in order to contemplate the extent of its influence accordingly.

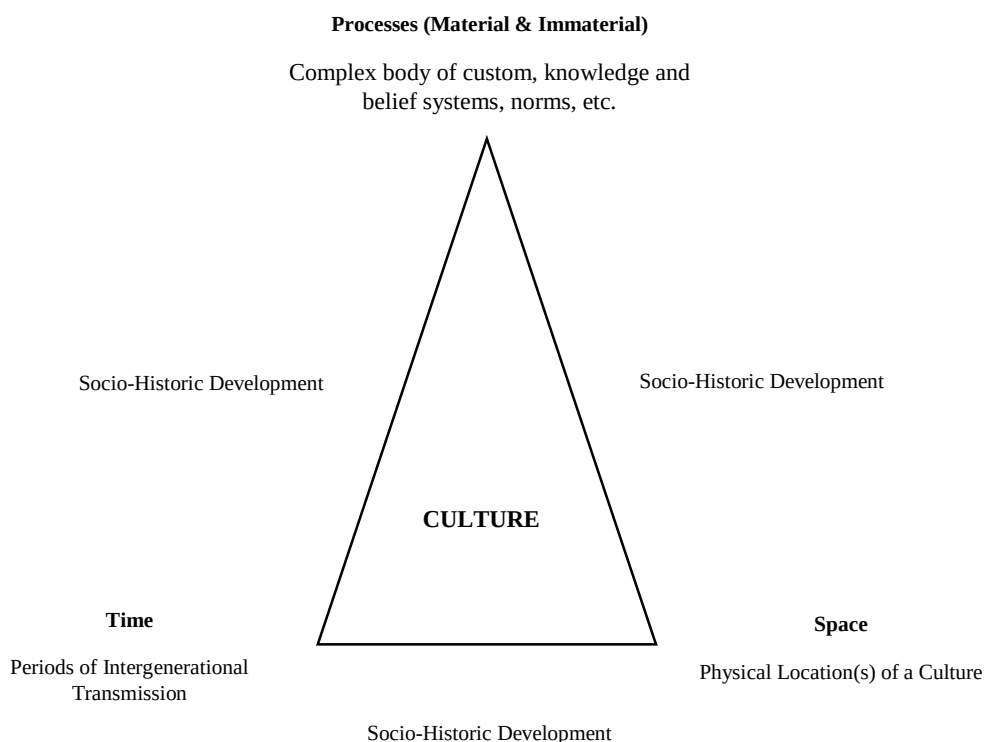
With the foregoing in mind, the interest of this study is in culture as it relate to social groups’ unique identity and ways of doing on account of which they construct notions of ‘self’ and simultaneously become the ‘other’. On this perspective, scholars concur that culture is a complex body of habit-forming components such as customs, traditions, laws, knowledge and belief systems (Tylor, 1871; Hofstede et al. 2010; Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Societies consciously cultivate their culture over the course of their socio-historic development as a means of experiencing and interpreting the world and generating behaviour in response (Boas, 1901, 1962; Benedict, 1934;

Spradley, 1979; Wason, 2017). Based on the critical formative components it encompasses, culture is, in effect, the soul of every society and it imposes conditioning effects on both collective social and individual actions. In both its tangible and intangible forms, generations of a society find and express their identity in culture as a mark of their distinctive socio-historical heritage, whether it is in the variety of their cuisine, language, dress mode, art, religion, festivals, or legacies of their civilisation. For instance, to this day, the Oyo people of South West Nigeria, one of the many groups of the Yoruba nation, proudly reminisce the exploits and glory days of the ancient Oyo Empire as a Yoruba cultural and military bastion until its eventual destruction in 1837. To keep the legacy of that important period in the Yoruba sociocultural history alive in the globalised, heavily mediated, and technologically deterministic twenty-first century, the culture industry depicts that long-gone era primarily through movies. Certain noteworthy features are implicit in the cited example, features that derive organically from the nature of culture itself: that of changing times, permanence of space or location occupied by a people, and practices of a people. In other words, the transmission and socialisation of cultural heritage, as Lasswell (1948) puts it, is, first, intergenerational and, second, a dynamic process for the fact that changes and developments in the world means that the experiences and reality of each generation is never the same. Culture itself is characteristically dynamic, subject to changes by actions of its own members and external influences as well (Spencer-Oatey, 2012; Barber, 2018).

The foregoing forms the background for a time-space-processes framework through which the meaning and implications of culture is considered. In line with the foregoing and in respect of this study specifically, culture is defined as a complex and socio-historically constructed system of self-construction through which a people identify with, experience, and interpret their environment and the world. Figure 2.1 is a diagrammatic illustration of this definition in context of the time-space-processes framework. That said, both the definition and framework are reducible to one main idea: that culture is unavoidably relative and inseparable from the historical development of a people occupying defined geographic location(s) and its legacy sustained through intergenerational transfer and socialisation. In context of this study, *space* correspond to defined places or locations where the Yoruba people inhabit particularly in Nigeria, *time* correspond to the state of the Yoruba culture through socio-historical periods and *processes* correspond to the body of material and immaterial cultural features peculiar to the Yoruba people. This definitional logic

applies to the development of culture of other peoples’ of the world as well. In the P-model (people, place, and practice) of culture for example, Causadias (2020) similarly emphasised that culture does not exist outside of the spatio-temporal-processes interaction, as did Geertz (1973).

Figure 2.1: Time-Space-Processes culture definition framework



Hofstede et al. (2010) liken culture to a computer software that mentally programmes people to think and act in specific patterns. This way, every individual, consciously or otherwise, carry emblems of their cultural identity wherever they go, usually discernable in their conduct. Among Nigerians for example, accent is usually a reliable giveaway of one’s ethnicity when speaking English; in many cases, Nigerians can detect if a fellow citizen is Yoruba, Igbo, or Hausa/Fulani by how their original language characteristically conditions their English. In the same vein Spaniards, French, and Scots produce telltale signs of their cultural origin when they speak

English. Beyond speech, studies have confirmed that culture imposes an indelible conditioning effect on its members that is noticeable in their behaviour and worldviews. A notable work in this regard is that of Hofstede (1980) who discovered that employees from over fifty (50) countries working for IBM tend to act in ways and display traits consistent with the cultural values and perspectives of their countries of origin. Further investigations by Hofstede and Bond (1988), Minkov (2007), and Hofstede et al. (2010) expanded and corroborated that discovery and resulted in the six cultural dimensions through which people reflect their cultural orientation regardless of where they are. With the foregoing in mind, both the definition and framework adopted for this study is further simplified thus:

1. Culture is an adaptation mechanism which helps a people master their environment, construct their reality, and relate to the world on that basis,
2. By virtue of its adaptation function, culture regularise people and influence the formation of stable patterns of dispositions and actions, and,
3. Finally, culture distinguishes one people (self) from another (other) because of regularisation.

From a simplistic view, knowing the foregoing fact about the nature of culture should promote tolerance and harmony between peoples of the world and eliminate culture-fueled antagonisms and controversies, because, after all, every society is a product of its culture. However, the opposite is true in a complicated world. Every society prides its culture and, as Merz (2021) notes, reifies it as though it were a living creature capable of doing and feeling, and essentialise or define their identity through it. Cultural essentialism assume that culture has a cohesive and core essence that enables every society produce exact replicas of its members (Gjerde, 2004). Continuing on the cultural reification and essentialism practice, Eriksen and Nielsen (2013) and Schwartz (2018) note that societies have been able to bind their members, foster a sense of oneness, and emphasise the unique differences that distinguishes them from the other through both strategies. In this situation, societies entering a contested space of cultural rivalry, either inadvertently or deliberately, seem inevitable in reality. A prominent theatre that cultural contestations between societies have been happening is the media and culture industry, for the obvious fact that they prepare, frame, portray,

and present histories, events, and peoples in specific ways that certain cultural constituencies may find unpleasant, inaccurate, or discriminatory. Bennis and Ghourdou (2024) observe that this is often the case because the media and culture industry typically consolidate dominant elitist ideology and stereotypes, or engineer consent for sectional views.

Culture industry products such as comics, animations, movies, video and computer games, and music are breeding grounds through which audiences and fans engage in bitter cultural rivalries and discontent. Consider, for example, that in the 2022 *Rings of Power* movie, a prequel to the popular *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Black and Asian actors featured in Tolkien's fictional Middle Earth races. That creative decision made because of cultural inclusion led to an intense backlash with Caucasian audiences and fans arguing that the so-called people of colour did not exist in Middle Earth and that the author did not remotely imply their presence (see Romano, 2022). The media and culture industry are, therefore, critical avenues for the narration and portrayal of a society's body of culture, making them essential for continuing a cultural legacy in terms of intergenerational transmission and socialisation. It is in this context that the culture industry becomes a site of cultural contestation, advocacy, and protection in which societies attempt to control how their culture is framed and presented, the purpose being to ensure that their socio-historic experiences and unique worldviews are not devalued, diluted, misrepresented, or ignored.

The core of the contentious relationship between culture and its framings and renditions in media and culture industry products has far more complex roots. Ortner (2005) reaffirms that culture is a device for internal cohesion of a people but importantly adds that it is also a potent ideological tool used as part of the processes of domination. That is, in the bid to exert control and dominate other people, part of the machinery deployed by hegemonies is cultural imposition in which, either by sheer coercion or by subtle invasion, they suppress cultural systems of their target societies and replace it with their own worldviews. As such, Ortner (2016) submits that culture is presently dominantly used in a Marxist sense across the globe meaning the concept in its traditional sense of ways of life is subsumed into and overshadowed by power and political motivations for hegemonic purpose (Rodesth, 2018; Schwartz, 2018; Causadias, 2020; Bennis & Ghourdou, 2024; Ofoegbu, 2024). In the final analysis, the culture concept extends beyond simple matters of how a people live; it is mired in controversial issues bothering on the installation of hegemonic ideology

and objectives. This hegemonic objective that culture can be weaponised to achieve has, perhaps, not been more pronounced than in contemporary times where societies engage in ideological and cultural struggles in an attempt to outdo each other and become the leading, if not universal, standard.

To be certain, no society is immune from infiltration and domination of its precious cultural system by determined actors, meaning approaching matters of culture with levity might be naïve and social suicide. Considering the web of complex entanglements linked to culture, keen and purposeful monitoring of the status of one's culture, particularly regarding the nuanced ways of its framing, presentation, and portrayal in the media is non-negotiable. As a major ethnic group whose cultural tentacles extend beyond the shores of Nigeria, the Yoruba culture is a subject of culture industry framing and portrayal mostly by the local culture industry for the consumption of local audiences. That the Yoruba culture and language have appeared in superhero comics with appreciable international traction mean that an analysis of the culture within the nuances and dynamics of the culture industry portrayal is in order.

2.3 Time-Space-Processes Framework: Contentious Origins of the Yoruba People

The time-space-processes framework logically implies that every culturally organised people must have a history. The clearer and precise the history is, the more the people can affirm the origin of their identity and foster unity among their people. In the case of the Yoruba however, historians contend that the history of their origin is one of the most contentious in Africa (Johnson, 1921; Akintoye, 2010; Agai, 2015). A brief overview of the contention follows.

The putative oral history of Yoruba origin is the *Oduduwa* mythology. Depicted as a divine messenger who, as commanded by *Olodumare* or Almighty creator, *Oduduwa* descended from heaven and arrived at Ile-Ife in present day Osun State, Nigeria where he created humanity. Based on this belief, the Yoruba people venerate Ile-Ife as the cradle of creation. From this divine intervention angle, oral history maintains that the Yoruba people are descendants of *Oduduwa*. The alternative origin story is the migration theory. In the migration theory, the view is that the Yoruba people probably originated from the Near East, which, according to Johnson (1921), may

be Egypt or Arabia and possibly Mecca. Believed to be the son of a king in Mecca which legend calls *Lamurudu*, the belief is that *Oduduwa* was an idolater who rejected Islam and fled his home with a group of like-minded individuals to escape persecution. The dissidents subsequently arrived in Africa where they settled in Ile-Ife thus becoming the ancestor of the Yoruba. However, Biobaku (1958) categorises the *Oduduwa*-led exodus as the second wave of immigrants who fled the East because of religious persecution and arrived in areas of present-day Nigeria to form what would be the Yoruba, and credits the first wave of migration to King Kisra. There is yet a third origin myth which claims that present day Yoruba land was already inhabited as of the time the dissidents from the East arrived and *Oduduwa* met *Agboniregun* or *Orunmila* there (see Atanda, 1980). Indeed, Aribidesi and Falola (2019) provide information from scholars to the effect that some Yoruba groups were long-term inhabitants of their land and never migrated from anywhere.

Associating the origin of West African peoples to the East is an old tradition that is not unique to the Yoruba (Agai, 2021). Yet, despite occupying a central role in the socio-historic emergence and development of the Yoruba people, historians continue to debate both the exact location of the “East” and the identity of *Oduduwa* including the veracity of his migration story in relation to the formation of the Yoruba ethnicity. Johnson (1921), for example, contends that the Yoruba are neither from Arabia nor Mecca because the typically meticulous Arabian historians did not record the supposed significant *Oduduwa* incidents claiming, on the contrary, that, “...the ancestors of the Yorubas, hailing from Upper Egypt, were either Coptic Christians, or at any rate that they had some knowledge of Christianity (p. 7).” Similarly, Okediji et al. (2024) drew connections between cultural practices of the Yoruba and biblical Jews as further evidence of historical contact with the “East”. However, Aribidesi and Falola (2019) observe that scholars have argued that linguistic evidence undermines the *Oduduwa* migration episode from either Mecca or Egypt because Yoruba language bears genetic traits of the Kwa-language family meaning there must have been a prehistoric relationship between present day Yoruba people and other kindred groups. As such, some scholars are of the opinion that the Yoruba originated locally within West Africa or Nigeria (Lange, 2011; Agai, 2016; Aribidesi & Falola, 2019). Nonetheless, opinion on the subject still differ and some continue to gravitate towards the East or Arabia as origin of the Yoruba for which Agai (2021) provides copious evidence.

Furthermore on the association of the Yoruba people to the East, and by extension the tendency of most African peoples to do same, Agai (2021) suggests that it might be the result of a felt-need to trace and establish religious kinship with the Middle East where all the three Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – originated. With the benefit of religious fervor and socio-political tensions between the peoples and government of Nigeria in contemporary history, Agai’s suggestion is not without merit. For instance, in their protracted agitation for secession from Nigeria, the Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria have claimed that they are originally from Israel, one of the “Lost Ten Tribes of Israel”, and look to that country for recognition and assistance on the logic that they are fellow, albeit Black, Jews enduring persecution in Nigeria. In another example, the Ijebu of Ogun State have claimed to be Jewish, a claim the paramount Ijebu ruler made in a 2006 interview (Oluwalana, 2016). Although Lang (2011) is categorical that the Jewish descent or origin is unlikely regarding the Yoruba people generally, Olasupo (2014) argues to the contrary and present evidence that seem to suggest both the Igbo and Ijebu claims are true; figure 2.2 is a collection of images regarding Igbo and Ijebu Jewry claims. For the Ijebu people, Olasupo cites the supposed tomb cum shrine of Queen Sheba (called *Bilikisu Sungbo* by the Ijebu) in the Oke-Eri area of Ogun State where she is thought to have settled and intermarried with the locals. Arguing further, Olasupo submits that Islamic and European-Christian colonialism of Africa were instrumental to the erasure of Jewry in West Africa. Responding to Olasupo, Afsai (2014) refuted all evidences the former advanced for Igbo and Ijebu Jewry, stating that:

1. Queen Sheba, despite her relationship with King Solomon, is irrelevant in conferring Jewry on the Ijebu because she was not Jew and the conferment of Jewry on an Ethiopian tribe was on verification that they were an authentic Lost Ten Tribes of Israel originally from the tribe of Dan, and
2. The claim Olasupo advanced that the Israeli government sent an official expedition to investigate the Jewish roots of the Igbos was a misconception arising from a publicised private documentary filmed by Israelis on Igbos’ claim of Jewish ancestry and, therefore, not true.

Afsai, consequently, weakens the intellectual underpinnings of Olasupo’s argument. Nevertheless, the fascination with origin narratives from the East persists.

Figure 2.2: Images highlighting 'Jewish' origins in Nigeria



From left to right: newspaper article on life of 'Jewish' Nigerians, a textbook page for children in Ogun State focusing on Bilikisu Sungbo (Queen Sheba) and supposed tomb cum shrine of Bilikisu Sungbo in Oke-Eri, Ogun State. Source: Olasupo (2014).

Perhaps it is partly because of these counter argumentations that Agai (2021) continued on a cautionary note warning that the trend of West African peoples attempting to create origin links to the East diminishes the value of Blacks. The scholar pinned the caution on the biblical myth of Ham, whose black-skinned descendants are cursed to a lifetime of servitude, and its historic use to perpetuate and rationalise the subjugation of the Black race. To demonstrate the weakness of the Arabian origin story of the Yoruba people, Agai (2021) argues that Blacks living in Arabia at the time were mostly slaves who had no significant social status thus casting doubts on the possibility of a black-skinned king and prince as *Lamurudu* and *Oduduwa* were respectively thought to be. Agai added that the perception of African slaves in Arabia was as inferior people and, therefore, they could not have rejected the religion of their master. In conclusion, Agai (2021, p. 7) submits that:

The Yorubas followed their traditional religions before the 14th century when Islam allegedly arrived in Yorubaland. There is no record that the *ridda* war in Arabia had a direct and immediate impact on the Yorubas in Yorubaland around the 7th and 9th centuries when the alleged apostates began to leave Mecca and Arabia. The debatable identity, personality and character of Oduduwa in connection with Islam and idolatry suggest that Oduduwa might not have promoted Islam and by implication, nor does he promote the theory of an Arab origin of the Yorubas in Yorubaland.

Their contentious origin story notwithstanding, Akinkunmi (2003) and Asiwaju (1983) listed the following eleven indices as features that regularises and identifies the Yoruba people:

1. Acknowledgement of *Oduduwa* as their ancestor,
2. Veneration of Ile-Ife as their origin and spiritual home,
3. Possession of personal panegyrics or *oriki* for self-adulation,
4. Traditionally agrarian,
5. Use monarchical system of government in which the Oba or king is supreme,
6. Are a highly urbanised people,
7. Belief in *Ifa* and *Ogun* deities including the concept of *Ori* or destiny,
8. Dress differently from non-Yoruba people,
9. Greeting begin with “*e ku*”, “*a ku*”, or “*okun o*”,
10. Practice Yoruba specific norms and customs such as prostration or kneeling to greet elders,
and
11. Habitation in geographically adjoining land.

The Yoruba people are a prominent African ethnicity whose culture and practices are sufficiently documented. Whether in Nigeria where they are majorly resident or in other parts of West Africa such as Togo, Gambia, Sierra Leone, and Republic of Benin, or far ashore in places such as Brazil, Haiti, and Cuba where they are referred to as *Anago* or *Lucumi* and the United States (Biobaku, 1958; Oti & Ayeni, 2013), the Yoruba cultural legacy is documented. In South West Nigeria where they live mainly, the Yoruba previously existed as groups of sub-ethnicities such as Ijebu, Ijesha, Oyo, Owo, Egba, Ekiti, and Egbado while remaining steadfast to their ancestral origin from and veneration of Ile-Ife (Akintoye, 2010; Agai, 2015). However, post-colonialism and exigencies of modern statehood, the Yoruba sub-ethnicities have been consolidated into six states in modern Nigeria namely Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti, Osun, and Lagos even as presence of the Yoruba nation extends to central Nigeria in Kwara and Kogi States.

In the foregoing brief discourse of the origin of the Yoruba people, the imprecise origin story, eventual emergence and stabilisation of a people in what is now recognised as their ancestral home, their spread to other locations in the world, and their life in modern times are broad, socio-historic

timelines. The Yoruba culture and its components have developed within the different timelines. To continue the regularising cultural features of the Yoruba people provided by Akinkunmi (2003) and Asiwaju (1983), the Yoruba culture has distinguishing traditional cultural practices which cuts across food, religion, music and arts, dressing and fashion, and important philosophical norms of conduct (Oti & Ayeni, 2013; Olanipekun, 2017; Aladesanmi, 2019; Adekola, 2021), which have been transmitted through many generations. Table 2.1 contain these traditional cultural practices while, following immediately, figure 2.3 is a collection of images showing some Yoruba culture markers.

Table 2.1 Aspects of traditional Yoruba cultural practices

Cultural Aspect	Description	Modern Changes	References
Language	Yoruba is a tonal language. Words must be written with and be pronounced in the appropriate tone for them to convey correct meaning either in speech or in writing. Three major tones are used in Yoruba language namely high (/), mid (-), and low (\); these tones are placed on the alphabets to create exact meanings, aid clear understanding, and foster communication.	Ability to correctly write and speak Yoruba language is declining in modern times with schools and homes preferring to communicate with children in English.	Adekola (2021); Oti & Ayeni (2013); Pulleyblank (2004)
<i>Omoluabi</i>	The virtuous character emphasising integrity, honesty, diligence, and respect recommended as models of individual behaviour and social conduct. The ideal end of Yoruba cultural education is to make members of the ethnicity <i>Omoluabi</i> .	Western culture, globalisation, moral decadence, unbridled monetisation of social acts and relations and corruption have significantly diminished the <i>Omoluabi</i> concept among the Yoruba.	Banjo & Afolaranmi (2023); Adejumo (2021); Oladiji et al., (2020); Olanipekun (2017); Oti & Ayeni (2013)

Religion	The system of indigenous cosmology, faith, spiritualism, beliefs, rituals, ceremonies, and worship of a deity or deities. The Yoruba faith is <i>Aborisha</i> or a devotee of <i>Orisha</i>. <i>Orisha</i> are divinities or gods, numbering at least 401 in Yoruba culture, who are intermediaries between <i>Olodumare</i> and humans. Some Yoruba <i>Orishas</i> are <i>Ogun</i> (god of iron, war, and craftsmanship), <i>Sango</i> (god of lightning and thunder), <i>Esu</i> (deity of crossroads, doorways, and gates serving as intercessor between humanity and spiritual realm), <i>Ifa</i> (god of divination and wisdom), and <i>Yemoja</i> (goddess of ocean and nurturer of all living things). Although the Yoruba worship a pantheon of deities, they all believe in and defer to <i>Olodumare</i> or the supreme creator.	Colonialism, Christianity and Islam have diminished the <i>Aborisha</i> religious practice which is predominantly now seen as idolatry.	Adekola (2021); Ehineni (2019); Oti & Ayeni (2013); Odejobi (2014); Biobaku (1958)
Dressing	Traditional Yoruba attire are typically hand-woven cotton fabric in various colours and types, for various occasions and social status. The <i>Aso-Oke</i> – and its other forms namely <i>Alaari</i>, <i>Saanyan</i>, and <i>Etu</i> – is a prominent Yoruba attire. Others are <i>Ofi</i>, <i>Aran</i>, and <i>Adire</i> (tie and die attire). Yoruba clothes are also gender specific with men wearing <i>Kembe</i>, <i>Agbada</i>, <i>Dangogo</i>, <i>Dansiki</i>, <i>Buba</i>, and <i>Sokoto</i> with caps such as <i>Abeti-Aja</i> (dog-eared cap) while women wear <i>Iro</i>, <i>Buba</i>, and <i>Gele</i> (head gear).	Foreign clothes such as jeans, suit, shirt, and others have displaced Yoruba traditional attire, reducing them from been worn daily to outfits for specific days or occasions.	Adejumo (2021); Oti & Ayeni (2013)

Hairstyle	Apart from beautification, traditional hairstyles among Yoruba women communicate messages such as marital and social status and religious initiation and membership. For example, married women's hairstyle runs from the forehead to the back or either side to the centre while a maiden's hairstyle runs from the right side of the head to the left ear. <i>Suku</i> (buns or bundle), <i>Panumo</i> (keep quiet), <i>Ipako-Elede</i> (back of pig's head), <i>Ojompeti</i> (rain soaked ears) are some traditional Yoruba hairstyle.	Foreign hairstyles, chemical treatment and colouring of hair, synthetic hair and wigs, and so-called Brazilian natural hair are now the preferred choice.	Oti & Ayeni (2013)
Tribal marks	Incisions of various patterns, length, thickness, and number made on the cheeks for the purpose of beautification and identifying the tribal group a Yoruba person belongs to; <i>Pele</i> and <i>Gombo</i> are examples of tribal marks.	The practice is outlawed owing to health implications and abuses.	Oyo Affairs (2020); Orié (2011); Oti & Ayeni (2013)
Greetings	Greeting is considered a mark of <i>Omoluabi</i> in Yoruba land. Hence greeting etiquette signifies good manners and sophistication. Apart from regular daily greetings according to time of day, the Yoruba have greetings for specific seasons, jobs, occasions, and events.	Western civilisation and values have almost completely erased knowledge and practice of Yoruba greeting etiquette especially among younger generations.	Oti & Ayeni (2013)

Naming of children	Naming of newborns among the Yoruba is distinctively representative, done in consideration of specific circumstances and context surrounding childbirth. Some contexts which are considered in naming children are: 1. Experiences of the parents or situation of the family such as breakthrough (for example, the name <i>Iremide</i> meaning my breakthrough has arrived), travel (for which a name such as <i>Abidemi</i> meaning one born while I was away, might be given), and abundance (<i>Olamilekan</i> meaning my wealth has increased is a probable name). 2. Birth circumstance relating to manner of birth (position, posture, or notable physical features of the child during birth for which a name such as <i>Dada</i> might be given if the child has locked hairs at delivery) and period of birth (festive period or war time for example, <i>Abiodun</i> meaning one born during a festive period). 3. Order of birth especially relating to twins and their siblings in which the names <i>Taiye/Taiwo</i> and <i>Kehinde</i> meaning one who tastes the world and one who comes last respectively	Foreign names from the West as well as religious (Christian and Islamic) names currently co-exist with traditional Yoruba names. Ehineni, (2019)

are given to twin children while *Idowu*, *Alaba*, and *Idogbe* are given to children in order of their birth after the twins.

4. Religion to which a child is born into or if a child is believed to be the generous endowment of a deity after difficulty conceiving. For example, *Ogun* and *Ifa* prefixes in a name indicates affiliation to the deity a family worships.
5. Profession of the family or lineage. For example, *Akin*, *Ayan*, and *Awo* prefixes in a name respectively indicates the bearer is from a clan of warriors, professional drummers, or priests.
6. Death situation specifically when a woman consistently suffers infant mortality, called *Abiku* (meaning born to die) in Yoruba culture. Names such as *Kuforiji* and *Malomo* (meaning death pardon this one and do not go again respectively) thought to prevent infant death are given to *abiku* children.

Music	The Yoruba nation has a variety of traditional drums made from tanned animal skin. A few of the drum types are <i>Gangan</i> (talking drum) <i>Bembe</i>, <i>Dundun</i>, And <i>Bata</i>. Modernisation and colonisation, while making it easier for traditional Yoruba drums to be produced in bulk from a variety of materials and removing the previous monopoly of professional drummer lineage in using drums, have erased the beauty and sacredness associated with drums and drumming.	Aladesanmi (2019)

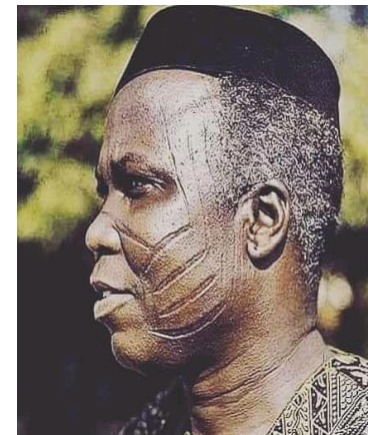
Figure 2.3: Collection of Yoruba cultural markers



Gangan (Talking drum) a type of Yoruba traditional drum. Source: Aladesanmi (2019)



Celebration in a Yoruba village. Source: Akintoye (2010)



Yoruba man with tribal marks. Source: Oyo Affairs (2020)

2.3.1 Time-Space-Processes Framework: State of the Yoruba Culture in Present Times

The expression “Yoruba culture” requires analytic clarification for it may suggest that the body of practices of the ethnicity has remained pristine and stable, immune to modifying influences from both within and externally and unaffected by traces of decline. In reality, the contrary is true. Consequently, the term “Yoruba culture” as used in this study is best understood as a bridge that negotiate connections between a retrospective era and contemporary times. The subject is the body of unique identification properties of the Yoruba people and their continuation in contemporary times up to their manifestation and portrayal in culture industry products such as *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* African superhero comics.

Over the years, much has been written about the history and culture of the Yoruba people but little is understood about the extent of changes to their customs and practices including the roles individuals and organised structures are playing in fostering those changes (Asaaju, 2018). What Asaaju means is that beyond the broad factors which both scholars and other Yoruba people have consistently pinpointed as corrupting traditional Yoruba culture and threatening its continuation, the strategic methods, perhaps seemingly culturally harmless, being used to perpetuate changes have not received equal strategic dissection. The consequence is that the true extent of the changes to the culture is masked. Therefore, there is shortage of strategic appreciation and understanding concerning the changes that are reshaping the Yoruba culture landscape. By extension, it logically means that there is equally lack of strategic and sustained initiatives to reclaim ownership of critical aspects of the culture that are being eroded.

On the one hand, scholars have identified factors that have exerted and continue to exert undesirable changes on the Yoruba culture. Factors such as colonialism (Oti & Ayeni, 2013; Adekola, 2021; Tshabangu & Salawu, 2021; Adejumo, 2023), foreign religions mainly Christianity and Islam (Olasupo, 2013; Odejobi, 2014; Adekola, 2021; Olasupo et al., 2024) including foreign content on the media (Adeniyi & Bello, 2006; Adelowo, 2020) as well as technology and globalisation (Familugba, 2012; Akinlade et al., 2021) are external factors mentioned in this regard. For example, Akintoye (2010) laments that in the European Christian mission schools situated in Nigeria, learners were taught to renounce their culture, customs, indigenous names, clothing, and language as an important step to attaining the status of sophisticated people.

On the other hand, there is the question of institutional intentionality in terms of forestalling the effects of the influences of these factors on Yoruba cultural heritage, especially in an age where globalisation and culture industry reign supreme. These influences are intentional and targeted mechanisms that have steadily infiltrated the Yoruba cultural system and methodically planted the hegemony of external cultures and ideologies. The extent to which the change agents have been allowed to infiltrate and engineer large-scale alterations to the body of practices that constitute Yoruba culture is also a matter of intentionality. In this regard, the degree to which responses – whether it is strategic, robust, and sustained, or lukewarm, uncoordinated, and inconsistent, or merely nonchalant – of the Yoruba people and their internal structures and institutions address the subject of changes to their culture is paramount. Culture is characteristically dynamic, changing over time due to both internal and external influences. Therefore, the argument is not for a perpetually rigid cultural outlook. Instead, the type of changes in question concerns the traditional features of the Yoruba culture and the extent of modifications degrading, diminishing, or devaluing influences have enacted.

2.3.1.1 Institutional Intentionality and Culture Preservation

Akinlade et al. (2021) coined the term “American-Yorubaism” to describe the proliferation and large-scale adoption of American practices by the Yoruba people. From this Yoruba society-wide perspective, the implication is that institutional intentionality in Yoruba land falters in taking proactive measures that protects the culture from succumbing to external influences. This suggests weakness of Yoruba institutional intentionality. In reality, there are observable situations that lend credence to the suggestion. For instance, the Ooni of Ife, custodian of Ile-Ife, the spiritual nerve of the Yoruba people, was strongly criticised on X (formerly Twitter) in July of 2024 for appearing in a new golden carriage with image busts that looked like Greco-Roman gods neglecting the four hundred and one pantheon of deities in Yoruba land. Considering that the monarch is an important cultural and spiritual institution for the Yoruba people, the outcry that followed this seemingly innocuous action is understandable. The act is equivalent to the Europeanisation of Yoruba culture from the peak of Yoruba traditional institution, an action that may be construed as granting liberty

for Yoruba people to reject their culture and embrace Western ideals. Figure 2.4 is the image of the contentious golden carriage.

Figure 2.4: Image of the golden carriage of Ooni of Ife with image busts of Greco-Roman like gods



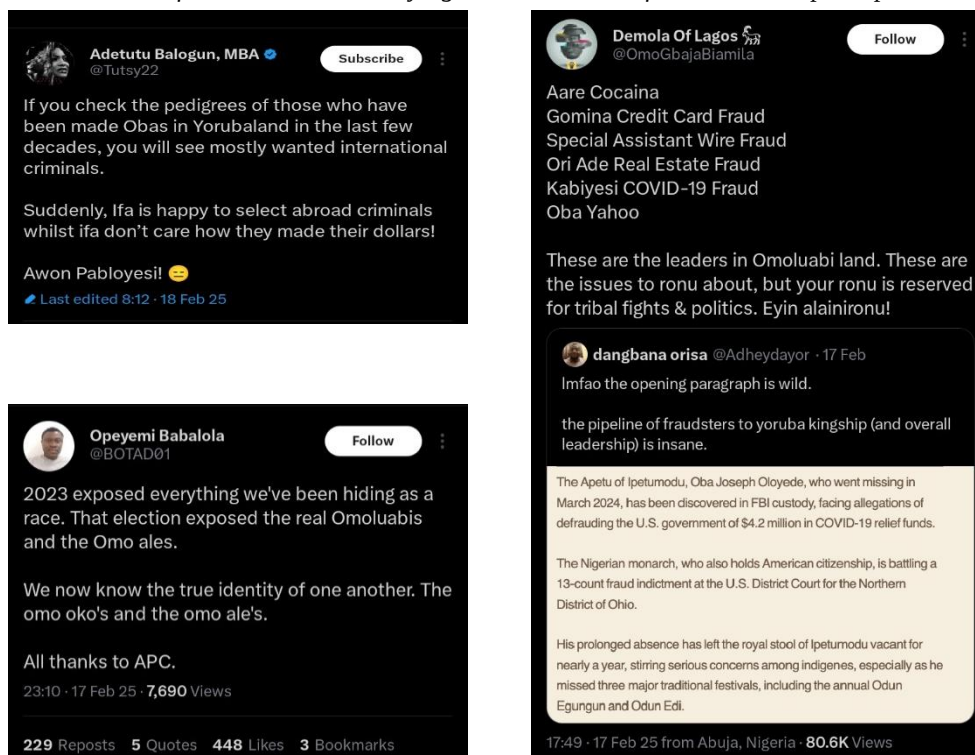
Source: Kabiyesitv (2024)

Institutional intentionality transcends seemingly mundane matters of cultural performance and the appropriateness of artefacts. It significantly embodies the immaterial core of the Yoruba culture. In this regard, the *Omoluabi* concept (see table 2.1) requires further attention. As the behavioural cornerstone of members of the Yoruba culture, the *Omoluabi* principle mandates virtuous character for the Yoruba people regardless of their social standing, gender, or age. From childhood to old age, individuals are taught to imbibe virtues such as integrity, honesty, diligence, and respect for parents and elders. The *Omoluabi* principle is not mere recommendations members of the Yoruba nation are at liberty to accept or reject; it is a compulsory and binding cultural model of behaviour and social conduct, a critical component through which the Yoruba people essentialise the uniqueness of their culture. The ideal end of the Yoruba cultural upbringing is, thus, to make every member of the ethnicity an *Omoluabi*. Individuals who violate this principle earn repudiation of their community. Indeed, repudiation, avoidance, or even stigmatisation are typical consequences of operating outside the boundaries of cultural essentialism (Merz, 2021). However, recent developments regarding the *Omoluabi* precept points to its corruption, if not abandonment. The situation paints a case of institutional decay, one in which supposed role models for younger

generations have compromised their integrity thereby creating an avenue for the prevalence of vices among the Yoruba people.

Being that X is a foremost social medium Nigerians use to discuss matters of countrywide consequence, culture and cultural practices are part of the prominent subjects of discourse. Examples abound of Yoruba people, as shown in figure 2.5 below, lamenting the wanton disregard of *Omoluabi* values, first, by Yoruba individuals of high social standing (traditional rulers, chiefs, politicians, celebrities, corporate executives etc.) and, second and inevitably, many regular Yoruba people.

Figure 2.5: Screenshots of Yoruba X users decrying the desecration of the *Omoluabi* principle



Source: X (2025).

To further complicate the situation, the Yoruba culture generally and *Omoluabi* ethos specifically have become enmeshed in vitriolic political identity antagonisms since the 2023 general elections that was partly characterised by mutual and varying degrees of bitter ethnic and fanatical political

campaign which, in the case of the Yoruba precisely, some persons orchestrated in favour of their preferred Yoruba candidates. Since then the discussion about Yoruba culture on X has distinctively been one of animosity, ridicule, and disgust. For example, the popular Yoruba rallying creed “*Yoruba ronu*” ordinarily meaning, “Yoruba, apply your mind intelligently” is currently a subject of scorn for its application to fanatical political purposes even as the derisive “*yorubastard*” terminology emerged in reference to supposed dubious and unreliable character of Yoruba people. To be accurate, it is necessary to add an important layer of context to the political extensions of the current demeaning discourse around the Yoruba culture. Nyamnjoh (2015) observes that the primary allegiance of Africans is first to their ethnic or cultural group while the country or state as a colonial creation receives secondary consideration in terms of loyalty. Indeed, ethnic loyalty runs deep in Nigeria and ethnic hostilities have historically characterised relations between the more than two-hundred and fifty (250) ethnic nationalities amalgamated to form the Nigerian state by the British colonialists in 1914. Salawu (2013) fittingly describes Nigeria has been in perpetual ethnic crises, and further adds that each ethnicity keeps a record of perceived and real injustices against it choosing to selectively recall them to justify their antagonism to other ethnicities. Nigeria is, therefore, a country of mutual ethnic animosities.

Given the ethnically charged and complex statehood situation, attacks and counter-attacks based on real, imagined, or exaggerated impressions of sinister intentions or actions are regular and unrelenting features of the Nigerian polity. This foundational circumstance provides a fertile ground for the seed of cultural derision and attacks to grow once an initial action triggers the process, as the 2023 general elections did. It is probable that matters concerning the state of the Yoruba culture might have mostly remained within the Yoruba people without the political adventure it [Yoruba culture] was applied by powerful Yoruba individuals and institutions which, in the estimation of other peoples, was for the forceful installation of a political hegemony. To recall the elaboration of scholars such as Ortner (2005, 2016), Rodesth (2018), Schwartz (2018), and Causadias (2020) on culture and domination (see section 2.2), the entanglement of the Yoruba culture with politics of identity in 2023 typifies the position that culture is weaponised for political domination. Ofoegbu (2024) continues in the context of Nigeria that in the quest to establish their personal political fiefdoms and spheres of control, elite or powerful politicians incorporate cultural hegemony by using culture as a machinery to create a divide and dominate system, bringing the

cultural institution to disrepute in the process. Consider for example that case of the sacred Yoruba *Oro* deity, a male only cult, procession typically performed at night for special spiritual purposes with curfews imposed until dawn and prohibition of female movement. In what was seen as a scare tactic to prevent opposition voters from hurting the election of preferred candidates, the *Oro* was invoked in broad daylight in March of 2023 few days before and leading up to the morning of voting in the governorship election in some areas of Lagos State (see Sunday, 2023; Francis, 2023). Olasupo et al. (2024) submit that this event was a significant turning point in the politics of Nigeria, as Lagos State became the first experiment in the intersection of politics and cultural rites in ethnic enclaves. Suffice to say that in March of 2025, many X users, both Yoruba and non-Yoruba alike, derisively commemorated that event and questioned the Yoruba traditional institution why *Oro* has not been invoked in broad daylight two years post the elections. A major result of that 2023 action for the Yoruba culture is, therefore, that it exposes the complicity of Yoruba sociocultural institutional forces (such as Yoruba Council of Elders and Yoruba Council of Obas) in compromising the integrity of the Yoruba cultural values. It further buttresses the point that institutional intentionality is critical in how culture is portrayed and estimated both by members of the society and external others.

Considering the foregoing circumstance and the fact that Yoruba people have a reputation for sophistication and enlightenment, Yoruba elders and prominent institutional stakeholders looked upon as custodians of the culture and role models of *Omoluabi* have consequently earned the disdain and disregard of both Yorubas and people of other ethnicities. This is for either supporting the fanatical ethnic political narratives in shocking contrast to the virtues they were known and respected for or for remaining silent and offering no resistance to the debasement of the Yoruba culture for political reasons. Whereas there are oppositional enclaves of Yoruba individuals, some for and some against the status quo, keeping and continuing Yoruba identity is the common denominator. As the parties continue to differ and bicker on the status of the *Omoluabi* core of the Yoruba culture, the foregoing circumstances suggest that the culture is currently experiencing crisis that needs institutional intentionality to remedy. One such way to address the situation is through strategic culture industry framing and portrayal of the Yoruba culture. Yet, even the ethnic colouration and bias affects Nigeria's culture industry. For example, an external observer may believe that Nigeria's Nollywood movie sector is homogeneous when, in fact, the industry operates

on three parallel ethnic silo sub-industries namely Yoruba movie sector, Hausa movie (also called Kannywood) sector, and Igbo movie sector plus the English films that tries to paint a picture of cosmopolitanism. On a strategic level, these on-going events and context have added a redemption mission and objective to the subject of Yoruba culture portrayal in culture industry products. It may no longer suffice to show the culture strictly for entertainment purposes, institutional intentionality will be necessary to remedy the damage already done. Even among the Yoruba people, this restorative action is necessary because it would be counterproductive to assume that all Yoruba people consented to or are in support of the interconnected issues that have exposed the Yoruba culture to negative public relations.

Elsewhere in the world, institutional intentionality is the centre of the global cultural crises with some countries attempting to expand their hegemony and domination while others are taking deliberate steps to protect and promote their culture from such infiltrations. In a report on the nuances of Sino-American relationship for example, Levine (2024, p. 12) notes that:

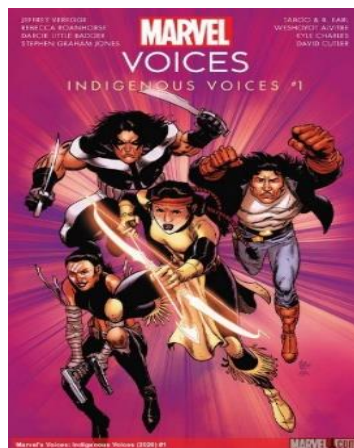
Western liberals have come to believe that their political, cultural, and moral values are “universal and eternal” and represent “the prevailing norm for all human civilization.” Liberalism thus cannot tolerate the continuation of non-liberal societies anywhere, as their very existence would delegitimize the notion that liberalism is the universal destiny toward which all humanity is allegedly progressing.

Levine continues that the West thus attempts to compromise and undermine China in order to halt its global influence while the Chinese continue to restrict foreign influence on its cultural, entertainment, and educational sectors (Shullman, 2019). Having established that institutional intentionality is part of the mix of factors responsible for the ailing state of the Yoruba culture, it necessary to examine the state of the Yoruba language specifically.

2.3.2 Yoruba Language and Signification of Indigeneity

The term ‘indigenous’ can be viewed from two dimensions: a restrictive political definition and a generic definition. From the restrictive political view the concept is applied to people who share cultural ties, history, and language and occupy specific geographic locations but have presently become a disadvantaged minority due to physical and psychological displacements or evictions from their ways of life by colonisation or formation of new state systems (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Sarivaara et al. 2013). This category of people has an endangered status because their culture is under real threat of extinction. To prevent the total disappearance of such endangered people, stakeholders may implement initiatives such as culture industry portrayal to protect, preserve, and promote their cultural legacy. It is within this context that the “indigenous comic” category among the big comic publishers specifically refers to Native Indian or other aboriginal peoples who historically inhabit North America but are now considered minority, disadvantaged, and endangered. Figure 2.6 below is the cover page of a comic portraying the culture of indigenous Americans. The Yoruba language and culture do not fit into this category of indigeneity, but they fit the second. The other way to understand ‘indigenous’ is in a generic sense referring to the gamut of cultural properties distinct to an ethnic group such as Yoruba, Fulani, Zulu, or Asante. Their cultural heritage would necessarily include material and immaterial aspects like those contained in table 2.1.

Figure 2.6: Indigenous American superhero comic



Source: Marvel (2020)

Language plays a major role in the socio-historic development of man and the many indigenous cultures of the world: it enables meaningful interaction and engagement between members of a culture thereby distinguishing modern man from animals as well as from our prehistoric ancestors. In addition, the task of intergenerational transmission and socialisation of culture rests on the development of language. Yet, language is not an in-born property, it is a socially created system of signs and symbols. The meanings associated with language constructions depend on the culture within which they are used and not intrinsic to the signs and symbols that constitute any particular language system. That means language is arbitrary and must be learned (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Copley & Jansz, 2012). The Saussurean linguistic structuralism emphasises the arbitrariness of signs and symbols in signifying a particular meaning by proposing that as a socially created tool, language formation rests on two components namely *langue*, an abstract system of rules governing the creation of signs and their uses, and *parole* or the various combination of these signs to perform individual acts of meaning. Practically, the *langue* of the Yoruba language is the unique alphabet system, other symbols, and set of grammatical rules governing their usage while the *parole* is the various combinations *langue* resources are used to communicate and create specific meanings verbally (speech and written forms). Ferdinand de Saussure's system is dyadic focusing on the relationship between signifier (a word or sign that suggests or indicates a thing) and the signified (or the idea or concept the sign refers to). Charles Pierce differs with the triad model – consisting the sign that represents or suggests a thing, the object or concept the sign suggests, and the interpretant or the meaning the sign evokes in the mind of an individual. For both language theorists however, the notion of social arbitrariness is present in the relationship between signs and symbols, the formation of language, and the associated communicative meanings different cultures associate with them. The colour red, for instance, is a symbol associated with aggression, blood, danger, and fire in the Yoruba culture and linked to the deities of iron (*Ogun*), thunder and fire (*Sango*), and storm and river (*Oya*) (Adedina & Taiwo, 2020) but the same colour signifies luck, joy, and celebration in China.

A connection that theorists have drawn between language and culture is that both have structural layers relevant to the functions they perform. Informed by this similarity, Levi-Strauss' (1963, 1976) anthropological structuralism conceives language as a means or tool to dissect, understand,

and expose underlying meanings in the framework of a culture. For Levi-Strauss, language is a social phenomenon containing hidden rules that moderates actions and unveils the less apparent thoughts of its users. Language thus become a means to understand human thoughts expressed in culture and through which cultural aspects such as religion, myths, social relations, and kinship can be analysed to uncover their patterns and purposes (Cobley & Jansz, 2012). By implication, the arbitrariness of language is not limited to creating context-bound, socially specific meanings alone, it also has analytic value and facilitates probing the entire organisation of a culture to reveal the overall character of a people, including how their culture condition their life and shape their society. Regarding Yoruba language therefore, structuralism suggests that the *langue* and *parole* of Yoruba language and the range of ways they enhance expressions of the language – for example, terminologies, incantations, praise singing, social relations, and mythologies – are useful routes to unveil and discern the fundamental nature, character, and motivations of the people. Recalling, for example, that language-wise Akinkunmi (2003) and Asiwaju (1983) essentialise Yoruba people as using “*e ku*”, structuralism posits that it is possible to detect underlying cultural patterns of social relations from the expression. However, post-structuralists depart from structuralism on the latter’s tendency to over emphasise structure and universalism at the expense of fragmented complexities of human experiences which has historically altered and led to evolution in structures (Khrais, 2013; Blommaert, 2010). Regardless of the philosophical contestations however, language is the gateway intrinsic to the life and processes of a culture.

In the growing African superhero comics of Nigerian origin, Yoruba language as a socially constructed system of *langue* and *parole* indigenous to the Yoruba people is rare but not totally absent. Given that Nigeria does not have a strong comic culture and there is a predicament of relevance and sustenance bedeviling the Yoruba culture, the use of Yoruba language in telling superhero comic stories is significant for creating psychological pride and boosting the reputation of the people, their culture, and language. In preventing the language from declining, both advantages may be helpful in reversing the tide of Yoruba language deterioration. As explained by Marmion et al. (2014, p. 8):

A language may be said to have declined or be declining when it is spoken by more limited age groups, less frequently by certain age groups, by fewer speakers, or a combination of these. A language may

also be said to be declining if speakers' proficiency levels have declined.

In the contemporary globalised world where most traditional markers of a culture such as dressing are being replaced by western styles and gradually homogenising the peoples of the world into global citizens, language remains the most observable and critical signification of culture. Yet, many indigenous languages in Africa are battling decline in the combination of forms described by Marmion et al. Tshabangu and Salawu (2021) attribute the situation to colonisation, adoption of colonial languages like English and Portuguese for official use, and the rare use of indigenous languages for communication in the media. Indeed, studies have shown that indigenous languages are in a state of rapid decline globally. In its International Decade of Indigenous Languages for 2022 – 2032 report, the United Nations (n.d.) notes that projections and calculations indicate that about fifty percent (50%) of the world's indigenous languages will be extinct or severely endangered by 2100, rising to between ninety to ninety-five percent (90% - 95%) by end of the twenty-first century. In their second National Indigenous Languages Survey of Australia, Marmion et al. (2014) found that of the two hundred and fifty (250) indigenous Australian languages, only one hundred and forty-five (145) were still been spoken in some form. Their scholars' survey further revealed that one hundred and ten (110) indigenous Australian languages had become critically endangered, and just eighteen (18) were actively spoken by all age groups and passed down to children. A similar survey of Canadian indigenous languages painted comparable case of woe; the survey report of Statistics Canada (2023) had the following key findings:

1. Between 1991 and 2023 the number of indigenous people who could speak their language proficiently in conversation declined by ten thousand, seven hundred and fifty (10,750) persons, just slightly over four percent (4%). The exact figure stood at two hundred and thirty-seven thousand, four hundred and twenty (237,420) persons,
2. Between 2021 and 2016, the number of indigenous people who learned their language from childhood either in school or at home declined to minus seven percent (-7.1%), representing fourteen thousand, one hundred and twenty (14,120) drop from one hundred and eighty-four thousand, seven hundred and ten (184,710) in 2021, and

3. Indigenous people who learned their language as second language rose to over twenty-seven percent (27.7%) in 2021 from a little over twenty-four percent (24.8%) in 2016.

The trend is not considerably different in Nigeria. Azuma (2023) laments the ironic situation in which in the over two hundred million (200,000,000) Nigerians, a significant amount speak English as their first language yet they are not sufficiently competent in their adopted language because, “many Nigerians who speak English were not taught by native speakers of the language. They were taught by people who learned the language from people who also learned the language (para. 5).” A multi-dimensional survey on Nigerian languages conducted in urban and semi-urban areas of Abuja, Lagos, Warri, Ekpoma, and Asaba by Ikoba and Jolayemi (2020) recorded some major findings. Given that the languages of interest were Yoruba, Isoko, Urhobo, Igbo, Esan, and Edo, the researchers found that:

1. All the languages fell short of a seventy percent (70%) threshold of home usage,
2. There were significant rates of inability of the respondents to use their native language. In terms of the reported lack of proficiency, the smallest group was those who did not understand their language at all followed by those who could not speak their language, then those unable to read their language and, finally, those who were unable to write their language, and
3. Yoruba and Edo languages had the highest prevalence of use in public and private settings although they were still below the seventy percent (70%) threshold.

The foregoing suggests that while indigenous languages are suffering gradual disuse and decline, the level of proficiency in English language is also, ironically, poor in Nigeria. A telltale topical social trend that seems to validate the notion that many Nigerians have poor mastery of English language is in the *Japa* syndrome (a slang meaning ‘run away’ in reference to the desperate migration agenda of many Nigerians to Europe or America) and test of English requirement by destination countries, especially for the academic and job routes. Whereas some complain that Nigerians speak English as official language by virtue of British colonisation and should be exempt

from English tests, others are quick to point out that the tests are in order because, relying on social media interactions, there is a noticeable lack of comprehension, interpretation, and use of English.

Nigeria has over five hundred native tongues (National Educational Research and Development Council [NERDC], 2022; Translators without Borders, 2024) and English language, the native tongue of the country's British colonial masters, is the adopted official mode of communication, a seemingly reasonable compromise to facilitate universal interaction. Invariably, an apparent competition exists between native tongues, such as Yoruba, and the colonial language, viewed as the language of progress and status owing to its prominence in global affairs and dominant use in both private and government organisations. According to Sesan (2013), the danger in this situation is that when this sort of contact exists between two or more languages, one becomes dominant and the other(s) declines. The declining state of indigenous languages in Nigeria owing to the dominance of English language gives credence to Sesan's submission. To remedy decline in situations where multiple languages coexist, (Stępkowska, 2019) proposes multilingualism as a viable route to rescue indigenous languages from going into extinction because it promotes the retention and territorial value of languages. As a matter of policy, multilingualism brings to the fore the subject of institutional intentionality again.

2.3.2.1 Multilingualism, Code-Mixing, and Code-Switching

Keeping institutional intentionality in mind, two views of multilingualism are worth considering. If the definition of multilingualism is as the coexistence of many native languages within the boundaries of a modern state, then Nigeria is multilingual. If multilingualism is defined in terms of the European Commission (2007, p. 6) as, "the ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage, on a regular basis, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives", then Nigeria ventures into murky waters. The current language policy developed by NERDC (2022) applies the term "multilingual" to Nigeria. However, as per deliberate state mechanisms that mandates majority of Nigerians to be literate in more than one language, Nigeria is far from being multilingual because most Nigerians speak only in their native tongue while the few who are bi-lingual become so mainly on account of personal circumstances of their life, for example living among other ethnicities. Consequently, the NERDC's qualification of Nigeria as

multilingual is accurate only insofar as the first definition of multilingualism is concerned. This means that institutional intentionality is lacking in promoting multilingualism in Nigeria. To the credit of the NERDC, the 2022 language policy stipulates that schools must teach children in their native tongue or language of immediate community for the first six years of primary education. This is in line with the recommendation of various scholars that mother tongue education is the route to the preservation of language and culture (see Salawu, 2011; Oti & Ayeni, 2013; Sesan, 2013; Familugba, 2021). Beginning from secondary school education however, English language becomes the preferred mode of instruction as, “[...] a combined use of English language and mother tongue or language of immediate community shall be encouraged accordingly... efforts shall be made to develop and produce educational materials in various Nigerian languages (NERDC, 2022, p. 18 - 19).” The NERDC language policy generally follows this tone, at times conveying determination and compulsion, at other times vacillating and expressing likelihood not certainty. As such, the policy itself appears weak and bereft of resolve, a situation buttressed by the continued production of instructional materials in English language contrary to the NERDC policy. The weakness of institutional intentionality in preserving and promoting literacy in indigenous languages or even multilingualism is one major factor enhancing the endangerment of the Yoruba language and culture. This is because the lesser the people of a culture use and are fluent in their language, the higher the level of decline that their culture and its practices will experience. Interestingly however, Ikoba and Jolayemi (2020, p. 70), based on the finding of their survey, commented thus in respect of Yoruba language literacy and proficiency:

...the Yoruba respondents exhibited the highest levels of indigenous language literacy among all the tribes surveyed (up to 85%)...This finding, placing Yoruba far above other languages in terms of indigenous language literacy may be as a result of conscious policy efforts by policy makers in Yoruba land to entrench Yoruba language literacy among students in schools. With the availability of teachers and teaching aids, together with the fact that Yoruba is the lingua franca in many Yoruba urban centres, it has been possible for people to have basic literacy in the language in a formal setting, the school. It is also a fact that, for a long time, Yoruba subject has been made compulsory for students at the secondary school level.

Without prejudice to the finding, it is not entirely accurate that Yoruba institutional intentionality has accentuated or is accentuating the acquisition of literacy in the language in schools. From an empirical angle for instance, a survey of one hundred and eighty (180) Yoruba teachers spread across sixty (60) primary schools in Osun State and the result of their instructional processes found evidence that reaffirmed the dire status of the language and failures of institutional intentionality. In that study, Sosan and Okewole (2023) revealed that the teachers claimed it was difficult to teach in Yoruba language alone because Yoruba instructional materials were insufficient compared to English materials. In addition, the teachers had insufficient knowledge of the policy regarding teaching in mother tongue, further noting that implementing the policy will be difficult in the absence of proper mechanisms in place. A prior survey also conducted in Ile-Ife, Osun State returned similar findings. In that survey which comprised students, teachers, and public servants totaling one hundred (100) respondents, Akinkurolere and Akinfenwa (2018) found that forty-nine percent (49%) of students indicate that they prefer communicating in English language. Furthermore, despite the fact that majority of the teachers have above average mastery of Yoruba language, they were more comfortable conversing in English language with their students. The researchers thus concluded that while adults from older generations use and are proficient in Yoruba language, there is a noticeable decline of the language among younger generations. From the perspective of individual members of the Yoruba culture and society, a pseudo-elitist mindset has conditioned many homes to interact with their children in English even as the language of instruction in most schools is also English. This has created a generation grossly deficient in their indigenous Yoruba mother tongue and knowledge of its cultural heritage. Consequently, while Yoruba is not a minority language, Salawu (2004) states that indigenous languages like Yoruba are not highly esteemed in Nigeria because they are considered inferior to English.

Yoruba language is also in a crisis when it comes to its use in the media and culture industry and the level of regard audience accord it. The population dynamics of Nigeria is distinctively young, consisting youths addicted to modern media technologies and entertainment content from Hollywood where English is the language of communication and, in recent times, K-drama (Korean movies) subtitled in English. Adeniyi and Bello (2006) pointed to this problem warning that given the proliferation of foreign content in the media, attitudes to Yoruba programmes vary and, “only an insignificant number...will get themselves culturally educated by reading Yoruba

literature, philosophy and religious texts (p.158).” In addition, Familugba (2021) decried the advent of modern media technologies in strengthening the extent of Western cultural imperialism and erasing the moral value of *Omoluabi*. Ironically, some Yoruba content creators are using the same modern media technologies to promote Yoruba language and culture. On social media platforms such as Facebook, X, and TikTok, some Yoruba creators regularly produce content about various aspects of Yoruba culture and language but these do not offer sufficient and strategic counter-measures to the status quo. As Mpofu and Salawu (2018) submit, the media can keep a language alive by consolidating and strengthening it through its usage for content or downgrade it by exclusion or using it inappropriately or insufficiently. The consensus regarding Yoruba language and cultural heritage is that both need visibility and revival in more strategic and sustained ways. In an age where the culture industry and media technologies have combined to exert powerful narrative framing and socialisation force, superhero comics are one way of stimulating that visibility and revival. Even then, one important detail that institutional intentionality will determine is:

1. If only Yoruba language will used for such comics,
2. If a strategic multilingual policy will be pursued such that Yoruba culture-oriented superhero comics can combine other local languages with Yoruba language in a deliberate code-mixing or switching strategy,
3. If a strategic multilingual policy will be pursued such that Yoruba culture-oriented superhero comics can combine both English and Yoruba languages in a deliberate code-mixing or switching strategy where users are not deficient in their mother tongue, or
4. If the status quo remains and Yoruba-English code-mixing and switching is generally adopted with the tacit implication that Yoruba language inclusion in the comics is a cosmetic exercise implemented to score cheap culture inclusion or portrayal points while English continues to dominate.

In the matter of the language options that comic creators may use in Yoruba themed superhero comics, Nigeria’s history of Anglophone colonisation and the country’s multi-ethnic composition are realities that make both code mixing and code switching almost unavoidable linguistic strategies. Code mixing and code switching are closely related linguistic concepts. Eastman (1992)

and Fromkin et al. (2011) describe code switching as the act of alternating between different languages across sentences while code mixing is the infusion of two different languages in the same sentence or utterance (Ekechi, 2006; Odoemenam et al., 2007). Thus, a measure of multilingualism or at the bare minimum, bilingualism is required to use either strategy. Indeed, Ayeomoni (2006) and Osoba and Osoba (2014) emphasised that both strategies are regular features of bilinguals in urban centres even as Bello (2007) and Mabule (2015) submit that both code mixing and code switching are common linguistic behaviour globally.

Keeping in mind the Nigerian context as per the lack of an intentional multilingual policy, both code mixing and code switching have strategic and basic implications for the language versatility and proficiency of a people. With a strategic multilingual policy in an ethnically diverse society like Nigeria, the implication is that people can easily resort to either code mixing or code switching with competence and guarantee of communication regardless of where the participants in the conversation are from. For example, if as a matter of multilingual policy Nigerians must acquire communicative competence in Yoruba, Ibo, and Hausa – being Nigeria’s dominant languages – the domestic reach of Yoruba themed superhero comics will certainly be extensive because, regardless of their ethnicity, the different peoples of the country will reasonably understand each other. However, the meaning of multilingualism in Nigeria largely applies to the multi-ethnic composition of the country not the language versatility of the people as a matter of policy. As such, code mixing and switching between users of the local languages in Nigeria is limited to basic and popular words. For instance, it is common for a Yoruba person to code-mix words such as *biko* (meaning ‘sorry’) and *odogwu* (meaning ‘boss’) from the Ibo language of Eastern Nigeria with Yoruba language. Beyond such simple, basic, and popular words, not much inter-indigenous language alternation happens. Owing to the foregoing, code switching between Nigerian languages is rare. On the other hand, code switching and mixing between a local language and English language is common; indeed, Adetoye (2002) affirm that code mixing and switching with English is ubiquitous among Nigerians who are competent in the language and one or more indigenous languages.

The Yoruba society is not immune to the pervasiveness of Yoruba-English language mixing and switching. Aside daily conversation, the culture industry is one prominent channel Yoruba-English

language code mixing and switching is ubiquitous. Whether in Naija hip-hop music or Yoruba dramas on the audio-visual media, Yoruba language has a colourful impact in the foregoing regard. In a study conducted by Owolola (2018), the researcher sampled the opinion of one hundred Yoruba persons on their reasons for code mixing with English. The respondents gave the following reasons for code mixing Yoruba-English languages: because of incompetence in Yoruba language, the need to show-off their ability to speak English, to conform to trends and fashion, and because of socio-technological innovations from other cultures that may not have a substitute word in Yoruba language. Owolola concluded that the Yoruba-English code mix phenomenon hampers the development of Yoruba language and advocated for “pure” Yoruba language to keep the culture alive. In a similar study, Osoba and Osoba (2014) analysed selected Yoruba plays across three generations specifically 1923 to 1959, 1960 to 1999, and 2000 to 2012 for the prevalence of code mixing. The scholars concluded that modernisation, westernisation, and globalisation accelerate Yoruba-English language code mixing. They added that it is a feature of the 2000 to 2012 generation of Yoruba playwrights who are bilinguals and adopt the method to comply with contemporary trend and portray present lived experiences. Like Owolola, Osoba and Osoba concluded by cautioning modern Yoruba playwrights to avoid letting Yoruba-English code mixing dilute the purity of the Yoruba language and harm its development.

2.4 Culture Industry: A Political Economy Perspective

A \$180 billion empire was built on Mickey Mouse. For 95 years, Disney fought to keep him locked away. They: rewrote US law twice. Spent billions on lawyers. Created a law called “The Mickey Mouse Protection Act. But on Jan 1st, 2024, they lost... (@shawnychauhan1, 2024).

Culture industry ventures into the domain of critical political economy of the media, the concern being the operation of the media, the interests shaping the direction of that operation, and objectives related to it (Fuchs, 2012). Institutions have predetermined objectives they exist to achieve and the media is an institutional tool for galvanising public support or compliance in that regard. Therefore, paying attention to and awareness of political economic forces is vital to understanding the underlying conditions in which media narratives are produced, distributed, and

consumed in a web of complex interacting sociopolitical, economic, cultural, and technological circumstances.

For Adorno and Horkheimer (1944/2002) who coined the expression culture industry, the culture or values that form the soul of a society must remain pure and pristine. Ideally, most, if not all, societies will prefer that the DNA of the culture that has regularised and sustained them as a distinct group remain intact and free from any internally or externally engineered mutation. As the cliché goes however, change is constant and, logically, culture itself is subject to changes over the course of its socio-historic development. Indeed, culture is not static. Culture, as already established, is relative and particular to a place and people. As such, the context of Adorno and Horkheimer's "culture" is Western. The authors expressed disdain for how the trio of industrialisation, capitalism, and technology have combined to pollute, dilute, and displace what they considered as authentic culture manifested in the form of arts, artistic work, and artistic appreciation. In a preceding critique, Benjamin (1936/2005) expressed worry over how mechanical (re)production had removed the aura of artistic craftsmanship. By "aura" Benjamin means the essence of original works of arts resulting from artists' skills, time, and ingenuity poured into creating scarce masterpieces and subsequently submits that, "[...] that which withers in the age of mechanical production is the aura of the work of art (p. 8)."

The Hollywood establishment, the media institution that typifies the accord between capitalism, industrialisation, and technology (or mechanical production), was the principal subject at the centre of the culture industry critique. Adorno (1975) conceptually clarifies the domain of culture industry. Culture industry is not high art connoisseurship nor is it traditional or folk culture, it is not even popular or mass culture. Rather, culture industry refers to trends, patterns, and tastes that originate from media corporations (and individuals) whose chief output is cultural products such as music, movies, books, comics, animations, reality shows, drama, fashion, computer games, sports entertainment (or wrestling), and cinema. The culture industry comprise creators, producers, writers, performers, owners, and funders who conceive the ideas, messages, and content which cultural corporations distribute to mastermind and activate tastes, preferences, and lifestyles. In Nigeria for example, the slang "*Marlians*" refers to teenagers and young adults who glorify deviant, unruly, and carefree lifestyle which Naira Marley, a Nigerian Afrobeats hip-hop singer

and songwriter, popularised through his music and encouraged his fans to adopt. It is the same way other forms of culture products have inspired values and lifestyles.

Adorno's conceptual clarification could create a misleading impression that the culture industry always create new ideas and subsequently cultivate it into a cultural staple. This is only partially accurate because, in fact, the culture industry does borrow, modify, and apply aspects of a people's culture for creating fictional entertainment products. The Onion Model depicting essential layers of culture is useful to illustrate this crucial relationship. In the model, Hofstede et al. (2010) identified symbols, heroes, rituals, values, and practices as the crucial layers from which every culture derive their character and identity. Symbols refer to categories such as words, gestures, pictures, signs, objects, slangs, terms, and dressing of a culture. According to creators of the model, symbols are most noticeable to and easily copied and adapted by non-members of a culture. Rituals have religious and spiritual dimensions while heroes are individuals who may be deceased or alive, or fictitious or real who possess and exhibit characteristics or perform actions held in esteem by members of a culture making them role models whose behaviour and exploits people aspire to. Hofstede et al. (2010, p. 8) provide this expatiation on the contemporary nature of heroes owing to culture industry input:

Even Barbie, Batman, or, as a contrast, Snoopy in the United States, Asterix in France, or Ollie B. Bommel (Mr. Bumble) in the Netherlands have served as cultural heroes. In this age of television, outward appearances have become more important in the choice of heroes than they were before.

The characters in this citation are all original fictional creations of the culture industry such as comics (*Mr. Bumble*, *Asterix*, and *Batman*) and animations (*Barbie* and *Snoopy*), consistent with Adorno's (1975) explanation. However, the culture industry has created several products that directly borrow ideas from symbols, rituals, heroes, and practices of a culture. Consider this example in respect of superhero comics and the Jewish culture. In *Batman*, the immortal super villain, *Ra's al Ghul* derives his longevity from bathing or being immersed in the fictional *Lazarus Pit*, a rare and extraordinary pool that has regenerative and restorative powers. The *Lazarus Pit* idea bears striking similarity to two biblical and culturally Jewish accounts. The first account is the story of Lazarus who – after being dead for four days – was miraculously brought back to life

by Jesus Christ, while the second instance is the Pool of Bethesda, which has divine healing powers upon being stirred by an angel as recorded in the Book of John 5: 2-9 and John 11: 33-44 (Bible, n.d.). According to the Biblical Archaeology Society (2025), the notion is that the Pool of Bethesda, which was excavated in the nineteenth century, is a *mikveh* or a Jewish ritual bath site. In this example, covert and overt clues pertaining to Jewish cultural rituals and symbols were for the creation of a fictional feature in a fictional culture industry product. Therefore, there is a delicate intersection between culture and culture industry otherwise the issue of portrayal will be inconsequential.

To show the implications of the culture industry, Adorno and Horkheimer (1944/2002) describe its nature and effect on society as follows:

Culture today is infecting everything with sameness. Film, radio, and magazines form a system. Each branch of culture is unanimous within itself and all are unanimous together [...] something is provided for everyone so that no one can escape; differences are hammered home and propagated. The hierarchy of serial qualities purveyed to the public serves only to quantify it more completely. Everyone is supposed to behave spontaneously according to a "level" determined by indices and to select the category of mass product manufactured for their type. On the charts of research organizations, indistinguishable from those of political propaganda, consumers are divided up as statistical material into red, green, and blue areas according to income group (p. 1 & 97).

Two striking dimensions in the scholars' notion of culture industry are the homogenisation and reduction of audiences into data or information: both entrench the capitalist mode in the culture industry production. To consider the extent of the culture industry as a capitalist ideology promoting homogeneity of cultural experience, the emphasis of Adorno and Horkheimer (1944/2020), Adorno (1975), and Benjamin (1936/2005) on the relationship between capitalism and technology requires further exploration.

2.4.1 Culture Industry, Capitalism, and Technology

The framing of the culture industry critique is through the lens of Marxism, and Karl Marx was clear that his *Capital* treatise concerns only capitalist societies in which free enterprise prevail. Since its publication in the nineteenth century, Marx's political economic analysis has been responsible for unprecedented paradigmatic shifts in the world beginning from the early twentieth century. The resulting ideological political-economic struggles ultimately resulted in contradictory constructions of principles that defines the ideal manner of relationship between the state, institutions, people, and production. A major claim Marx (1887/c.2008) makes is that the evaluation of economic systems should be in terms of how and why goods are produced not how and why people consume goods, the contention is that the former logic reveals the value of commodities or goods in two ways. Commodities can have a use-value or the satisfaction that arises from physical consumption of a product or an exchange value, referring to the abstract, uncertain, and absence of sensuous satisfaction that arises from using a product, for example a painting. The type of value commodities have is central to unraveling the production ideology of capitalist societies (Marx, 1887/c.2008; Shapiro, 2008; Fuchs, 2020).

Marx's argument holds that people will naturally consume goods regardless of whether the era is pre-industrial agrarian, early or modern industrial. Therefore, seeking commodities and exchanging commodities for the satisfaction of a natural and biological need (feeding and clothing for example) is immaterial and not special. The important point to contemplate, especially in the contemporary era of aggressive marketing and plethora of brands, is why do we have many products and many brands of the same product? The smart phone, for instance, has use-value because it serves basic communication purposes. However, not only do many companies produce the smart phone under different brand names with more or less same functionalities but each brand recycles its smart phone as upgrades to a previous one. Apple, for instance, releases new version(s) of its iPhone product yearly. In this circumstance, Marx maintains that the reason people buy and consume products underscore the function and usefulness of commodities to the capitalist machinery thereby revealing the nature of capitalism. It (capitalism) is a production ideology that thrives on the creation of faux need situations in which people are caught in a cycle of unending and psychologically manipulative marketing campaigns and forced to accumulate goods and consume compulsively (Shapiro, 2008; Fuchs, 2020). The consequent compulsive consumption

associated with the capitalist mode is neither because people have essential need for the variety of similar products nor is it because they derive any special use-value or exchange value by using the products. Rather, the capitalist system creates marketing scenarios which triggers psychological responses that promotes the fear of missing out on the latest, classiest, more interesting, more beautiful or most exotic commodity or thing. Ultimately, people are pushed to consume compulsively to the benefit of the capitalists who control the resources of production and determine what goods to produce and how to produce them. In this way, the compulsive consumption cycle of products continues the capitalist system.

Since much of the world is capitalist or practices capitalism in some form, corporations, regardless of the country, replicate the compulsive consumption model for the more or less similar products they produce. In the case of the culture industry, Fuchs (2020) notes that the contents they produce are high-risk products lacking guaranteed use-value making them rely on the “hit rule” strategy of copying a successful model. To interpret, every first instance of a culture industry product is a prototype undergoing an experiment of commercial viability. If the prototype fails, it is abandoned but if it proves to be a “hit” (meaning it succeeds), then other culture industry producers create and market their version of the product thereby saturating the market in a pattern consistent with the capitalist system of homogenised production and stimulation of compulsive consumption. In culture industry practice, superhero comics were a prototype in 1938 when DC published the first *Superman* issue, it was a hit, other publishers entered the comics industry, and there is currently a proliferation of superhero comic products around the world. Likewise, rap was a prototype music genre in Nigeria during the early 2000s with pioneer artistes such as Idris Adulkareem of the *Remedies*, Black Face of the *Plantashun Boiz*, and *Trybsmen*, the genre was a hit, and Nigerian rap music became a popular commodity thereafter. By the start of the second decade of the twenty-first century Nigerian rap music was gradually waning while Nigerian Afrobeats hip-hop was gaining ascendancy – today, rap is outdated in the country while Afrobeats hip-hop is in fashion.

In current times, the culture industry sameness or homogenisation Adorno and Horkheimer (1944/2002) criticised is executed through the “hit rule” strategy that relies on recycling content under fancy terms such as reboot, remake, sequel, prequel, crossover, season, and spinoff. Using the recycling formula, culture industry products go through several iterations and adaptations,

which, through aggressive marketing, the audience anticipate and desire to see. In superhero comics for example, since *Superman* the alien from Krypton first appeared in 1938, his story has been recycled in several reboots and adapted for various media forms such as games, movies, and animations. The trailer of yet another movie reboot of *Superman* circulated in 2024 teasing the curiosity of audiences and stimulating their appetite prior to the full movie released in July of 2025. The same is true for many superhero comic stories. The strategy is suspension of gratification in which audiences' interest in the climax is almost never realised.

In view of the foregoing reality, whatever homogenising trend Adorno and Horkheimer (1944/2002) observed and frowned at in the mid twentieth century when their influential essay first appeared does not compare to present times when previously unavailable media and communication technologies are regularising the peoples of the world into global citizens in a global community that defies spatio-temporal barriers. Technologies such as the internet, social media, digitisation, streaming, artificial intelligence, and mechanisation of previously tedious human centric activities have – and continue to – ease peoples of the world into an integrated global community. These technologies enable a situation where almost everything can be reproduced anywhere and reach any location on earth – unless it is a primeval, undiscovered habitat not connected to the global internet infrastructure. A globalisation of culture results from this technology driven process in the socio-historic development of the world (Raikhan et al., 2014), accelerating uniformity or sameness of trends and norms in ways magazines, radio, television, and newspaper individually could not.

The fact that technology fosters globalisation across all imaginable facet of human activity means the culture industry itself is a global phenomenon that is part of the global integration process and can be expected to have relatively homogenous features on account of adopting certain similar patterns, models, or ideas. For instance, it is true that various countries have unique traditions that distinguishes their culture industry landscape. In the film industry for example, India has Bollywood, South Korea has Hallyuwood, Latin America has Telenovelas, Ghana has Gollywood, and Nigeria has Nollywood. Yet, at least since the 1920s, the Hollywood institution has become the exemplar model dictating and inspiring the ideas, patterns, and best practices and standards of the global culture industry. In its first-among-equals position, Hollywood's tentacles extend to

places like India, China, Nigeria and other parts of the world influencing their production methods and storytelling (Perren & Schatz, 2004; Maisuwong, 2012; Sigismondi, 2012; Ibbi, 2013; Miskell, 2016; Lyu, 2023). In this way, the capitalist culture industry model of the United States, strengthened by technologies of media and communication, seeped beyond the physical borders of its country of origin paving the avenue for globalisation of cultures as Raikhan et al. (2014) termed it.

Indeed, Adorno and Horkheimer (1944/2020) maintain that the culture industry is part of the political calculus that energises the capitalist economic ideology and ensures the hegemony of capitalist profiteers in whose possession technology and media are tools to manipulate audiences into embracing alternative culture and ideologies. Culture as a vehicle to execute hegemony or domination surfaces, again, in this line of thought (see Rodesth, 2018; Ortner, 2016 as previously cited). In the evolutionary course of the media, this perspective has been variously emphasised. For instance, Smythe (1981) posit that media audiences are mere commodities whose work is to consume ideological content produced by powerful institutional forces – the state, media itself, and capitalist moguls – in order to continue the status quo. “Work” in this instance refers to the act of consuming media content – news, music, movies, advertisements, various types of shows, sports etc. On the one hand, it is through this act of audience work that the media performs its functions of education, entertainment, information and socialisation. On the other hand, the same media functions are vehicles that carry deliberately packaged institutional messages or ideologies, which audiences absorb and adopt through repeated exposure. In this manner, audiences’ attention essentially work to actualise institutional objectives making it (audiences’ attention) a commodity monetised for profits and ideological indoctrination in the battle for hearts and mind. Prior to Smythe, Althusser (1971/2014) had categorised the media as an ideological state apparatus or a surreptitious, non-violent, non-coercive conduit that the state and its institutions as well as powerful private entities use to infiltrate and infect people with preferred ideologies or worldviews. Ideological apparatus contrasts repressive or coercive apparatuses such as security and law enforcement agencies and judiciary through which the state exercises raw power to enforce conformity. Similarly, McQuail (2010) emphasises that the media operates as an ideological institution subject to and enabling the whims of powerful political and economic forces.

Indeed, the evidence is clear that the global media ownership is concentrated in the hands of few corporations. Hamelink (2015) reports that since the 1920s, eight United States owned corporations have controlled the global movie industry. These media corporations are Paramount, Warner Bros., 20th Century Fox, Loew's Inc., United Artists, Universal Pictures, RKO, and Columbia Pictures. Hamelink further adds that in the news and current affairs category, the production and distribution of international news has been under the control of the so-called "big four" news agencies namely United Press International, Associated Press, Reuters, and Agence France-Presse since the late nineteenth century. In the case of the global movie industry, Whitten (2019) notes that the sector has been further consolidated into fewer hands following Disney's acquisition of 20th Century Fox (now called 20th Century Studios) in 2019. Due to that acquisition, Disney accounted for about forty percent (40%) of the box office or movie profits in 2019 while its closest competitor, Warner Bros., accounted for just fourteen percent (14%). These media conglomerates are privately owned entities and ostensibly create and operate in a pluralist media environment. The pluralist media system is theoretically rooted in the libertarian media ideology which fundamentally holds that the media must operate as a free and competitive enterprise open to any individual to own and available for all individuals to freely ventilate their views in order to prevent the monopoly of ideas and information. This model characteristically aligns with the capitalist, free enterprise system (Vivian, 2006).

The liberal pluralist model of media ownership dominates the global media landscape with many countries operating a mixed ownership system in which both governments and private individuals own media outfits, a situation confirmed by Djankov et al. (2003) who, in their survey of ninety-seven (97) countries, found that government and private media ownership is almost a universal practice. Ordinarily, this suggests that the media in any one country or globally is a free space that support diversity, encourages the unhindered participation of various social constituencies in getting sufficient and appropriate representation, and eliminates monopoly of thought and ideas. However, Marxists oppose the liberal pluralist media system denouncing the ideology as conspiratorial illusion. For instance, McChesney (2015) and Rab and Sprague (2022) assert that plurality does not necessarily equal to diversity of voices since media owners are usually power brokers who belong to or align with different interest blocs. Consequently, the scholars argued that contrary viewpoints and talking points are suppressed while favourable or preferred ones receive

priority. Applied to the agenda setting function of the media, this means that even in a pluralistic media system the agenda or priority subjects of concern and their framing are subject to the interests and motivations of the media itself. Objectively therefore, the presence of powerful persons and institutions with vested interests will always determine the trajectory of media operations in relation to how every society is managed. To put it according to Tuchman (1978), the media constructs social reality. Based on the foregoing, describing the media as a culture industry actively involved in the production, distribution, and propagation of ideologies, interests, and preferences for which institutions covet audience work or attention for successful adoption is in order.

2.4.2 Culture Industry and Ideology

Ideology is central to socio-political and economic hegemony and related to culture and culture industry. Ideology is a worldview, a way of thinking, making sense, and acting in relation to the world. Hall (1986/1996, p. 25-26) views ideology as, “frameworks—the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation—which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works.” For Althusser (1971/2014) ideology is an imaginary rationalisation scheme that has material value because it, “makes individuals, who are always ready-subjects (you and I) ‘go’, yet, “[...] each subject (you and I) is subjected to several ideologies that are relatively independent, albeit unified under the unity of State Ideology (p. 199).” While both authors approached the concept from a political economy perspective, Hall seem to equate ideology to culture, suggesting that there is singularity of ideology within social groups whereas Althusser points to multiple ideologies co-existing, conflicting, and competing for supremacy and, perhaps, confounding individuals. The nuanced perspective in each author’s framing arises from the fact that ideology is a mutable concept applicable in a strict and restrictive sense as well as in a broad and collective manner. In a broad and collective sense, ideology can refer to schemes of social groups’ worldviews especially if there are no outlier units whose values deviate sharply from norms of the entire group. From the strict and restrictive view, ideology refers to the ideas or worldviews of sub-groups within a society, Donham (1999) intends this meaning by referring to ideology as sectional beliefs appearing to be general views. There is also the political economic view of

ideology that concern the overarching framework within which governments formulate political and economic policies. The political economic perspective of ideology is putative in both academic discourse and non-academic commentaries. Therefore, just as culture is a mutable concept having various meanings according to its context of use, these views on ideology underscore the mutability of the concept.

Since political economy stratifies society into the bourgeoisie ruling and privileged class and proletariat ruled or working class or, in Nigerian term, the “common man,” it is doubtful if uniformity of ideology exists in any modern state, even assuming there is complete cultural homogeneity. This is because societies, though differing culturally, are similar for having structural inequalities determined by power, wealth, status, and privilege that unavoidably stratifies people into social classes of haves, have-nots, and wannabes. History has shown and evidence has demonstrated that ownership and control of the most influential media conglomerates and consortiums is concentrated in the hands of few people in the privileged class whose influence and interest are economic and political. This concentration of ownership in the hands of privileged individuals with vested political and economic interests is responsible for scholars and people questioning the sincerity of media narratives and the ideological interests they really serve. This is the thrust of Marx’s political economic treatise, the core of Adorno and Horkheimer’s (1944/2002) critique of the culture industry and critical media analysis of scholars such as Smythe (1981) and Fuchs (2012).

A state has a political economic ideology it stamps as its identity but as an entity of various parts, the state comprises units of distinct social groups each with its own ideology as well: ethnicities and their cultural ideologies, religious sects and their ideologies, advocacy groups and their ideological views, and many other interest groups. Ideology, like culture, is then also a way of life and the modern state system is a complex confluence of contesting ideologies that requires a delicate balancing act to prevent internal and external relations from going awry. In reality, things have gone ideologically and culturally awry in the world between and within countries. Currently, there is a clash of cultural values accentuated by complex political economy ideological posturing. Based on the foregoing, countries have coalesced into blocs of opposing groups to fend-off perceived and real threats from the other. To illustrate:

1. The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) Plus countries exist to halt further expansion of the United States' political and economic hegemony in their respective countries,
2. Russia and allies such as China, Iran, and North Korea are in constant hostilities with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) countries comprising United States and its Western allies on account of differing geopolitical ideology,
3. The Confederation of Sahel States (CSS) in Africa comprising Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso have severed ties with and become hostile to France on account of decades of exploitative economic and political agenda which has impoverished and destabilised their respective countries, and
4. The South-West home of the Yoruba people in Nigeria has been experiencing hostile contestations involving Christians and traditionalists on the one hand and Islamic ideologues on the other hand, on account of the latter's agitation for sharia religious ideology to become mainstream in the characteristically multi-religious Yoruba society.

In the prevailing global cultural, political, economic, and ideological contestations, the media and culture industry are critical institutions for their immense power to cultivate and form habits that stabilises a status quo or challenges it. As a result, countries have had reasons to ban or restrict culture industry products and media platforms for enhancing culture and ideology contrary to the status quo. For example, several Islamic countries prohibited the Hollywood movie "Noah" released in 2014 because it contravened Islamic teachings that forbids portrayal or depiction of prophets in any form (Child, 2014). In 2006, the Catholic Church banned "The Da Vinci Code" novel and movie adaptation for presenting alternative, none canonical biblical narratives regarding the marital status of Jesus Christ and leadership of his evangelism ministry post his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascendancy to heaven. Instances of such bans or restrictions also exist for media platforms audiences consume daily. The African Stream, a Kenyan based online media platform was banned by Google, YouTube, and Meta (all owned by United States' citizens) platforms in September of 2024 following allegations by the United States that the outlet is a covert Russian channel operating to expand Russia's sphere of influence in Africa. Many Gulf States banned Al Jazeera for being friendly to ideologies that incite violence and promote religious extremism while

countries have raised concerns over the economic and political power of social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and X and have taken steps to dismantle their growing monopoly. A notable example is the Cambridge Analytica scandal in which the organisation obtained millions of Facebook user data and weaponised it to influence the outcome of the 2016 presidential election in the United States.

These contemporary events emphasise the stance of the agenda setting theory that the media not only tell the people what to discuss, they frame messages in ways that point the direction in which people should think and act. For this reason, the audience work or attention is coveted for achieving widespread impressions pro or against an ideology, or strengthening or diluting a culture. The portrayals and depictions audiences consume in culture industry products is a prominent way of achieving any of these objectives.

2.4.3 Culture Industry as Value Chain of Symbolic Products

Although Adorno and Horkheimer (1944/2002) gave a fitting terminology that aptly describe the nature of the media as an institution instrumental to the planting and forming of culture and provides a critical political economy analysis of the purposes of that function, they did not exhaust the categories of entities under the culture industry umbrella. Consequently, Mirva (2015) submits that the characteristics of the culture industry and industries under its ambit has remained unclear. What this means is that the media of mass communication alone are not the only industry that produces cultural products or depict culture. The media, of course, are ubiquitous and invasive. They bombard society and audiences with many messages and content through various medium, flooding, for example, each individual with advertisements estimated between four thousand and ten thousand (4,000 – 10,000) daily (Badalyan, 2024). For their ubiquity, invasive nature, and power to shape opinions and form habits, it might be tempting to conclude that the mass media alone are the culture industry. This is misleading and inaccurate because, in reality, the media is part of the culture industry and simultaneously mirrors other entities in the culture industry. This relationship between the media as a culture industry and mirror of the culture industry is important to establish the nuances of the industry and the media's centrality to it.

According to Wang et al. (2019), culture industry refers to a variety of organisations that produce and distribute cultural goods that have symbolic, artistic, or aesthetic value. For Lawrence and Philips (2002) the culture industry comprise organisations that produce and sell meaning while Mirva (2015) describe culture industry as organisations that invest creative effort into producing experience products distributed through the mass media to the consumer market. Mirva continues that the creative elements that makes cultural products experience goods are stories and styles intended for purposes such as entertainment, identity building, and social display. The difference between the three definitions of culture industry is merely grammatical, they all emphasise the following in different ways:

1. That the culture industry is a variety of organisations,
2. That cultural organisations produce cultural products which are characteristically creative or artistic, symbolic or representative, and relate to some experience which could be real or imagined, and
3. That the utility or usefulness people derive from cultural products is abstract, intangible, and subjective unlike the utility derived from consuming tangible goods.

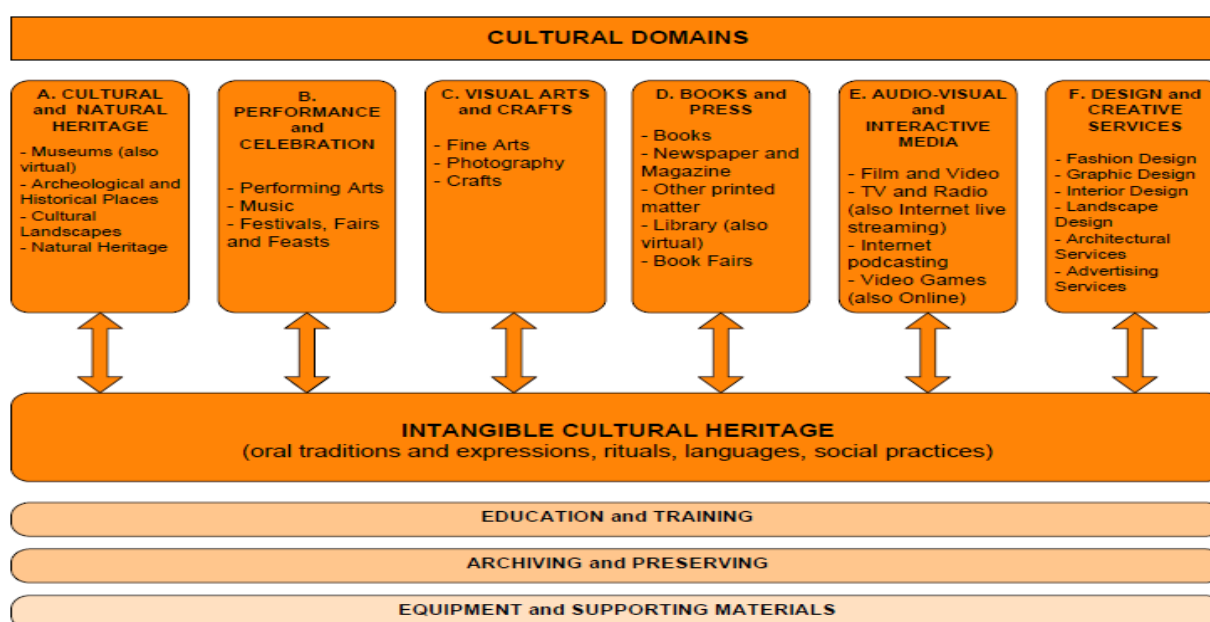
Based on these features, Hesmondhalgh (2008) elaborates the reasons accountable for the introduction of the term “creative industries” to the cultural production discussion. Beyond mere semantic differentiation, Hesmondhalgh states that the critical political economy theoretical basis through which the culture industry was viewed is flawed because it treated the subject of cultural production as though it were a homogenous industry governed by one process when, in fact, it is a conglomeration of allied industries vying for the same consumer cultural market. The creative industries vocabulary is a policy shift that emphasises the clustering of cultural production activities occasioned by changes in contemporary urban lifestyles, technological competencies, innovation, place and festival marketing, and application of entrepreneurial mindset to arts and culture production. Indeed, technological innovation in the media space has reinforced creative entrepreneurship and reconfigured the culture industry in tremendously significant dimensions. Technological innovation has extended the scope of the industry outside the control the conventional media and well-resourced culture corporations wield and exert on production discretion to one in which ordinary users have become active participants in the creation of content

manifested in user created content on social media. The current dispensation of social media user created content is the architect of a new political economy in which previously ordinary consumers have emerged as powerful and influential media constituencies who, for the large following they have, influence lifestyles, values, opinions, and, of course, culture. Consequently, brands and various interest groups and institutions seek the platform of these social media influencers to push their points of view to the public, typically in exchange for material benefit(s) for the influencer. This new category of media actors are an extension of the capitalist institution for the reason that rather than their activities being trivialised or disparaged, they are viewed as a creative industry because they produce commercially viable content that creates various experiences. In other words, they are solo creative entrepreneurs. In the Nigerian social media space, platforms such as Facebook, TiktTok, Snapchat, X and a variety of streaming applications have many popular and fringe content creators who use their online activities, not minding debates around the social consequences of their actions, to escape economic hardship and poverty and become celebrities. Clearly, the culture industry is a delicate and nuanced subject and viewing only from the binary perspective of Adorno and Horkheimer (1944/2002) limits its scope.

As such, for emphasising that cultural products are decentralised into clusters of commercial production, proponents of the creative industry terminology argue that the term appreciates cultural production as an indispensable commercial value chain. Indeed, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation – Framework for Cultural Statistics [UNESCO-FCS] (2009) recommends that countries should formulate policy that focuses on cultural industries because it promotes holistic sectoral and economic development. Nigeria seems to have adopted the UNESCO-FCS recommendation because authorities in the country recently approved the Creative Industries Development Act (CIDA) of 2023 that aims to coordinate funding, incentive, research, skills, and training for the players in the creative industry value chain. Since its first culture industries framework in 1982, the UNESCO has been a vital stakeholder and resource entity on the global situation of the culture industry. The United Nations agency notably divides the culture industry into six main culturally productive categories that, as illustrated in figure 2.7, are cultural and cultural heritage, performance and celebration, visual arts and crafts, books and press, audio-visual and interactive media and, finally, design and creative services. The categorisation is completed by tourism, sports, and recreation, viewed as culturally tangential entities for providing

experiences that support or promote the exhibition of culture. The reasoning for including these last tangential entities may not be obvious. If the necessary resources are primed for tourist attraction, tourism becomes a cultural business that provides experiential utility. It is for this purpose that even governments brand their countries as delightful experience destinations to attract tourists and investors – campaigns such as the United States’ “*Land of Dreams*”, India’s “*Incredible India*”, and Thailand’s “*Amazing Thailand*” (VanAnuken, 2024) are examples of tourism related place branding drives that informed inclusion of tourism in the UNESCO-FCS framework.

Figure 2.7: Culturally productive entities in the culture industry



Source: UNESCO-FCS (2009)

It follows that the management of tourism as an experience product is the condition for that sector to thrive as a cultural industry that attracts both local and international patronage. The task of priming a society to facilitate tourism related cultural experience is a function of strategic institutional intentionality; Nigeria’s failed and abandoned experiment with the “*Good People, Great Nation*” campaign initiated in 2012 intended to rebrand the country into a culture product to be experienced underscores the reason tourism is not a main culture industry. In the case of

sports and recreation, events such as the World Cup and Olympics and theme parks such as Walt Disney Park sell culture experiences of the societies they operate as goods.

For emphasis, the original critical language and analysis of culture industry denies any material and immaterial value of the contemporary cultural production processes. However, goods are consumed in a cultural context and cultural goods have a unique materiality or value connected to the prevailing context (Lawrence & Philips, 2002). This means that the essence or value of cultural products exists within the context of historical production. On this score, Adorno and Horkheimer's (1944/2002) culture industry critique, despite its intellectual brilliance, may be criticised as deficient for failing to recognise the dynamic nature of human processes that compulsorily births new ways of doing things. Put in other terms, the culture industry critique ignores human experience and culture within the time-space-processes framework. In this regard, the artistic standards which both authors valorised and used as yardstick to condemn the then nascent practices of present technological age cultural production is itself a contextual consequence of the dynamic human processes. The foregoing been said, terminological appropriateness is not the concern of the researcher regarding this subject. No distinction is made between culture industry and creative industry. However, the preferred vocabulary is culture industry and the use of the term is in a contemporary sense to mean a commercial value chain of media contents that portray ideas, experiences, symbols, and lifestyles produced for and distributed through the media of mass communication to audiences and fans.

Having a value chain perspective of the culture industry is beneficial in that it reveals the interconnectedness of the culture industries and role of the books and press and audio-visual industries specifically in accelerating visibility for ideas contained in culture industry products. On the one hand, the different categories of culture industries portray and market culture as products in their respective sphere of culture production business. On the other hand, however, culture products from the different categories of culture industries are present in and part of the discrete representations or portrayals in both the books and press and audio-visual industries thus creating a seamless unity in which mass communication platforms have emerged as the most prominent outlets of culture industry products. The mass media therefore have a dual nature in relation to the culture industry. First, they are a culture industry on their own for their ability to create, frame,

and depict ideas about ways of life or that can influence ways of life. Second, they are integrative necessarily containing and showing ideas from other culture sub-industries in their capacity as means of communication. For the avoidance of doubt, the books and press and audio-visual industries are all media of mass communication and the influence of the mass media in extending and entrenching ideologies and cultures has been established.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation – Institute for Statistics (UNESCO-UIS, 2016) report for the 2004 to 2013 decade notes that Sub-Sahara Africa plays a marginal role in the flow of cultural goods and services in the global culture value chain. Nigeria, being the most populous Black Country on earth, is also conspicuously absent as a major player in the global culture industry market. This means, for example, that for all the efforts of comic publishers like Comic Republic and other sectors of the Nigerian culture industry are worth, culture industry products in which Yoruba language and culture are portrayed have miniscule to no impact beyond the shores of the country.

2.5 Brief History of Global Comics Industry

As sequential art and a culture industry, a distinguishing feature of comics is the compulsory use of images in a specific order to tell a story. Before humans developed sophisticated systems of language to record and preserve their experiences, archaeology has shown that prehistoric societies made rudimentary yet meaningful drawings in caves to depict their life. Communication through drawing thus predates the development of formalised sign systems and rules of language (McCloud, 1993; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). By this logic of intrinsic relationship between the history and evolution of man and drawing, comics as illustrated narratives could be said to be as old as humanity. Indeed, academics and practitioners of the comic and cartoon art maintain that prehistoric cave impressions, later forms such as Mayan carvings and Egyptian hieroglyphs as well as decorative and religious artifacts depicting narratives in both images and text are the pristine roots of modern comics (Eisner, 1985; McCloud, 1993; Saraceni, 2003; Glubizzi, 2007; Horton, 2017). That the history of comics has been traced to ancient times is neither accidental nor haphazard, it is a deliberate social-historical validation exercise to provide legitimacy for a genre that, for a long time since emerging as a mass media form in the 1930s, were estimated as frivolous

and low-quality art (Humphrey, 2020). Consequently, compared to forms of high or respectable art and literature, comics suffered a public relations crisis in its early twentieth century days. Therefore:

The care that is taken to establish a connection between high culture and comics, and to confer on comics the antiquity that is constitutive of every legitimate cultural tradition, accounts for the tendency (found primarily among internal commentators), to relocate the origins of comics to the greatest possible historical distance [...] (Boltanski, 1975/2014, p. 288).

Specifically, the development of contemporary comics is directly connected to Rodolphe Töpffer, a nineteenth century Swiss teacher, author, and artist who authored *Historie de Mr. Vieux Bois* in 1827, an illustrated comic strip considered as the first comic story (Murray, 2024; Leuner, 2015). From 1827 until he died, Töpffer illustrated many caricature stories named ‘*histories en estampes*’ or stories in print producing seven comic strips plus an uncompleted one and several other drawings, a feat for which his works have been considered as the precursor of present-day comics (Kunzle, 2007; Leuner, 2015). The comics legacy thus have a French-European origin, a heritage Kunzle (2007, p. X) emphasised to dispel contrary narrative that distorts history as follows:

Recognition that an “obscure” Genevan could be truly the father of the comic strip, way back in Europe of the 1830s, was delayed in Anglophone countries by a chauvinistic insistence in the U.S.A. that this arch-American phenomenon was invented there in 1896, with the advent of the newspaper supplements. Europeans knew better of course.

Chronological evidence supports Kunzle’s emphatic declaration and the notion that contemporary comics derive from Töpffer’s Franco-European comic strips considering that Richard Outcault’s *Yellow Kid*, the first comic strips to appear in a newspaper, which Americans usually reference as origin of modern comics, did not appear in The New York World newspaper until October of 1896 (Saraceni, 2003; Vivian, 2006). Nevertheless, the creation and appearance of the *Yellow Kid* in a mass consumed newspaper marked a significant point of transformation in the emergence of the comic book beginning from the 1930s as a distinct type of mass media product defined by distinct socio-cultural styles through which stories are narrated. In Europe, countries began to develop their respective comic cultures; de Vries (2012) stressed that the Franco-Belgian comic tradition

was most influential in Europe and Hergé, who created the *Tintin* comic book series, is considered as the godfather of twentieth century European comics. In Asia, Japanese manga flourished becoming a major force in the comics industry exporting its unique style to Europe and America; for his pioneering role in the development of manga, the Japanese revere Osamu Tezuka as god of manga. The manga market is segmented into five demographic groups namely *shonen* for boys in their teenage and early twenties, *shojo* is the female version of *shonen*; *seinen* is for adult men and contains darker themes and explicit depictions while *josei* is the female manga version of *seinen* and, finally, *kodomo* for young children (Pagan, 2018). In the United States, the golden age of superhero comics began in 1938 when Joe Schuster and Jerry Siegel created *Superman*.

Those three comic traditions dominate the global comic market estimated to be worth 22.7 billion United States Dollars in value by 2030 (Fortune Business Insight, 2024). This dominance is exerted in a variety of ways centred on adapting comic books for other forms of culture industry production such as animated and non-animated movies, production of comic characters themed merchandise such as toys and apparels, video and computer games, and movie soundtracks. Actually, media cross-fertilisation in which comics are adapted for both the audio-visual media [and as products of other allied culture industries] is a common trend that has generated enormous profit in box office returns in Hollywood. For example, table 2.2 details an elite class of superhero comics adapted for non-animated films with profit above one billion dollars since 2008. The arrangement of the earnings is from the lowest to the highest.

Table 2.2 Non- animated superhero movies with over 1 billion USD global earnings since 2008

Year	Superhero Comic Movie Title	Global Earnings (USD)
2008	The Dark Knight	1, 006, 234, 167
2019	Joker	1, 074, 445, 730
2012	The Dark Knight Rises	1, 081, 169, 825
2019	Captain Marvel	1, 124, 462, 972
2019	Spider-Man: Far From Home	1, 131, 927, 996
2018	Aquaman	1, 148, 528, 393
2016	Captain America: Civil War	1, 153, 337, 496
2013	Iron Man 3	1, 214, 811, 252

2018	The Incredibles 2	1, 243, 089, 244
2024	Deadpool & Wolverine	1,289, 526, 318
2018	Black Panther	1, 347, 597, 973
2015	Avengers: Age of Ultron	1, 402, 809, 540
2012	The Avengers	1, 518, 815, 515
2021	Spider-Man: No Way Home	1, 920, 544, 470
2018	Avengers: Infinity War	2, 048, 359, 754
2019	Avengers: Endgame	2, 797, 501, 328

Source: Acuna (2022); The Numbers (2024)

Within comic culture, the term ‘graphic novel’ exists. The niche it occupies and the stylistic markers that differentiates graphic novels from comics deserve mentioning. By form, comics are short length, serialised stories typically printed on cheap paper (Baetens & Frey, 2015; Gluibizzi, 2007). To give a basic description, graphic novels are, “[...] simply lengthy comics” (Van Ness, 2010, p. 5). However, Baetens and Frey (2015) elaborates the form features peculiar to graphic novels as they:

- 1) Are exactly like comics in terms of emphasis on preponderance of image although creators bend the idea of sequence images in a variety of non-prescriptive, experimental, and individual style,
- 2) Adopt the book or novel format thus, pagination wise, graphic novels are denser and lengthier than comics, appearing in a single volume issue unlike serialised comics, and
- 3) Typically address adult content in terms of topical and serious subjects the like of which are too complex and advanced to appeal to and for children to understand. An example is the critically acclaimed Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* (1986), an autobiographic story of his family’s holocaust survival experience in which Jews were depicted as mice, Polish people as pigs and Germans as cats.

This, however, is not to say that graphic novels do not carry typical comic stories, for example the superhero type. In reality, the graphic novel evolved from the comic tradition and many superhero stories have appeared in this format receiving critical and commercial acclaim. For instance,

Batman: The Dark Knight Returns and *Watchmen*, whose animated movie adaption exists in parts one and two, were published as graphic novels (Baetens & Frey, 2015; Van Ness, 2010). In this research, the publications of concern are not graphic novels but comics because they are serialised, short length, conventionally sequential art stories that do not deal with complex adult content subjects.

2.6 Universes, Superheroes, and Villains

The myth of the superhero as the defender of society is not questioned: Superheroes are good folk. They defend the weak and wretched against evil machinations and doomsday devices (Kukkoken & Müller-Wood, 2010, p. 155).

The American superhero comic genre rests on three primary anchors: universes (referring to parallel or alternate realities), superheroes (humans, gods, or aliens with superpowers and skills fighting to prevent crime, evil, or doomsday cataclysm) and, villains (diabolic humans, invading extraterrestrials, evil supernatural force, or criminal kingpins always scheming sinister plans). By plot, it pitches polar ethics in which a superhero permanently remains a morally virtuous watchman or vigilante of society, opposing and thwarting the agenda of staunch evil doers. This archetypical formula is the mainstay of superhero comics and is observable in well-established superhero-villain arch rivalries such as *Batman vs. Joker*, *Spiderman vs. Green Goblin*, and *Superman vs. Lex Luthor*. On the one hand, scholars of differing comic traditions criticise superhero comics as monologic, presenting a stereotyped frame of impervious morality and infallibility (Kukkoken & Müller-Wood, 2010). In addition to this criticism, an aura of insular competence and superiority complex premised on the notion of the United States' superior capability, resourcefulness and skills to solve internal challenges, and as the indispensable focal point for resolving threats to all of humanity is noticeable in superhero comics to a keen observer. On the other hand, the era in which superhero comics and characters emerged as a distinct American culture industry perspective alongside challenges of the time offers an insight into the genre's ideology and worldviews.

Superhero comics' rise to prominence coincides with a period of global turmoil notably the Great Depression, World War II, the Cold War, Vietnam war and America's ideological positions in

relation to the development and resolution of those events (Hassler-Forest, 2010; Kukkonen & Müller-Wood, 2010; Franco, 2015). This association between comics and state ideology was undisguised in the golden age of superhero comics spanning 1938 (when *Superman*, the first superhero was published by DC in Action Comics #1) to 1954 (when the Comics Code was introduced) with *Superman*'s "truth, justice, and the American way" motto (Kukkonen & Müller-Wood, 2010, p. 153). Through this motto of the superhero comic genre's most iconic character, the intention to portray the America way or culture including its ideological values is unmistakable and obvious, what may have been less obvious to non-American consumers of the comic is its instrumentation to market and engineer the adoption of the America way. A retrospective socio-historical commentary by an African user on X on the rivalry between America and Russia during the aforementioned tumultuous times and America's victory through the power of Hollywood and culture industry acknowledges this fact thus:

When I was a kid, we were bombarded in print by both Western and Russian propaganda. The Americans went beyond print and subtly used Hollywood to sell their dream to us. Russians used education first as they had a language disadvantage. Americans won largely because of Hollywood...they knew what people craved and gave them entertainment while indoctrinating them about American might and power (@asemota, 2025).

It suffices to say that other characters like *Batman* and *Captain America* created in 1939 and 1941 respectively followed *Superman* in 1938. Criticisms accompanied the rise of American comics both in Europe and in the United States. In England, Pumphrey's (c. 1956) *Comics and your Children* accused American comics of polluting British society with and exposing children to explicit depravity such as violence, racism, gangsterism, and sex. In the United States itself, Wertham (1954) published a scathing criticism in *Seduction of the Innocent* that, for example, purports a link between superheroes and homosexuality using the case of *Batman* and his juvenile wonder kid protégé, *Robin*. The core of Wertham's criticism was that superhero comics contain and convey undesirable ideologies that were polluting the morality of children and young adults as well as reducing literacy proficiency and standard of education. The publication occupies a significant position in the history of superhero comics because it led to censure and formation of the Comics Code Authority in 1954. The period between 1938 and 1954 when Wertham's criticism informed censure is regarded as the golden age of superhero comics while the silver age ran from

1956 to the early 1970s during which censure continued, existing characters were repurposed, and new ones such as *Flash*, *Hal Jordan*, *X-Men*, *Avengers*, and *Justice League* were introduced (Bacon, 2022; Land, 2023). Bacon and Land added that during the last two ages, bronze age (around 1971 to 1986) and modern age (1986 until today), more characters were introduced, increased commercial success from various ventures with allied industries followed, and the comics code lost significance.

Considering the foregoing, the ascension of superhero comics to global fame is not just popular culture fiction and fantasy orchestrated by the culture industry alone. The alliance between stakeholders such as the state, the comic industry, the powerful Hollywood establishment and other related industries, and the intricate incorporation of all these structures contributed to the global popularity and success of the superhero model, despite manga outperforming it in terms of sales and readership in recent years (Kemner & Trinos, 2024; Salkowitz, 2019). For upstarts such as Nigerian comic publishers in the superhero comics industry, the foregoing is a lesson in paths to transform and strengthen the local industry and a reminder of the power of ideological apparatuses to entrench dominance. It has been stated that since the mass communication era began in the fifteenth century, all forms in which it manifests have been instruments used for the subliminal propagation of ideologies by state, corporate, and individual actors. In this respect, instances exist of the comic media functioning as an ideological apparatus. In a restitutive post-World War II project, Giner-Monfort (2024) details an elaborate research conducted on behalf of the Jewish community by Bureau of Applied Social Research between September 1945 and March 1946 to contain anti-Semitism using a comic strip titled *Mr. Biggott*. In Africa, Hammett (2022, Abstract) notes that in the 1970s Apartheid South Africa, *Mighty Man* comic was, “used in efforts to instil and frame a conduct amongst Black subjects – both in accepting separate development and apartheid government [...]”. In addition to superhero comics’ early history with turmoil and advancing American interests and perspective, the genre has continued to portray America as first among equals, a leader and saviour of the world while serving as a conduit for funneling its ideologies to new social territories. For example, non-animated superhero movie adaptations such as *Dr. Strange: Multiverse of Madness*, *The Eternals*, and *Superman* all explicitly carry favourable messages that advances the contentious LGBTQ advocacy.

For the various scenarios of humanly unrealistic exploits and ideological viewpoints it depicts, the social impact of superhero comics is still a topical matter. However, unlike the hysteria generated by Wertham's 1954 revolutionary criticism, contemporary critical inquiries are undecided regarding the conditioning effects superhero comics have on audiences (Zeytuncu, 2019). For instance, Saritha et al. (2023) conducted a literature survey of fifteen (15) investigations published in high impact journals focusing on the effects of exposure to superhero movies. The researchers found that a mix of positive effects (such as increased representation for females, enhancing creativity and imagination, and facilitating cultural portrayals and awareness) and negative consequences (such as increasing aggression, reducing attention span, increase in anxiety and stress, racism, sexism, and reduction of emotional intelligence capability) accompany exposure to the genre. However, a similar but earlier study made precise claims. Bauer et al. (2016) analysed thirty (30) superhero movies for the extent of positive and negative consequences they have on audiences and fans. They found that negative consequences outweighed positive effects with the latter category manifesting prominently through violence, bullying, torture, intimidation, and use of lethal weapons as opposed to positive effects such as protecting the public and assisting others, teamwork and collaboration, and constructive relationships with family and friends.

In another study, Santos and Pimentel (2024) conducted two online experiments involving two hundred (200) Brazilians and investigated their prosocial behaviour (referring to voluntary actions that benefit others, i.e. sharing, cooperation, and donation) in relation to watching superhero movies – the study returned mixed findings. The researchers concluded that exposure to prosocial conduct arising from watching superhero movies is a complex affair mediated by factors such as moral justification and empathy, and, to that extent, violent depictions may not necessarily have negative consequences on behaviour. They further observed that both negative and positive effects are associated with superhero movies but, as Zeytuncu (2019) noted, added that studies on effect of the genre is scarce. Indeed, it will seem concerned culture industries involved in the superhero business are attempting to use the same comic media to moderate effects. For example, the entirety of the superhero thriller movie *Glass* (2019) is a delicate production that blends reality with comic fantasy in an attempt to question the existence of superheroes. In her bid to explain the situation of her comic book superhero-like patients to their relatives and loved ones, psychiatrist Dr. Staple explained conditions of *The Overseer*, *The Beast*, *The Horde* multiple alter egos, and the super-intelligent *Glass* as delusions of grandeur by saying the following in one scene:

Comic books are an obsession. Have you ever been to a comic book convention? They sell teen TV shows there. They are selling things. Your friends and family members have lost their perspective [...] comic books are not valid history (Shyamalan, 2019, 1:28:26).

By virtue of the impact the superhero genre is making among indigenous Nigerian comic publishers as a style for culture portrayal, superhero comics have become valid socio-historical objects worthy of attention particularly because it cultivates strong fandom communities influenced by the characters and portrayals who, in turn, influences the society and culture. The world is not new to or short of real heroes and heroines, individuals whose daring deeds changed the course of humanity for good. The world is also not a stranger to real villains, persons consigned to infamy because they unleashed bedlam and pain on people. History is also replete with mythological heroes, heroines, and villains. The American comic industry merely repurposed these natural phenomena to create the fantastical superhero narrative and turned it to a successful culture industry product with millions of regular audiences and fandom communities around the world.

As already established, the superhero comic genre is a wholly American concept and it propagates American culture and ideology. In its eighty-eight (88) years of existence, the tentacles of the American superhero comics have penetrated many countries, gained followership in terms of audiences and fans as well as artistic adoption of style, and become a commercial powerhouse in the global culture industry. In their analysis of the global influence and relevance of Hollywood in the audio-visual culture industry, Perren and Schatz (2004) identifies three critical features behind the success of the establishment. The features are the industrial aspect comprising the film production processes and its value chain, the institutional aspect comprising the handful of powerful movies studios that control the movies produced, and, finally, the formal-aesthetic or the characteristic narrative or storytelling style. The superhero comic industry replicates the same organisational system in the operation of its processes. First, it is a culture industry product of the books and press category dominated by two main publishers namely, again, DC and Marvel Comics, both of whom follow the same aesthetic style and control sixty percent (60%) of the global comics market between them (Alverson, 2025). Second, the superhero comic industry is a cross-fertilised culture industry product whose titles are adapted for various other media forms to generate new ways of experiencing the product. The first scenario is a duopolistic domination of the superhero comic business while the second case relies on symbiotic ties of the superhero comic

industry with, first, Hollywood for adaption of comics to movies and animation and, second, with other allied industries for games, toys, and other merchandise.

The operational system of the superhero comic industry reveals an important duality about its nature as a culture industry. From a Marxist perspective, the superhero concept is a culture industry mechanism that serves as a political economic tool of the capitalist system while, also, acting as an instrument of cultural expansion that, through its commercially viable creative enterprise, is able to influence audiences and fans globally with specific experiences. Insofar as globalisation continues to coalesce countries into a global community, innovation in the sphere of communication technologies does not abate, and capitalist political economic system remains dominant in the world, both perspectives will be mutually inclusive in the interpretation or description of the culture industry. To say that the nature of the culture industry is exclusively either perspective will be naïve. Recognising the concurrent validity of both perspectives does not negate the merits and demerits of either. Rather, it allows for recognising the intricate connectedness and complex organisation of the superhero culture industry implemented by powerful Western ideological forces and shifts attention to matters material to reality of the times. In this regard, the contemplation of how comic traditions from other parts of the world can participate in the superhero comic industry without losing their identity is pertinent. In other words, the material subject given the current reality of the world and culture industry is how comic creators and publishers from lesser known or struggling comic traditions can etch their presence in the superhero comic industry and effectively portray their culture, identity, philosophy, language, and other indices peculiar to their socio-historic experience and development as a people. For the Nigerian superhero comic publishers generally and Comic Republic specifically, from whom *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* superhero comics portraying Yoruba culture originates, this issue is significant because they are inevitably entering a terrain of well-funded, long-standing institutional ideology with solid audience and fan culture and expectation.

2.7 Fans, Fandom, and Superhero Comics

Superhero comics, like any other culture product of the audio-visual and press entertainment industry, thrives on its appeal to audiences and fans. However, neither audiences nor fans accrue

easily. The media are a deliberate institution that harvests a wide range of demographic, psychological, behavioural, social, economic, and values and lifestyle information to prepare and position the content they produce. In the fiercely competitive media market, knowledge and precision are non-negotiable requirements necessary to formulate a strategy that targets the right audience group(s) for the right benefits to accrue. The necessity for a knowledge and precision-based media strategy is suggested in the uses and gratification theory. Being an audience-centric theory premised on how people select and consume the media, the logic of the uses and gratification theory is that people are deliberate media consumers who actively consume certain media or media content in order to gratify specific needs, desires, and tastes they have. By inversion, discerning media institutions must rely on knowledge of audience behaviour to frame precision content that appeals to and gratifies various needs. The theoretical premise of uses and gratification is useful to approach audiencing on two levels. The first instance is the broad audience level in which, invoking the description of (Jenkins, 2007), people merely consume media programmes but never talk back or accentuate the brand status of programmes while the second level concerns fans and fandom as an audience type.

While it will be appropriate to define a fan, Linden and Linden (2017) note that there is no consensus definition of “fan” and various authors have attempted to identify various types of fans. Duffet (2018) adds that there is intellectual monopolisation of fan research in that television and new media scholars have historically dominated the subject. In the absence of a stable definition, and considering the skew in fan research towards a few aspects of the culture industry, Barton (2014) observes that most works on fandom tend to focus on what fans do rather than what fans are – that is fandom practices. In the interest of clarity and exactness, fan culture is conceptualised in an explanatory manner, which, following Barton’s observation, focuses on fandom practices.

For its instrumentality to the popularisation of the superhero comic culture, the nature of fandom regarding what superhero comic fans do requires contemplation. To put it simply, fandom is extended audience; it refers to fan groups distinct for their enthusiastic and devoted consumption of and practices related to the use of culture industry products. Considered within the context of the uses and gratification theory, fans are passionate audiences who enthusiastically use culture industry products to gratify specific personal needs and tastes. In practice, fans aggregate their

fascination with and enthusiasm for culture industry products and/or characters into a community of individuals with shared interests. Fans express the identity and power of their group through materialisation of the imaginary or giving fictitious culture industry ideas the significance of reality. Fans achieve their act of materialisation of the imaginary through a variety of methods such as discourse and fan art (referring to images of characters created by the culture industry that fans artistically render for various purposes outside of the original creators uses). Other methods they use are cosplay (short for ‘costume play’ meaning dressing up in costumes of characters or wearing make-up to look like characters) and fan fiction. To fans therefore, culture industry products such as superhero comics are symbolic artefacts that they actively engage with constructing their own interpretations, creating their own meanings, and extending their value beyond the original message. To illustrate, a regular audience might love superhero comic narratives and follow every Hollywood superhero movie for entertainment purpose after which each movie becomes a disposable commodity because it has gratified the audience’s entertainment need. A fan, on the other hand, will engage with the same product in more intense and significant ways in line with the fandom practices mentioned above.

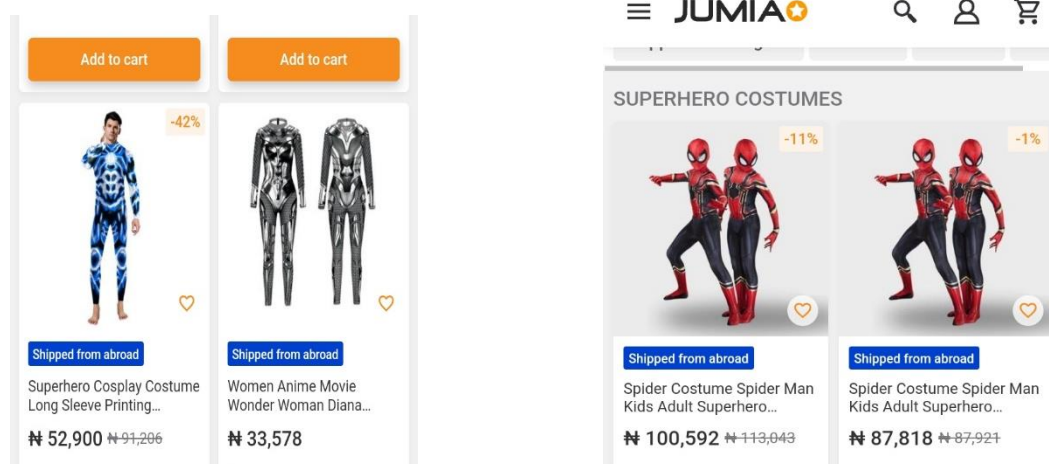
Based on fandom practices, Fuschillo (2020) indicates that fan actions venture into the sphere of [social] semiotics. Importantly, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) submit that meanings are processed through the lens of social semiotics or construction because meaning making is a value-based activity and subjective affair that no outsider can understand or appreciate unless otherwise inducted into it. From a meaning making perspective, there is little doubt that fandom practices have social semiotic justification on the fact that fans’ constructions of meaning and value related to culture industry products have no cultural and behavioural significance to individuals outside a fan group and not subscribed to or socialised in its views and practices. Indeed, Jenkins (2018) emphasises that fandom is a participatory and status conferring activity by describing the phenomena as an alternative social community, a mode of reception and consequent action, a system supporting production of particular products, and a set of critical and interpretive perspectives. Still, perhaps because it is inherently a subculture that departs from the mainstream, some regular audiences and other social constituencies may estimate fandom practices as obsessive fetishism of the make-believe. Within the context of the participatory dynamism and reality of contemporary culture industry influences on the society however, it would be shortsighted to

dismiss fandom simply as fringe, fanatical, and of no social or commercial currency. Considering that the locus of fandom is specific group practices, it (fandom) is also a way of life defined by symbolic uses of culture industry artefacts, a subculture whose adherents perform a status conferral function on a culture industry product that is the object of their fascination or interest. The status conferral function of fandom practices and participatory dynamism are pivotal resources through which fans make their impact in three spheres of influence namely the relationship between the culture industry and fans, the relationship between fans as in-groups, and the relationship between fans and the society.

To buttress the three dimensions in which fandom enacts and sustains participatory dynamism, it is necessary to keep the superhero comic specificity in mind. Fans of the superhero genre constitute a cult followership and use character paraphernalia as artefacts of in-group identity construction, representation, and relations. In spite of their in-group nature, superhero comic fandom, like other types of media fandoms, have the capacity to emerge into the mainstream and influence popular culture, a probability Linden and Linden (2017) confirm noting that the large amount of Hollywood superhero movies have impacted popular culture since the twentieth century. Cosplay or dressing up as a superhero, for instance, is a common fan practice which may appear outlandish to both members of a society and regular audiences of superhero comics whose engagement with the genre is limited to just entertainment gratification. Yet, the practice of dressing in outlandish superhero costumes or movie character outfits has morphed into regular popular culture and is typically on display at comic conventions and movie premieres, including, also, individual fetishes showcased on social media. Not surprisingly, the themed culture industry character dressing has crossed into Nigeria. On TikTok for example, Nigerian content creators make videos in which they appear in superhero comic themed costumes while during the Lagos premiere of the Hollywood *Barbie* movie in 2023, Nigerian celebrities and influencers dressed in pink mimicking *Barbie* (see Tuase, 2023). In addition, the Halloween costume dressing tradition is gradually becoming a popular culture trend in Nigeria as well. These instances illustrate the relationship between a fictitious product originally created by the culture industry, the fans who embraced it as a way of life and further popularised it, and the society influenced by both the culture industry product and its fans. It is testament to the participatory dynamic where meaning and value are a co-created experience. Figure 2.8 below shows superhero cosplay items for sale in Nigeria on a digital

commerce website underscoring the reach of both the superhero comic ideology and fandom in the country.

Figure 2.8: Superhero cosplay artefacts on sale in Nigeria



Source: Jumia (2024)

Whereas fandom practices have real life applications, fan culture is first technologically deterministic before becoming a popular culture trend (Hellekson, 2018; Lamerichs, 2018; Yin, 2023). To be emphatic, the formation of fan groups, the participatory nature of fandom interactions, the ability of fan groups to confer status on culture products, and the social inroads fandom practices have achieved in terms of escaping the confines of isolated subculture practices to mainstream popular culture all prosper on technology. In the course of this discourse, technology has appeared for the umpteenth time as a vital driver in both the culture dynamics of the world and culture industry. In respect of fandom, the internet and innovative technologies of communication have accelerated the ascendancy of fan culture not just within a particular country but also across the world in continuation of the globalisation phenomenon. Fans organise themselves into online communities on social media platforms such as Facebook, X, and Reddit; use wikis, webpages, blogs, and podcasts to promote fan culture and also exploit other technologies such as live video streaming, message boards, and chat rooms to steer conversations and interactions that portray their identity. The superhero comic fan culture does not depart from this norm. Given that superhero comic is an American product, the internet is awash with superhero

fan groups mainly domiciled in and administered by Americans on each of the technological medium itemised previously. In Nigeria as well, superhero fan groups are beginning to emerge on the social media. Regarding Comic Republic, whose African superhero comics are the concern of this study, fans have created fan communities for discussing their titles. Groups such as “The Comic Republic” and “Comic Republic” are restricted fan groups hosted by Nigerian fans on Facebook specifically to nurture Comic Republic fandom and promote the superhero ideology generally.

2.8 Evolution of Comic Industry in Nigeria

Although Liu (2022) argues that comic culture is not universal, it could be ludicrous to suggest that comics are absolutely absent in all forms in the media mix of some societies. The probability of that lack is unimaginable in our present world midwived by many innovative media technologies. Rather, in whatever form and stage of development it exists – whether it is sophisticated, embryonic, or rudimentary – it is better to view comic culture through the lens of social context. Di Paola and Tirino (2024) similarly emphasised this line of thought stating that it is important to analyse comic culture development within the context of prevailing sociocultural and technological environments. This context specific principle is fundamental in analysing the Nigerian comic industry and culture.

Keeping the context specific principle in mind, any attempt, brief or elaborate, to put the Nigerian comics industry in historical and contemporary perspective must begin with admitting the challenge of sourcing information, mainly because there is lack of institutional preservation of comics of yesteryears and critical interest in the Nigerian comic industry generally. Pijnaker (2018b) also encountered and emphasised this problem noting that information about Nigerian comics is scanty and existed in pieces scattered across the internet and forums where people occasionally discussed the topic with nostalgia. Additionally, interviews that creators of early Nigerian comics held with journalists are veritable sources of information from which this study drew insights. Given the institutional problems of preservation and information, the historical evolution of comics in Nigeria is at the risk of suffering factual distortion at best or forgotten at worse. For earlier generations, millennials and their forebears, the days of eagerly anticipating and reading Nigerian comic magazines are a forgotten period remembered fondly with nostalgic relish;

the younger Generation Z sense of historic appreciation of that era is *tabula rasa*: wiped clean and unaware of what came before. Therefore, the tendency that the current generation perceives the contemporary, largely digital comics as first of its kind in the country is real because of this institutional failure.

The division of the operating environment of comic publication in Nigeria is in two broad timelines distinguished by the concentration of publishers, technological innovations, and type of content. The first timeline is the period from 1976 to 1999 when comic creators and publishers were few and the frameworks for innovating the media of mass communication, as we know it in the twenty-first century, were either still gestating or not yet conceived. The second timeline is from the 2000s upwards, a period characterised by an explosion in indigenous comic creators and publishers buoyed by technological innovations such as internet, digital publication, and mobile applications.

2.8.1 First-Generation of Indigenous Nigerian Comics (1976-1999): Context and Characteristics

The fact is already established that Wale Adenuga's *Ikebe Super* is the forerunner of the first-generation indigenous Nigerian comics that captured the social, political, and economic realities of Nigeria in the late 1970s to the mid-1990s (see section 1.1 in Chapter One). If any doubt exists about the impact of *Ikebe Super*, its circulation success removes it. In an interview, Adenuga mentioned that the publication sold up to six hundred thousand (600, 000) copies a month (Onwudiwe, 2021). *Ikebe Super*'s success inspired other creators to publish titles in its [*Ikebe Super*] format, that been humorous comic magazine. Consequently, within eight years of breaking into limelight, *Ikebe Super* shared the spotlight with other publications notably *Nackson* [initially Dauda] *the Sexy Guy*, created by Abiodun Akanni Ademoroti and first appearing in 1982 (Uzoatu, 2023) as well as *Fun Times* created by Moses Osawe and David Lasekan appearing first in 1984 (Uhakheme, 2022). For a conservative society that treated sexually explicit or suggestive matters with a shroud of taboo, *Nackson the Sexy Guy* was a bold, nonconformist publication that staked its niche in sexually exciting content. The unattractive, unrefined, pot-bellied, and incurably randy *Nackson* character was full of lewd innuendos, always seeking out ways to exploit unsuspecting

females to gratify his base libidinal cravings. In the case of *Fun Times* magazine, a memorable character is *Benbella*, a skillful and outstanding detective who hunted and haunted criminals; *Benbella* was a nightmare to criminals and succor to vulnerable, law-abiding citizens.

The trio of *Ikebe Super*, *Nackson the Sexy Guy*, and *Benbella* are noteworthy first-generation Nigerian comics which told relatable stories that captured the cultural soul and social character of Nigerian experiences in everyday language rich in the whimsical nuances of Nigerian conversations. Unlike now where there is proliferation of the superhero personality in Nigerian comics, these first-generation comics had no superheroes wearing body-fitting costumes possessing superpowers nor where the stories about extraterrestrial invasions or missions to save humanity from doomsday cataclysm. Their content were more focused on mirroring prevailing social situations of Nigeria starting from the time they appeared in last quarter of the twentieth century. In this way, even if they were majorly humourous, their subject matter focused on topical realities people could identify with. The journalistic linkage between the creators and their comic magazines may have informed this feature of the first-generation comics.

Reference is often made to the *Yellow Kid* comic strip to indicate the connection between comics and journalism. The same connection exists in the case of Nigeria whose newspapers have a strong comic strip and cartoon culture. In the absence of a resilient comic industry, one-way Nigerians have historically encountered and consumed sequential art is through newspaper comic strips through which cartoonists use fictional characters to:

1. Satirize social, political, and economic situations in the country,
2. Teach or advocate the adoption of certain values,
3. Create whimsical comic relief, or
4. Tell serialised fictional stories, for example *Terror Muda* in Vanguard newspaper.

In respect of the first-generation of Nigerian comic creators' journalistic background as cartoonists, *Fun Times* comic magazine was published by Daily Times newspaper where the creators were previously freelance cartoonists (Uhakheme, 2022) while Wale Adenuga was chief cartoonist for a campus magazine (Njoku, 2023; Uzoatu, 2020). Nevertheless, the presence of a pool of successful cartoonists did not translate to a sustained, vibrant Nigerian comics industry in that era. Despite this failure, cartoonists such as Wale Adenuga, Moses Osakwe, and Abiodun

Ademoroti, not minding that their publications no longer exist, left noteworthy legacies in the history and evolution of Nigerian comics for which their contributions deserve recognition just as pioneer creators of comics in places like Japan, Europe, and the United States are recognised.

Unlike its sequential art comic book or magazine counterpart, cartoon as a genre does not lack critical attention from the Nigerian academic community. Adetola and Oluyi (2020) conducted a survey to assess audience perception of editorial cartoons in two national newspapers namely *The Punch* and *The Guardian*. The researchers submitted that editorial cartoons use creative techniques that makes them an effective communication device; their conclusion rests on the finding that of the one hundred and fifty (150) respondents, a substantial sixty-seven percent (67.1%) viewed editorial cartoon as an essential part of the newspaper and they read it habitually either for entertainment (49.3%) or information (25.4%). Similarly, Omolabi and Abiodun (2020) conducted qualitative analyses of eight (8) selected cartoons from three national newspapers namely *The Nation*, *The Sun*, and *Daily Trust*, their objective was to examine the multimodal ways the cartoons create meaning. From their analyses, the duo stated that the multimodal devices (vector, colour, and nuanced settings) the cartoonists used enhanced the meaning of their messages, creating a holistically coherent and meaningful intersection between linguistic and non-linguistic resources and helping them (cartoonists) achieve their objective of satirizing political situations in a variety of ways. In another study, Egbe (2024) conducted a multimodal analysis of cartoons in three national newspapers namely *Vanguard*, *Business Day*, and *The Punch* published between 2020 and 2021. The researcher found that the cartoons are noticeably multimodal, copiously using a variety of non-linguistic resources (images, colour, vector, space etc.) to pass meaningful political messages to readers in a socially contextual manner. The interest of Sani et al. (2012) was the analysis of lexical constructions of satire in Nigerian political cartoons for which they used a qualitative method to dissect one hundred and twenty (120) cartoons published between 2007 and 2010 in *Daily Trust* and *Vanguard* newspapers. The researchers found that in line with social trends, cartoonists are constantly evolving creatively in terms of the language they use; their analyses revealed that cartoonists use a blend of word coinage, loan words, denotation and connotation as well as word class to pass their satirical messages. In a more situation-specific context, Asiru and Bello (2023) studied how Nigerian cartoons captured the Covid-19 health crises in the country for which they adopted the qualitative methodology to analyse ten (10) randomly selected cartoons published between March and April of 2020. Their findings revealed that the

cartoons were humourous, depicted the dire situation and social condition of the country, and require contextual familiarity to produce and understand. In addition, the researchers further found that the cartoons adopted different multimodal resources to satirize Nigerians' notions of the Covid-19 pandemic. The trajectory of these studies shows that cartoons are an active political communication and social context tool, typically satirizing the Nigerian sociopolitical and economic situation.

2.8.2 Digital Comic Generation (2000 – to date): Context and Characteristics

Post-first-generation Nigerian comics, the Internet and digital technology has revolutionized Nigeria's media landscape. Whereas the comic industry in Nigeria has not become considerably stronger, the new generation of digital comic creators are aspiring to take the comic industry in new directions towards achieving both local and international reckoning chiefly through the superhero narrative. The new generation of digital comic publishers, such as Comic Republic, use the affordances of digital technology to create colourful and compelling sequential art and animated visuals in ways their predecessors could not. As such, one common trait many of the digital comic publishers share is combining animated productions with still comics. This is partly because both animation and comics are allied industries and partly because neither animation nor comics industry is at an advanced stage of development in Nigeria but the available technology is compact, affordable, and reasonably applicable for the production, promotion, and distribution of animated productions and comics.

The demise of the first-generation comics was hastened partly by stifling economic challenges which made the cost of production and distribution of copies unsustainable even as sales revenue dropped (Uhakheme, 2022; Onwudiwe, 2021). For the digital comics' generation, the drudgery and logistics involved in printing, distribution, and physical sale of copies at newsstands is eliminated by innovative technologies such as the internet and application (app, for short) software installed on mobile devices and computers to perform specifically designed tasks. Digital comic publishers and creators:

- 1) Host their website on the internet,
- 2) Develop and encourage audiences to download and install their app for easy access,

- 3) Integrate a variety of audio-visual content and social media to enhance fan engagement and experience, and
- 4) Integrate online paywall systems to process orders, payments, and subscriptions for copies.

The consequent multimedia user experience created is immersive and interactive which encourages the formation of a culture of fervent fandom in which the audience are not merely readers but co-creators who use fan art to imagine scenarios or depict situations unrelated to the original comic stories. This fandom is observable for Comic Republic for which fan community groups such as ‘Comic Republic’ or ‘The Comic Republic’ exist on Facebook. For the indigenous superhero comic publisher, this helps to foster and sustain the superhero cult thus giving the publisher the incentive to create more.

In spite of the fact that the digital revolution has opened promising paths for the Nigerian comics industry, the sort of collaboration and coordination that made the American superhero genre powerful and popular is lacking locally in the following respect:

- 1) The absence of media cross-fertilisation in which allied culture industries collaborate to expand the value chain by rendering comic stories in forms other than their original version resulting in comic themed video games, animations, movies, toys, and merchandises,
- 2) The absence of intellectual legitimacy which confers on comics the value of a critical social artifact through which nuances of actual, imaginary, and aspirational histories are expressed, and
- 3) The absence of purposeful government support for the comic industry, or institutional intentionality.

2.9 Nigerian Culture Industry and Yoruba Culture Portrayal

It suffices to reemphasise that comics as a part of the culture industry are an outlier product in both Nigeria’s books and press industry and general culture industry because the value chain has not received strategic development and its full range of possibilities are unexplored and neglected. Having said that, the Nigerian culture industry has achieved much of its local and international recognition through the music and movies sectors. Yoruba musicians have been active in the music

industry using indigenous genres such as *juju* and *apala* to convey the culture and philosophy of the Yoruba people (Abiolu et al., 2022; Fadipe & Salawu, 2022). Unfortunately, indigenous Yoruba music genres have almost completely disappeared from the culture industry topography of Nigeria because they are seen as less fashionable and have, thus, succumbed to Westernised brands such as Afrobeats hip-hop whose steady rise began in the early 2000s (Akpan, 2022). At least since the second decade of the twenty-first century, the current crop of Afro-hip-hop artistes have been making remarkable international strides performing all over the world, securing deals with international recording labels, and winning coveted international awards such as the Grammy. In terms of lyrical content and message however, the music is devoid of indigenous cultural values with lyrics glorifying topics bothering on perversion, indecency, misogyny, crime, ostentation, gangsterism, and violence (Akpan, 2022; Salawu & Fadipe, 2022). The traction Afro-hip-hop, also called *Naija* hip-hop, is gaining is essentially the Americanisation of Nigerian music, a situation responsible for the decline of the Yoruba musical signatures of the past. The Americanisation of Nigerian music phenomenon is glaring on social media where both fans of *Naija* hip-hop and the musicians use nomination for and winning a Grammy as mark of good music and success.

In Nigeria's Nollywood film industry, Yoruba culture has been recently receiving critical acclaim with productions such as *Seven Doors*, *Jagun* (warrior), *Anikulapo*, and *Ayinla* on Netflix, the digital streaming platform. Ironically, Netflix announced in December 2024 that it would significantly reduce its funding policy for Nigerian producers stating that it is unable to recoup its investments. In addition, the streaming platform also laments that producers receive huge amounts to produce movies of a specified standard but only use a little portion for the project and divert the rest to fund their ostentatious lifestyles (see Chima, 2024). This means the generous funds that have been the backbone of outstanding Yoruba cultural movies seeming to be making international traction via Netflix is about to disappear returning it (Yoruba film industry) to the days when the industry was viewed as producing cheap and uninteresting movies even by the standard of local audiences. In addition, audiences of Yoruba movies abroad have been lamenting that they cannot access the productions on Netflix, some alleging deliberate suppression, some rationalising the situation as a function of Netflix's focus on tailoring content to regional tastes. Indeed, Mohammed (2025) and Mohamed and Fawe (2025) affirmed that the alliance Netflix-Nollywood have advantages but cautioned that tendencies of cultural imperialism are real making it necessary for

Nollywood to adopt, “a conscious representational model to appeal to and retain its Nigerian audience” (p. 1).

The Netflix issue and case of the music industry reinforces the problem of institutional intentionality in Nigeria regarding the absence of a strong culture industry and its consequences on the framing and packaging of Yoruba culture as a cultural product. The situation reemphasises the fact that the local culture industry is not making significant impact internationally.

The subject of institutional intentionality has repeatedly featured in relation to the Yoruba culture and role of stakeholders in entrenching and promoting the legacy of the culture. A major implication of Nigeria’s problem of institutional preservation is that it increases the potential for the loss and/or distortion of significant historical events thereby creating a situation where there is little or no knowledge about the past in the socio-historic evolution of, in the case of this study, the culture industry. The UNESCO-FCS (2009) culture industry framework contain indices that emphasise institutional intentionality as an indispensable factor. The framework lists education and training (for transmission of cultural knowledge, skills, and history), archiving and preserving (for preservation of tangible and intangible cultural properties for posterity and re-use), and equipment and supporting materials (for provision of requisite financial and physical infrastructure) as independent but transversal domains that perform critical sustenance roles across all the six main culture industries. All the transversal domains of the culture industry UNESCO-FCS framework can be subsumed into the institutional intentionality framework for which the Nigerian culture industry fails.

In spite of the bleak picture occasioned by lack of institutional intentionality in Nigeria’s culture industry, there seem to be some attempts to repurpose culture industry products such as comics, video games, and animations for representation of cultural and national values and identity. For example, on the recommendation of Nigeria’s National Orientation Agency (NOA) to curtail the proliferation of foreign animated content, the federal government has approved the nationalisation of cartoon content to achieve seventy percent (70%) local output with emphasis on promoting indigenous heroes, ideology, culture, and values chiefly to children from an impressionable age (NOA, 2024). Nevertheless, as Oke (2023) observes, government policy for the culture industry is

typically propaganda and nothing impactful comes out of it. For now, it is best to have cautious optimism regarding the NOA influenced policy direction.

To add another dimension to the hurdles specifically confronting the development of the press and books culture industry in Nigeria, the reading culture in the country cannot escape mentioning. The aversion of large portions of the population to reading and consumption of literature has long been recognised and bemoaned. In the words of Hundeyin (2024):

when the half of the audience that has greater purchasing power doesn't have a recreational reading habit, it means one can't either earn a living as a writer in a market of >100 million literate people or one has to hyper target [...] to a niche audience [...]

This factor is contributory to the fate of comics as literature in Nigeria yet, it would seem to be a recent phenomenon considering that the first-generation of indigenous comics enjoyed cult readership up to the 1990s when they disappeared. Parents and adults tend to forbid children and teenagers from reading the comics for their tendency to touch subjects considered taboo and explicit for youngsters. Nevertheless, an underground culture of smuggling and reading existed among the barely legal demographic. Perhaps the sequential art nature of comics was attractive to the audience and it disguised a latent aversion for consuming text heavy literature. In the current internet and social media dispensation, significant portions of the Nigerian audience have demonstrated preference for audio-visual content as opposed to text inclined content. Given that the current generation of Nigerian comics are digital and multimedia in nature, the reading culture might not be much hindrance.

Kunzle (1973) emphasised that an important feature of comics is that they convey a story that is both moral and topical. This means that comics, whether of the superhero type or any other subject, are just as powerful as television, radio, and newspapers in influencing audiences. Indeed, countries in the Global North have long realised the potential of the seemingly pictorial juvenile media – the American superhero comic genre demonstrates this. In Belgium, *Tintin*, a comic book about the adventures of a young investigative journalist, is a national cultural icon such that for the Euro 2024 football tournament, the Belgian football team wore a jersey themed after the appearance of the comic character. The elevation of a fictional comic character to the status of a

national cultural icon affirms that the culture industry is a creator of cultural heroes as Hofstede et al. (2010) maintained in their Onion model (see section 2.4). Figure 2.9 below shows the habitual depiction of *Tintin* and the Belgian football team's Euro 2024 kit. The exclusion of comics from the media landscape of Nigeria is clearly a missed opportunity for the country as a whole and Yoruba culture particularly. Indeed, the fact that the Yoruba society significantly omit comics from the mix of their culture industry amount to the underestimation of a viable and vital means of participating in a critical global industry and creating characters that portray their culture and values to various audiences.

Figure 2.9: Tintin comic themed Belgian football team kit at Euro 2024



Source: Sky News (2024)

In view of the absence of institutional intentionality in strengthening the Nigerian comics industry, it is to the credit of publishers like Comic Republic that they have managed to remain afloat and publish content that portrays indigenous culture and heritage, which, in the case of this study, is Yoruba. A point clarified in section 2.3.1 was that given the dire state of the Yoruba culture and language, portrayals regarding the Yoruba people must be a strategic mission of redemption as opposed to an inconsistent or frivolous activity for entertainment. Regarding comics, a clear path to achieving this is contained in Kunzle's (1973) insistence that the medium can carry moral and topical subjects. To this extent, the portrayal of Yoruba culture in both *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* are topical subjects worthy of analysing.

2.10 Media-Audience Duality of Culture Portrayal

There is just one feature central to and recurrent in the entirety of this chapter: acts or actions. All the intellectual theorisations, postulations, categorisations, and concepts fundamentally revolve around the simple performance of acts or actions. Concerns central to the performance of actions relating to culture and culture industry are typically subjective in nature, as is the justification of the reality and interpretations individuals or social units give to them. In typical intellectual culture, the simplicity of topics such as culture, culture industry and their products, fandom, and portrayals of culture in the culture industry as acts or actions may be masked by terminologies and complex analyses. Yet, it is important to strip theoretical intellectualisations of social phenomena to the most basic purpose from which other essences or functions emanate. In the context of this line of thought, the “existence precedes essence” slogan of the existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre reflects the reduction of perspectives in this chapter to simply acts or actions. This reductionism does not diminish or dismiss critical interrogations and reflections on the subject of concern, rather, the intention is to expose or summarise the simple core of the main concept in relation to the variety of ways people express and experience them. This is especially important for this concluding piece of discourse connecting culture portrayal, spheres of meanings between culture industry producers on the one hand, and fans on the other hand.

There is no refuting the fact that the culture industry producers such as comic publishers are in the business of portrayal of actions; the type of actions portrayed and motivations for the portrayals are what Adorno and Horkheimer (1944/2002) analysed. The portrayals in the superhero comic genre have generated criticisms for the effects they have on real life cultural systems and actions of people as examined in section 2.6 of this chapter. The criticisms are a type of media-audience/fans relationship in which culture products are subjected to diverse analyses, interpretations, and points of views. Cultural portrayal is a contentious terrain for superhero comics for which the industry is criticised for doing too little too late and with insincerity especially in terms of portrayals of black Africans. Scholars such as Asante & Pindi (2020), Burroughs (2018), Benash (2021), Lebron (2018), Song (2023) and Peppard (2018) have criticised superhero comics for appropriating the Black body for White objectives. Consider for example that DC’s anthology series for *The Joker*, the maniacal arch villain of *Batman*, titled *Joker: The World* takes the so-called Clown Prince of Crime around the world showing his criminal exploits in Spain, Germany,

Italy, Brazil, Mexico, Czech Republic, Türkiye, Japan, Korea, Poland, Argentina and, for Africa, Cameroon (DC, 2024). Cameroonian comic publisher, Zebra Comics, is in charge of giving the character an African flavour. As shown in the images in figure 2.10, the character has been given an African appearance in furtherance of the project.

Figure 2.10: The Joker adapted for African exploits and typical Caucasian Joker



Source: Zebra Comics (2024)

In the case of *T'Challa the Black Panther*, the acclaimed first superhero of [Southern] African ancestry, a number of critical analyses also revealed several facets of its framing which permits the questioning of its 'indigenous African' credentials. Scholars criticise the fact that its original creators are Caucasian and subsequent writers are not of indigenous African descent (Burroughs, 2018; Lebron, 2018) and the insular isolationism of *Wakanda*, the fictional technologically advanced country of the *Black Panther*, over pan-Africanism (Lebron, 2018). Furthermore, scholars also frown at the reduction of various African languages and cultures to one fictitious whole in the comic story (Asante & Pindi, 2020) as well as its orientation towards experiences of Black Americans as against that of Blacks living in Africa (Benash, 2021; Song, 2023). These discontent with the existing, American culture industry fabricated "African" superheroes indicate that the search for comics with indigenous grounding must begin internally since externally

engineered characters like *Black Panther* have questionable credentials, hence the emergence of publishers like Comic Republic.

For a fact, controversies relating to cultural portrayal abound in Hollywood from where most superhero comic movie adaptations and other fictional productions emerge. Whereas the easy path is to label these controversial views as racial intolerance, it is reasonable to contemplate the possibility that the culture industry hegemony may be venturing too far into sensitive cultural terrains on account of diversity, equity, and inclusion such that the line between legitimate promotion of inclusivity and forceful imposition of an absurd ideology becomes blurred. To be fair, tinkering with characters in a narrative, whether fictional or mythological, founded in the socio-historic and cultural experiences of a people can be contentious and controversial. These are situations which exist simultaneously, thus making culture industry portrayal a cogent matter in which the options available to societies are either to definitively claim ownership of how their culture is portrayed or surrender it and risk profit-oriented culture industry corporations to revise it for their own purposes. Over the years, a number of prominent historical subjects have been mired in this controversial scenario both as a subject of culture industry portrayal and beliefs people hold: the physical looks and racial identity of Cleopatra, Jesus Christ, and ancient Egyptians are controversial subjects that continue to fray sensitive cultural nerves between Africans, Caucasians, and Arabs. The following are a few examples of recent culture portrayal controversies:

1. For its 2023 release of *Little Mermaid* movie, originally a storybook, Disney cast a Black woman to play *Ariel*, the fish woman. An intense racial backlash followed the decision on the ground that *Ariel* was never and should never be Black. On social media, hash tags such as #notmyariel trended (see Willingham, 2022).
2. Concerning comic superheroes specifically, the suggestion that DC is contemplating a Black *Superman* led to yet another round of backlash even as some fans question why Marvel scripted the previously White *Captain America* to handover the character to a Black actor when Steve Rogers, erstwhile *Captain America*, eventually aged and could not continue the role.

3. For the 2025 HBO *Harry Potter* series adapted for television, the decision was to cast a Black man, Paapa Essiedu, as *Professor Severus Snape*, one of the wizard lecturers at the fictional *Hogwarts School of Wizardry* who plays significant and consequential roles in the Potter story. That decision led to uproar in the *Harry Potter* audience and fandom world, the argument being that the author painted precise physical attributes of the Professor in the book that automatically excludes a Black person from playing the character (see Tassi, 2025).
4. For an upcoming Hollywood adaptation of the Greek mythology *Odyssey*, the proposal is that the Kenyan-American actress Lupita Nyong'o would act the goddess *Athena*. Again, there is outright audience rejection of the idea because casting a Black woman as an obviously White goddess is pollution of the Greek cultural legacy (see Kokkinidis, 2025).

Consistent with the portrayal or representation controversy, a 2019 survey by Statista (2023) revealed that regarding whether or not more Blacks should feature as superheroes, twenty-six (26%) Caucasian Americans answered in the affirmative, eight percent (8%) wanted fewer Black superheroes, thirty-one percent (31%) wanted the number of Black superheroes to remain as they currently are, and thirty-six percent (36%) refused to indicate their opinion on the subject. Regarding the racial composition of characters and actors in comic products by universe, Karim (2018) in a *Forbes* article tallied all the actors who played significant roles in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) superhero movies; this produced one hundred and ninety-three (193) actors. Of this number sixty-one percent (61%) are Caucasian, twenty percent (20%) are African American majority of whom acted in the *Black Panther* movie, eight percent (8%) are multiracial, four percent (4%) belonged to the Spanish/Latino group, five percent (5%) were of East Asian descent and the South Asia and Middle East/Arab group each had one percent (1%). For their large-scale content analysis of modern age comics, Facciani et al. (2015) randomly selected twenty-eight (28) comics published by DC, Marvel, and Image between 1991 and 2005. Their interests were race and gender distribution among the three thousand, four hundred and fifty-four protagonists (3,454), two thousand, four hundred and sixty-eight (2,468) antagonists, and twenty-three thousand, two hundred and forty-three (23, 243) total characters they analysed. On gender, the researchers found that men disproportionately outnumber women, the former gender recording eighty-six percent (86%) representation; on race, White characters generally dominated with eighty-six percent

(86%) presence even as the race dominated the protagonist role with seventy-six percent (76%) and antagonist with seventy-five percent (75%). A picture of lopsided representation thus trails the comic culture industry for which the previously mentioned examples of character diversity and inclusion drive, albeit generating controversial and acrimonious views among audiences and fans, were implemented to remedy the situation.

Keeping the foregoing in mind, the connection between culture and the culture industry is thus apparent: absent or less portrayed cultures get to be visible. Even then, attempts to transform the culture industry into a vessel of broader cultural representation often creates inter and intra-racial tensions among audiences as shown in the cited instances. As for the superhero comic genre, most African publishers will inevitably have to align with styles of the dominant models for traction and visibility given that their societies lack a strong comic culture and they are seeking to break into and use an industry with already firmly established models and fan cultures for the portrayal of African cultural heritage. Inevitably, cultural portrayals in superhero comics will always operate within the ambit of interpretation. The interpretation will involve, on the one hand, creators and publishers who frame their narratives in a particular way based on their interpretations of the culture and objectives they intend to achieve and, on the other hand, audiences and fans who have their own idealised uses of culture industry products and interpretations of the culture. The Yoruba themed African superhero comics published by Comic Republic are not immune to this same duality of perspective regarding cultural portrayal. As such, *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* as acts or actions framed in the superhero comic tradition intended to depict Yoruba culture to persons who live and experience the acts or actions of the culture are candidates of interpretations. The basis of such localised and differing interpretations will bother on personal knowledge, perspectives, and worldviews of both creators and audiences/fans regarding their experiences of the socio-historic development of the Yoruba culture within the time-space-processes framework.

Recalling the Hofstede et al. (2010) layers of culture Onion model comprising symbols, rituals, heroes, and values, the provenance history of the superhero concept does not exclude Nigerian comic publishers like Comic Republic from adopting and modifying it to achieve the objective of portraying Yoruba culture. Indeed, the body of Yoruba heroes, heroines, villains, mythologies, as well as previous and contemporary socio-historic cultural experiences that can be used to anchor

superhero comic stories are extensive. Every aspect of Yoruba culture in table 2.1 can be portrayed using superhero comic. For instance, the *Omoluabi* value may be framed into the philosophical ideology of a Yoruba superhero for the consumption of audience and fans. Even then, the fans and creators will still express varying interpretations of the nuances contained in the portrayals shown in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* as Yoruba-centric superhero comics.

2.11 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter explored the meaning and purposes of culture and used the discourse to develop a conceptual framework within which Yoruba culture was examined. The discussion of the culture emphasised both political economy and commercial value chain perspectives. The chapter also include discussions on the state of the Nigerian culture industry while internal and external factors inhibiting the portrayal of Yoruba culture the culture industry were included. On this account, institutional intentionality emerged as a key factor that determines the state of the culture industry generally and Yoruba culture specifically. The co-creative space of interpretation between comic creators and fans also featured in the subjects covered in this chapter. The next chapter is dedicated to the theoretical framework used to approach the subject matter of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

This chapter concentrates on the theoretical orientation adopted for the contextualisation and analytic discourse of the nuances of Yoruba language and culture portrayal in the case study African superhero comics. The preferred theories are multimodal theory and critical theory, both used in a complementary capacity. To be emphatic, the entire research is firmly located in multimodality for the fact that the construction of portrayals pertaining to Yoruba language and culture in both *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* African superhero comics are approached from the interaction between various modes of communication as opposed to text alone. This is so because comics, as already buttressed in the preceding chapters, are characteristically multimodal prioritising pictures and other graphical elements over and in consonance with text. The application of the multimodal theory prioritise the social semiotic perspective, the attention being on meaning creation as a function of sociocultural context and socio-historical evolution of a people and the role of the culture industry in the process. On the other hand, critical theory applies to the dissection and analyses of the idea of Yoruba language and culture portrayal. The application of the critical theory for the stated purpose is because of the hegemonic and domination use of culture as discussed in chapter two. The critical theory enhances the holistic analyses of the portrayals in both comics in relation to the facets of social realities and influences they mirror or respond to by promoting the visibility of Yoruba language and culture or concealing the continuation of external or dominant tendencies.

3.2 Overview of Multimodal Theory

Adler and Towne (1978) expressed the opinion that everything humankind has ever accomplished and will ever accomplish is dependent on communication, and communication, put simply, is fundamentally interactions oriented for meaning making. A fitting narrative that illustrates the significance of this fact is the biblical story of the Tower of Babel, a soaring edifice intended to

penetrate the sky and reveal the secret and splendour of heaven but whose construction was abandoned because God introduced and used multiple languages to sow discord among the once unified people. Although considered a myth, the story underscores the fact that communication is about creating meaning and understanding that fosters purposeful, coordinated, and collaborative human interactions. It also buttresses the sociality of meaning making because given that God threw the people into language disarray, they formed groups of social units based on the sameness of language and ventured into new territories to establish new societies as narrated in Genesis 11: 1-9 (Bible, 1979).

One way individuals think of and use language to make meaning and create understanding is through speech. Allwood (2013) and Drijvers and Holler (2023) stress that language expressed as speech in face-to-face interactions is always accompanied by a variety of non-verbal cues such as gestures, *proxemics* (communication using space and distance), *chronemics* (communication using time) and *paralanguage* or vocal effects. Although the written version of language is typically text heavy, image accompaniment is typical. Regardless of whether it is written or speech, language is the foremost way of communication (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Bezemer & Jewitt, 2018) yet the simultaneous deployment of non-verbal cues alongside language indicate that the former is not the only means of communication or making meaning and creating understanding. Allwood for example notes that an individual can unintentionally communicate the state of their mind non-verbally through the pitch of their voice, expressions on their face, or even the presentation of specific body parts just as much as a diagram in a biology textbook for students showing the organs and process of digestion creates a different meaning experience. The foregoing is an obvious case of combination of communication modes in making meaning; in other words, multimodality. As such, starting from the mid-1990s when the term ‘multimodality’ emerged, the premise of multimodal theory and research has been that language is not the only mode of communication. Scholars affirm that other semiotic resources or modes are adequately capable of being used and are, indeed, used to communicate (Jewitt et al., 2016; Van Leeuwen, 2017; Bezemer & Jewitt, 2018; Luca, 2020; D’Angelo & Marion, 2024). Theoretically, multimodality is a portmanteau field for which Nordensvärd (2010) traces a tripartite linear pattern of theoretical traditions from which it evolved summarily as follows:

1. Semiotics, in which Ferdinand de Saussure is a prominent figure in the study of signs, their signification, language, and the arbitrariness of signs and associated meanings (see section 2.3.2 in Chapter Two),
2. Social semiotics, in which the use of signs is not arbitrary but a motivated action that operates in a socially or culturally contextual manner. The systemic functional linguistic notion of Halliday (1978), which posits that language has social agency and is the outcome of social processes and needs, is instrumental in this regard, and, finally
3. Multimodality, in which all modes are considered as valid means of communicating messages individually in specific ways other modes cannot as well as in conjunction with others modes to complement and accentuate a message, meaning, or an impression, or intention.

Therefore, the priority of multimodal theory and research is on how different semiotic modes – text, images, colour, gesture, layout and speech – combine for meaning making. However, multimodality is not an entirely novel proposition because communication has always been a combination of more than one semiotic mode. But the historic dichotomy between verbal [language in speech or written form] and non-verbal elements [visual elements such as images and colour for example] promoted mono-modality by framing the former semiotic mode as the major means of communication and relegated the latter to adjunct devices, resulting in deficiency in multimodal literacy (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Adami, 2016; Van Leeuwen, 2017). Multimodality departs from this status quo maintaining, instead, that no mode has ancillary status and all semiotic modes communicate specific meanings in their respective capacity. Consequently, multimodality shifts the landscape of literacy from spoken and written modes to an inclusive scope in which different modes function in a distinct capacity enhancing deeper, nuanced meanings about contexts in a manner which spoken and written words do not. To underscore the growing inclination towards multimodality, O'Halloran et al. (2019) argued for a mathematical framework capable of modeling, investigating, and analysing the multimodal nuances of human communication towards making multimodality a standard method in our considerations of meanings.

There is ample justification for the multimodal approach in the culture industry. The audio-visual media has historically had popular and successful no-speech, strictly non-verbal shows for both adults and children. The likes of *Charlie Chaplin* and animated children shows such as *Oddbods*, *Tom and Jerry*, *Angry Birds*, *Masha and the Bear*, and *Pingu* all reinforce the fact that language [speech or written] is by no means the only way of communicating and people are capable of understanding messages encoded in other modes. In addition, beginning with TikTok, the Senegalese-Italian influencer Khaby Lame, achieved global sensation and financial success for his short, no-comment videos parodying life-hacks and other situations (see Forbes, 2024) in yet another example of how non-verbal modes expand the boundaries of communication and meaning making. Indeed, scholars insist that the affordances of new technologies of communication and the limitless variety of ways individuals use various modes in their user-generated contents are critical contemporary factors in the field of communication. This reality necessitates the need to expand our view of how semiotic modes create meaning and how reading content can be better achieved (Herring, 2015; Adami, 2016; Campoy-Cubillo, 2016; Camiciottoli & Bosignori, 2016; Godhe et al. 2022). Jewitt (2009, p. 4) terms this communication necessity the “multimodal turn” and Lim (2018, p. 1) emphatically submits that, “to be considered literate in this day and age is to be able to effectively communicate multimodally.” The implication is thus that the ways that humans create meaningful messages has gone through periods of socio-historic evolution informed by new intellectual contemplations of the communication process including, also, innovations in the technologies of communications and their role in stretching the boundaries of making meaning through a variety of modal resources. That is, communication and meaning making per multimodal literacy is reflective of the time-space-processes framework of this study for being a subject of changing contexts and perspectives across different eras.

Due to its multidisciplinary nature, multimodality benefits from various theoretical approaches and research areas who though define concepts differently and use terminologies in specific ways, nevertheless agree on the meaning making thrust of multimodality (Kress, 2010; Adami, 2016; Bezemer & Jewitt, 2018). The result of a survey on multimodal research approaches conducted by Jewitt et al. (2016) revealed that multimodal enquiries fall into three main categories namely:

1. Systemic functional linguistics (in which language is viewed as the product of social processes and studies how the language mode facilitates meaning),

2. Social semiotics (whose theoretical premise is on the social agency of signs or modes and interests of users at the point of use), and
3. Conversation analysis (which focuses on analyses and transcription of videos to study how humans deploy various modes for interactions).

In light of the epistemological variations in which modality research is conducted, Bezemer and Jewitt state that, "...it is very difficult and potentially problematic to talk about multimodality without making explicit one's theoretical and methodological stance (2018, p. 2)." It suffices to state here that this particular study approaches multimodality from a social semiotic perspective. Regardless of a researcher's epistemological orientation and approach however, Jewitt (2014) provides the following as the basic principles on which multimodal research rests:

- a) The understanding that all communication is multimodal,
 - b) The understanding that analyses focused primarily on language cannot sufficiently account for meaning,
 - c) The understanding that each mode has specific affordances, or specific characteristics which permits it to be manipulated in certain ways for communication,
 - d) The understanding that modes work together, each with a specific role to make meaning.
- Therefore, it is crucial to understand the relationships between modes for every case of communication.

Scholars use a range of terminologies in the multimodal research sphere. The basic terms used in the field that are important to this study are:

1. [Semiotic] Mode: referring to the semiotic resources or method adopted for communication such as language, image, colour, audio, gestures, space etc.
2. Modal Affordance: the specific characteristics associated with a medium that allows for its manipulation or presentation in certain ways. For example, the affordance of the printing technology limits a comic book to text, images, colour, and layout techniques while the same comic book adapted for animation production has more life due to the mobility, speech, and visual effect affordance of the audio-visual medium. As Jewitt and Henriksen (2016) described it, affordance is simply what can be easily expressed and

represented with specific semiotic resources or mode. In other words, affordance imposes a limitation on semiotic resources.

3. Provenance and Experiential Meaning Potential: provenance relates to the meaning associated with semiotic modes as used originally or previously in a given social context (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Provenance opens the window to imitation in that semiotic resources can be borrowed and applied to other contexts to achieve the same meaning as used in the original context or modified in some form to capture the borrower's contextual experiences and derive new experiential meanings (Adami, 2016; Jewitt & Henriksen, 2016). To illustrate, the superhero concept is American with characters and storylines portrayed in ways consistent with American ideology, objectives, and values. By provenance, several societies have borrowed the idea and created their own superhero characters. The African superhero genre does not depart from the core idea of who a superhero is but, in the case of Yoruba superheroes, the socio-historic experiences of the culture can create variations in the personality and presentation of a superhero.
4. Motivated sign user: this refers to the social agency of modes, that is modes are socially constructed signs whose meanings are generally tied to social contexts and, importantly, to the particular interests, objectives, or motivations of a user at every instance a mode is used (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Kress, 2010). The implication thus is that though modes are socially created, users give them new meanings based on what they intend to communicate or achieve at the time they used the mode.

Since its development as a cogent field of research, researchers have applied the multimodal principle to various contexts for various purposes. For instance, using systemic functional linguistic multimodality, Lim (2018) worked with two schoolteachers in Singapore and conducted a multi-method pedagogical experiment on three classes of students totaling one hundred and twelve (112). The researcher developed a multimodal curriculum, discovered that multimodal literacy is teachable, and advocated for its incorporation into schools' learning programmes. In a similar study, Bo (2018) applied multimodal principle to the analysis of the Hollywood movie *Argo* from the perspective of culture, context, and meaning of images and concluded that the movie uses multimodal ensemble that frames the three elements in ways that publicise Western

ideologies. In Nigeria, Egbe (2024) used the multimodal principle to analyse cartoons in three national newspapers namely *Vanguard*, *Business Day*, and *The Punch* published between 2020 and 2021. The researcher found that the cartoons copiously used a variety of semiotic modes (images, colour, vector, space etc.) to pass political messages to readers.

To summarily simplify the core of the foregoing discourse, what is brought to the fore is the state a message is passed or presented in, one being the “active” state in which participants have to act out their intentions in speech accompanied by bodily non-verbal signs or only animated non-verbal modes, for example sign language for persons with hearing impairment. The opposite is the “inert” state which though written and verbal, the affordance of the written medium allows for a different category of modes for meaning making: colour, layout, image, panels, frames, speech balloons are all modal devices applied to give life and meaning to written mode such as comics. The activity of decoding intentions in either state is simple as long as participants in the communication are socialised in the language and peculiar nuances of the social context. For example, there is no ambiguity in “unload the gun”. Yet, the intensity of the accompanying *paralanguage* cues may indicate urgency or deferment of action at the recipient’s convenience, hand gesture may indicate direction of the gun or the particular gun if there are more than one and so on. This multimodality is, also, realisable in the inert state through items such as comics in which, as Kress (2010) observes, visual modes [colour, images, and shapes] may be used to hint at certain developments, accentuate precise characteristics or pass specific messages. The holistic comprehension of these multimodal ensembles be it inert or active, makes the case for multimodal literacy within sociocultural conventions and contextual agency.

3.2.1 Multimodality from Social Semiotic Perspective

Scholars agree that social semiotic multimodal research is a hybrid field, the groundwork for its emergence being in linguistics and other fields concerned with meaning making (Kress, 2010; Juffermans, 2012; Partan, 2013; Adami, 2016; Perniss, 2018). The locus of social semiotics multimodality is that signs or modes are socially motivated and their meanings are tied to culture.

In addition, the interest of an individual at the particular time of using a particular semiotic resource, mode, or sign must be considered as part of the intentions behind the usage. This means in addition to the social or cultural agency of semiotic resources, there is also an individual agency to the same semiotic modes originating from a society. This way, the meaning of modes can vary slightly or significantly based on how an individual use them to achieve their intention. Indeed, the social meaning of semiotic resources are constantly shifting and requires contextual knowledge of both the culture and point-of-use interest to decipher (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Jewitt & Henriksen, 2016).

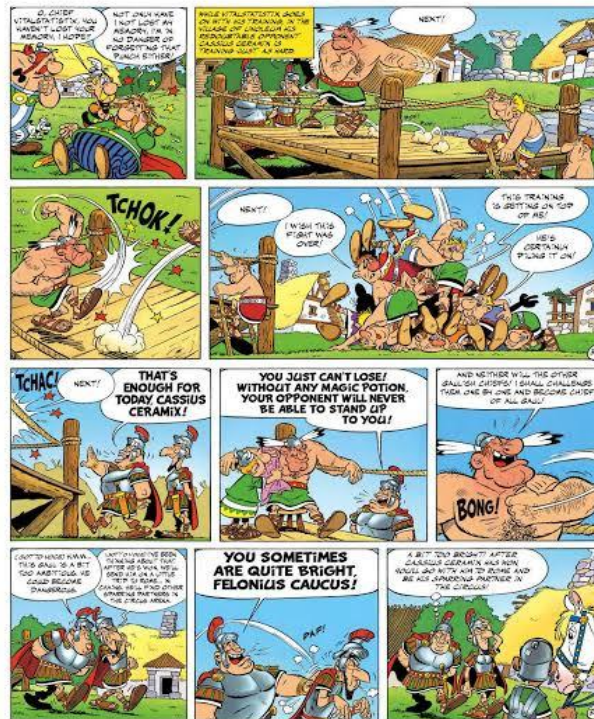
By virtue of the above-mentioned precepts therefore, everything is a mode and every mode enters the sphere of social semiotics multimodality. Therefore, seemingly regular and generic things have a social semiotic agency. For example, whereas peoples' perception of rats in many places around the world is destructive, disease carrying vermin and killed assiduously as a result, in Rajasthan, India, people feed, nurture, and venerate them as incarnates of family members of the Hindu goddess *Karni Mata* at the *Karni Mata* Temple [also called temple of rats]. The cow, relished for its beef in other societies, is similarly a sacred animal in Hinduism and are neither killed nor eaten. In contemporary times among the Yoruba people, adorning cowries on body parts raises suspicion of the wearer being either occult or having some esoteric traditional affiliation, thereby overshadowing its ornamental and historic monetary signification. Similarly, young females wearing waist beads evoke suspicion of charms and/or promiscuity as opposed to ornamentation. In these instances, the rat, cow, cowrie, and waist beads have socially shaped meanings so that when they are incorporated into a communication design, the interests of the producers of the message must be considered conjunctively with the broad social meanings to determine the messaging. Indeed, since multimodality is concerned with all possible ways people make meaning with social prejudice, then social semiotics multimodality is, to emphasise, preoccupied with how all types of modes of communication are deployed in a socially and individually contextual experience to make meaning. Therefore, interpreting socially motivated modes will be difficult to achieve outside the context of social and cultural experience.

Comics typically use a variety of modes such as words, images, and compositional devices (panels, speech balloons, gutter, colour, and captions) to express ideas and tell stories (Lambeens & Pint,

2015; Bateman et al. 2019). Pioneer comic scholar Eisner (1985) describe comics as reading in a broader scope than the term ‘reading’ is usually applied because it is a visual experience requiring, “...an understanding of the image-word mix and the traditional deciphering of text” (p.7). Similarly, McCloud (1993, p. 47) simply put it as, “words, pictures, and other icons are the vocabulary of the language called comics.” As such, comics invite the reader not to read words alone but see it conjunctively with nuances of accompanying images and other modal ensemble to have a holistic comprehension and interpretation of the narrative. Comics too are socially motivated stories comprising modes, ideas, and worldviews that require a heightened level of contextual awareness to understand.

Consequently, the theoretical anchor of this study is based on the notion that understanding how Yoruba language and culture are portrayed in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* African superhero comics is an intricate process involving the form which the text of Yoruba speech is rendered in conjunction with English, being another socially motivated mode, including image depictions. Multimodality is reasonably applicable for the analytic dissection of the two case study comics. Figure 3.1 below is an excerpt from the comic *Asterix: The Big Fight* to underscore the nuanced multimodal interaction between words, images, and social context. The images indicate that the events unfolded in a rustic European village set in a time when the Roman Empire ruled much of the world. The dressing of the characters in frame one and the muscular wrestler in frames two, three, six, and seven indicate the village is Gaulish buttressed by the characteristic “r/ix” suffix in the names. Furthermore, the distinctive Roman legionnaire military outfits worn by the two senior officers and the junior soldier holding the reigns of the horse points to an era when Roman might conquered and dominated large parts of the world. The yellow caption in frame two of the first panel and texts in speech balloons indicate a fight is in the offing for which two contestants are preparing, one being confident and boastful of emerging the winner while the other is in a dilemma. The conversation between the Roman army officers and the burly, confident wrestler indicates happiness and conspiratorial alliance between both parties. The words also serve an onomatopoeic function with ‘*tchok*, *tchac*, *bong*, *paf*’ all conveying sounds arising from actions they accompany. Finally, compared to other characters, the words of the big Roman army officer are rendered in all caps and bold, indicating the character is a loud talker.

Figure 3.1 Excerpt from Asterix: The Big Fight



Source: Hoogeboom & Selles (2024)

Similar to the brief multimodal assessment of the image in figure 3.1, many culture industry products have been subjected to multimodal dissection to unveil hidden and subliminal meanings fused into novels, comics, animations, and movies. Regarding *The Lion King* for instance, Davis (2023) notes that in order to give the lions an endearing mien, producers downplayed their predator and cannibalistic nature by giving them human-like exaggerated expressions while rendering prey animals like zebras and antelope as less sentient and, of course, disposable. With the fictional Dr. Robert Langdon character, novel writer Dan Brown shows in novels such as *The Lost Symbol*, *The Da Vinci Code*, and *Angels and Demons* that symbols, drawings, and artefacts appearing to be seemingly meaningless are significant sociocultural inclined modes of meaning making. These

examples underscore the importance of the multimodal perspective in interpreting messages in whole, especially in the context of this study.

While the typical multimodal case in comics is words from one language interacting with images, when words from two or more languages are present, either in the form of code mixing or code switching, keener reading is required because issues of nuanced linguistic meanings and prominence will surface in addition to image depictions. Such is the case the researcher navigated because in both *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*, the multimodal presence is English-Yoruba-images.

3.2.2 Analytic Instruments of Visual Semiotic Modes

It will be almost impossible to conduct a multimodal evaluation without reference to a set of defined principles that serve as basis for interpreting non-verbal, visual modes. This necessity is not trivial because humans are historically accustomed to the verbal mode and any proposition to expand their literacy to hitherto diminished competency of a visual semiotic mode must provide a template that serves as an interpretational framework. In the semiotic tradition, the template will be akin to a *parole* from which an entire system of *langue* is developed. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) provide such a template in *Reading Images*, their influential book on multimodality and multimodal literacy. From the beginning, the authors clarified that their ideas are socially specific to Western cultures who historically have almost the same communication experiences because of years of sociocultural, economic, and ideological integration. Nevertheless, scholars have widely used the basic principles of their template for various multimodal purposes. The same principles are useful for the purpose of this research.

In grammar, verbs convey action and meaning. Kress and Van Leeuwen propose the notion of images containing a vector or a visual verb that prompts the reader to infer the enactment and achievement of a narrative objective or goal in terms of an action, a direction, or a representation. A vector is, thus, a visual feature that guides attention through an image directing how readers interpret the information. In form, vectors are typically lines that connect elements in an image and express an action (Jewitt & Oyama, 2004; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). They can also be shapes, gestures, gaze, or motion lines or blurs, all capable of indicating action and establishing

relationship. Kress and Van Leeuwen maintain that images represent real world ideas and are composed in an interactive capacity to convey socially recognisable meanings. In other words, images always represent something socially determined and their presentation is in a manner intended to create a representational interaction, first between elements of the image, and, second, between the image and people who observe or read it. Both scholars acknowledge that the foundation of their view is Halliday's (1978) meta-functions of language. As theorised by Halliday, language is the outcome of social processes and it performs three meta-functions. These meta-functions are the ideational in which language represent the world as experienced by individuals, the interpersonal in which language facilitate meaningful interactions and understanding between people within a social context, and, finally, the textual or language being able to bring together ideas and interactions in coherent and meaningful ways. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) respectively repurposed the ideational, interpersonal, and textual meta-functions to representational, interactional, and compositional meanings of images. This trio of meanings are essential to unraveling various messages portrayed in sequential arts or comics given that images are the main means the medium express ideas.

3.2.2.1 Representational Meaning

Representational meanings refer to the abstract or concrete ideas depicted through characters, locations or settings, things or objects, practices, worldviews or anything that is experienced or is capable of being experienced. The presence or lack of vectors produces two types of representative meanings namely narrative and conceptual structures. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) term images that contain vectors a narrative because they depict an action or an unfolding event. In the comic extract in figure 3.1 for example, the narrative is realised by vectors such as gestures, facial expressions, and motion lines indicating energetic punches resulting in projectile-like transition in space and time between frames. Conceptual structures are images devoid of vectors and their representational meaning is symbolic, abstract, and generalising; conceptual structures classify elements based on shared attributes of their class or structure. For example, a picture of vehicles is conceptual because the objects share basic attributes of automobiles and they may be classified into groups based on factors such as context of use and speed. Despite the definitional demarcation between narrative and conceptual structures, the meaning of an image may overlap depending on

if an otherwise narrative or conceptual picture acts as a visual metaphor, that is, images or pictures used to signify or represent something else that can only be understood with knowledge of its context. A triangle, for instance, is a conceptual structure but, based on the context, may signify an insignia that has sociocultural, professional, or religious value. In this way, the otherwise conceptual structure becomes a narrative image.

In the case of as *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* African superhero comics, the vectorial formula has analytic value, serving as basic basis for the analytic scrutiny of narrative and conceptual structures through which Yoruba language and culture are represented. The social agency of the narrative and conceptual structures contained in the stories are, of course, an intricate task requiring a critical eye to analyse the portrayal of Yoruba sociocultural contexts in the superhero comics.

3.2.2.2 Interactional Meaning

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) construe interactive meaning of images as the interface between the visual depictions and readers as well as the responses, impressions, perceptions, and interpretations arising from the image-reader interaction. As Jewitt and Oyama (2004) describe it, interactive meaning deals with the interaction between readers, the static world of the picture frames, and image interpretation. It is the crucial point where the reader and author as a motivated user of signs engage in a field of evaluations and interests conditioned by sociocultural contexts. In respect of the African superhero comic genre, interactive meaning underscores the dynamic duality of interpretations between comic creators and the audience. As motivated sign users who have certain intentions they intend to achieve, comic creators frame their portrayals of African cultures accordingly and audiences or fans who have their own motivations and perspectives consume the comics with prejudice to their views.

The interactivity between images and readers is another modal analytic device through which images receive conspicuous, subtle, or negligible portrayals in three ways that Kress and Van Leeuwen list as contact, distance, and point-of-view. Contact refers to the extent to which images engage and direct the gaze of the reader to specific details or actions thereby evoking strong impressions in the mind of the reader. Kress and Van Leeuwen termed images with strong contact intensity “demand” pictures. Pictures that create a detached, weak, and impersonal interaction

contrasts the previous type and are categorised as “offer” pictures because they merely present or offer information for consideration. Figure 3.2 below contains two old Nigerian advertisements; the images are useful to show the contrast between demand and offer image. The image of the soap and its package is an offer image because it is neither intense nor does it evoke a strong interaction with the reader; the image merely offers the impersonal information that the picture is a soap. In contrast, the second picture has vectors that engage the reader intensely and directs them to consider the action of drinking the advertised product. The strong gaze in the man’s eyes, his broad, inviting smile, and the cup of hot coffee with steam lines are compelling visual devices which makes a strong consumption demand of the consumer.

Figure 3.2 Old Nigerian print advertisements depicting “Demand” and “Offer” interaction in Images



Source: Otepola (2021).

Distance concerns the spatial positions of images and how their location creates interactions which either indicate proximity and intimacy or formality and detachment, an effect achieved through framing, size, and shot size of objects in an image. Framing techniques such as close-up, medium, and long shot create notions of spatial distance and size, both of which play a role in the intensity of interactions. The point-of-view component of interactive meaning concerns the context of view through which the producer of an image purposefully convey impressions such as prominence, weakness, power, and superiority via angles and perspectives of view (Lister & Wells, 2004; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Point-of-view context follows from how the natural planes or perspectives through which we view people and objects register perceptions of their status, either generally or in relation to us, in our mind. In this regard, frontal, low, high, and horizontal planes of view are instrumental. To illustrate, a seven feet tall individual viewing the one thousand and eighty-three

(1,083) feet tall Eiffel Tower in Paris, France from the base will do so from a high angle point-of-view or perspective, raising their neck up to behold the magnificence of the monument while feeling tiny by virtue of the imposing edifice. In contrast, the same individual will adopt a low angle view by lowering their head and gaze when addressing a five-year-old child. Point-of-View is a device used in comic images to depict characters, activities, and objects in ways that audience and fans develop subjective notions about the prominence, power, status, and importance contained in a narrative. In the context of Yoruba portrayal for example, if two individuals, a Yoruba man wearing *agbada* (flowing garment) and a white man wearing a suit are having a conversation in a picture but the latter is rendered in a high angle, the perspective reduces significance of the African and arrogates prominence and status to the Caucasian.

3.2.2.3 Compositional Meaning

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) describe the manifestation of compositional meaning of semiotic modes in four forms, which are information value, framing, salience, and modality. Information value is realised by the placement of an element at the left, right, centre, top or bottom. Kress and Van Leeuwen explain that since the left-right placement is the standard writing order for most societies that adopt the Roman writing system, left textual matter flow follows the regular eye movement representing the normal and familiar while right placement indicates something novel that draws attention to itself. Top and bottom placement create an ideal–real dichotomy where modes placed at the top serve an ideal purpose, for example the introduction of an idea, while bottom modes act in a real or an amplifying capacity by adding broader details to the ideal. Modes at the centre are the nerve around which every other surrounding items derive value. Figure 3.2 above is useful to explain the information value. The arrangement of the narrative follows the left-right flow beginning with the smiling face on the left to the tin of the beverage on the lower right. Further scrutiny reveals that the steaming cup of coffee occupies a central location relative to the other elements yet closest to the man’s lips indicating it is the life or source of the happy expression on his face. At the bottom or ideal position is the brand name stretched across the entire frame, rendered in all capitals, and coloured red with a bold effect – this clarifies and amplifies the source of the expression on the man’s face and creates a strong contact interaction with the reader.

Framing relates to how modes in a narrative are depicted either as related to each other or discontinuous and discrete through the use of semiotic modes such as lines, colour, space, or any such device the creator of a message chooses. Again in figure 3.2, the dominant yellow square frame indicate all the elements belong together since no lines or other colours are introduced within the frame to create a border that separates the face, cup, tin of beverage, and brand name of the beverage. Saliency is simply the artistic creation and association of importance and prominence to modes through any of the foregoing techniques. Finally, modality refers to how a mode closely depict realistic or naturalistic experiences of people. Jewitt and Oyama (2004) illustrate this by referring to the lively and colourful reality of a photography as opposed to the empirical and detached reality depicted in graphs. Therefore, modality as a component of compositional meaning deals with the extent to which images closely depict contextual realities.

Using the foregoing multimodal analytic frameworks is always contextual and motivated. As Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006, p. 2) themselves noted, visual language is culturally specific and, “meanings belong to culture rather than to specific semiotic modes.” As interpretational frameworks therefore, the analytic propositions are guidelines that must be applied under the umbrella of sociocultural idiosyncrasies and the motivated intentions of the creator of a communicative text. The Yoruba culture and language are the sociocultural umbrella under which these precepts were applied for the multimodal analysis of *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* African superhero comics.

3.2.2.4 Analytic Instruments of Verbal Semiotic Modes

As already clarified that although the multimodal interaction in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* is words and images, the comics of concern are peculiar because words from two distinct languages coexist in the respective narratives thus creating a dual language modality, these being English language and Yoruba language. The combination of English-Yoruba languages in the two comics seem both logical and inevitable given that Nigeria has colonial history with the Anglophone culture and English is a portal to access popularity and success in the culture industry especially globally. Thus, English language acts as a vessel or carrier through which the Yoruba culture and language are packaged and framed for visibility with audiences of different sociocultural and

ideological persuasions. On the one hand, the previous analytic scheme for visual semiotic modes applies to the entire word-images multimodal elements because both categories signify, cohere, complement, and accentuate meanings in narratives in socially significant ways. In other words, visual modes exist in themselves and coexist with words to achieve representational, interactional, and compositional impressions. On the other hand, the English-Yoruba interaction informs the necessity to contemplate and interrogate the portrayal of Yoruba language specifically given the language duality. In respect of Yoruba language portrayal in presence of English language therefore, analytic evaluations considered the interaction on the following principles to analyse the extent of representational, interactional, and compositional meanings:

1. The overall Yoruba language distribution in which attention is on the usage of the language for conversation and other communicative expressions. For this, the focus is on dialogues in speech balloons, narrations, captions, and sound effects. In the main, representational and interactional meanings can be inferred from these while also, providing a basis to determine the nuanced effects the English-Yoruba interaction creates,
2. The Yoruba language form where the attention is on whether the language is used in the standard form with intonation marks or not. This extends to the spelling style serving as further points of representational meaning that indicate whether the spellings are consistent with urban culture modifications or if they retain the original form, and, finally
3. The specific use of Yoruba expressions different from regular conversation and/or used as part of regular conversations. Expressions such as idioms, incantations, or panegyrics are the concern in this regard. This provides another pathway to establish the extent of representational and interactional meanings.

3.3 Overview of Critical Theory

Critical theory facilitates the critique of society and ideology. It is a multidisciplinary methodology of subjecting culture, ideology, and practices to analyses and deconstructions necessary for the transformation and reformation of social structures. In a specific sense, Critical Theory with capitalised initial letters refers to the pioneer works of the Marxist inclined Institute of Social Research of the Frankfurt School. However, critical theory without capitalised initials is used to

refer to the different streams of intellectual methodologies of systematic analysis and deconstruction such as feminist theory, queer theory, critical race theory, and critical media theory, thereby leaving us with many critical theories (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011; Fuchs, 2016). The fundamental idea critical theory espouses is that no human activity, idea, or practice is completely infallible that it cannot be subjected to critical reflection, questioning, and refinement. The reflection and questioning are analytic deconstructions of social processes and their outcomes with the objective of fostering redress and transformation that new realisations and realities may dictate. In the case of Western countries for example, Kincheloe and McLaren (2011) note that critical theory has been a suitable frame of sociopolitical analyses of peoples who have for long lived under the illusion of an unproblematic democratic society while benefitting from relations of domination and subjugation in their dealings with non-Western territories. For example, the controversial Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (DEI) contemporary policy that, among others, preaches gender liberalism and fervently supports and rationalises the inclusion of transgender females in female sports has markedly polarised Western society with antagonists arguing that the policy is a degenerate ideology that contradicts natural gender biology and, in fact, promote inequality for female sports persons. Critical theory, thus, recognises that human nature is complex and societies are dynamic, evolving with changing times that, consequently, necessitate continuous evaluations of social practices, processes, policies, and worldviews. As such, Fuchs (2016) maintains that the variance in use of the terminology is needless since social critique is the central idea of critical theory. Fuchs continues that critical theory is applied to analyse social processes in the following five dimensions:

1. Critical ethics,
2. Critique of domination, exploitation, and alienation,
3. Dialectical reason,
4. Ideology critique, and
5. Struggles and political praxis.

In this study, the adoption of the Critical theory is for the analysis of the superhero concept, being an American ideology used by African comic creators such as Comic Republic to portray African heritage. There is historic precedence for this position, that is, the critical contemplation and

critique of the relationship between the manifestation of ideology, its influence, and implication(s) for society. According to Held (1980, p. 33) one of the three prominent themes during Horkheimer's 1931 inaugural address as Chair of the Institute of Social Research was:

The necessity for social theory to explicate the set of interconnections (mediations) that make possible the reproduction and transformation of society, economy, culture and consciousness.

Ideology critique or evaluation as the nucleus of critical theory, therefore, challenges dominant narratives and ideologies which maintain prevailing social order and circumstances, reveals its subtle and insidious mechanisms, and unmask how the ideological status quo benefits the hegemony [cultural, political, economic] of powerful institutions and individuals. To apply the ideology critique tenet of critical theory is to recognise the agency of human activity in the production of social reality, acknowledge that social reality is intrinsically contextual and changes overtime, and that the nature of relations between and within societies is fraught with imbalances and conflicting views and interests. A relationship between time, reality, and transformation is thus established. Indeed, an important point of departure for critical theory is the historic thread between time, reality, and transformation of the subject or issue under critical questioning and the position of the questioner to the matter (Horkhemier, 1972). In other words, the ideology under the radar of critique, the performer of the critique, and the performance of critique occurs in a socio-historic space that iterates between the past and contemporary in relation to social issues, values, practices, and worldviews. Ideology is an artificial schema from which a people derive their sense of identity concretised in a set of beliefs and institutional practices through which they view and understand the world (Althusser, 1971/2014; Hall, 1986/1996). Consequently, ideology will always be critiqued either internally by its adherents as new vistas of knowledge and understanding prompt the people to reflect on their values and standard of living or externally when it is introduced to new societies and it prompts changes to their traditional values and standard of living. For instance, the rise of the age of reason and science was a challenge to the hegemony of the clergy in Middle Age Europe and significant conflicts arose between both ideologies. With benefit of the foregoing, ideology also operate within the time-space-processes framework of this study.

From the 1920s to present times, critical theory itself has evolved, strengthened by its non-prescriptive and multidisciplinary orientation that has opened it to a variety of social issues and

definitional perspectives (Fuchs, 2016). In our contemporary era where fervor for postmodern reasoning has elevated the philosophical approach to a doctrine for questioning universal standards for their one-sidedness and advocacy for various valid realities, critical theory is a useful tool for deconstructing and interrogating dominant patterns and charting alternative paths towards transformation. That postmodernism and critical theory collide, at least on the objective of interrogating social reality and its ideological pillars, is an important factor in the theoretical outlook of this research.

The ideology analysis in this study is specifically in terms of the claim of showcasing or portraying Yoruba language and culture in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* African superhero comics. The notion of Yoruba culture and language portrayal is an ideology itself, a belief that the cultural heritage of a people is receiving visibility and authentic agency through a borrowed ideology within a culture industry under the political, economic, and ideological domination of the West, chiefly the United States. Yet, as noted in section 2.3.1 in chapter two, “portrayal” is a fluid expression, a function of time-space-processes meaning that what qualifies as Yoruba identity depiction subject to many influences of which the agency of the portrayal author is critical. By evaluating Yoruba portrayal in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*, the researcher means questioning and analysing the extent to which the comic creators used material and immaterial cultural properties (such as language, religion and spirituality, belief systems, mythologies as well as depictions of physical settings and characters) to represent Yoruba identity within the well-established, distinctively Americanised superhero comic culture. The idea is to identify patterns of contradictions or consistencies that either reinforces or diminishes portrayal of the culture relative to the firm American ideologies that shaped the superhero narrative, as already discussed in chapter two.

3.3.1 Complex Ideology of Portrayal in Culture Industry

Through their characterisation, culture industry characters [fictional, real, or mythological] may embody the sociocultural character and ideology of specific places they originate from (for instance, *T’Challa* the *Black Panther* in the superhero comic movie adaption or *Captain America*). Alternatively, they may have an original reputation located in any critical social function such as education (for example, the American *Sesame Street* children’s show) and/or entertainment (such as the popular Australian animated dog show, *Bluey*). In recent times however, culture industry

characters are increasingly used as partisan icons in the on-going geopolitical and ideological battles and protests around the world. This adds hitherto non-existing nuances of controversial signification to the characters. For instance, *Pichu* or *Pikachu*, the distinctive yellow mouse with red cheek balls in the popular Nintendo *Pokémon* video games became a prominent anti-government protest icon in 2025 in both Türkiye and the USA as individuals organised against social and geopolitical actions and policies of their governments. Still in the USA, *Luigi*, the green clad younger brother of *Mario* also in the Nintendo video game *Super Mario* has been appearing in anti-government protests in the country. When the United Nations picked DC's *Wonder Woman* as honorary ambassador to promote women empowerment, women and women rights groups protested arguing that a sexualised fictional superhero (ine) character is inappropriate for the task (see NBC, 2016). The Chinese government banned children character *Winnie the Pooh*, a chubby yellow bear, following dissenting and disparaging comparisons to the country's leader and the Communist Party's intolerance of free speech (see Haas, 2018).

The situations described above demonstrate how culture industry characters and their messaging intentions can extend beyond their original education, entertainment and/or symbolic cultural portrayal purposes and become partisan artefacts in the contestations between contentious ideologies, interests, and worldviews. In other words, given the intersections between the culture industry and powerful hegemonic and counter-hegemonic interests, culture portrayal is itself a complex ideological tool that institutions and individuals with vested may use to anchor the introduction and popularisation of new ideologies that may be problematic to various extents. Consider, for instance, that although LGBTQ content have significantly increased on streaming services like Netflix (Collington, 2021; Gallagher, 2022), the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2022) notes that about seventy (70) countries still criminalise LGBTQ and forbid content of the nature. Consequently, the WEF argue that media institutions and the global communication infrastructures (culture industry inclusive) have a clear moral mandate to support the propagation of LGBTQ around the world. Heeding the call means media institutions must find creative and relatable ways suitable for their contexts to create more visibility and acceptance for the ideology including, even if subtly, framing the subject into content presumably intended for cultural portrayal. Despite the fact that in Nigeria the social perception of the ideology is largely as perversion of moral ethos, still, it will be insufficient to exclude critical consideration of ideological views from the depiction of cultural content simply because of the seeming moral consensus. This is because powerful

ideological institutions may engineer surreptitious infiltration and achieve acceptance of their views over time. In any case, the framing of narratives in time and space is always under the influence of ideological interests and predetermined objectives.

Indeed, the fact has been established that ideology and culture are intertwined with power, subjugation, and domination, all being avenues through which powerful institutions, people, and societies engineer and entrench control of target ‘others’ by influencing what and how messages should be passed. Reinforcing the fact that ideology is essentially a scheme of worldviews, beliefs, and practices through which hegemony is maintained, Geuss (1981, p. 15) notes that the challenge in analysing ideology is to, first, distinguish between, “[...] the function of supporting, fostering, or stabilizing hegemony and the function of justifying or legitimizing hegemony.” This declaration is significant because it partitions the act of ideological hegemony into two categories, one being the active implementation of the ideology and the other being the rationalisation of the hegemony to people. For this, Althusser’s (1971/2014) ideological apparatuses category is, again, useful to contemplate the manifestation of ideological hegemony in the culture industry. The entirety of the culture industry is a massive ideological apparatus through which worldviews, impressions, values, ideas, and practices are presented with gentleness and subtlety to influence the perspectives and habits of audiences and fans. The repeated presentation of and exposure to ideologies in culture industry products can consequently achieve two objectives: the implementation of an ideology and the justification or rationalisation of the necessity for an ideology, thereby performing both functions Geuss (1981) mentioned.

3.3.2 Tokenism and Authentic, Counter-Culture Portrayal in Superhero Comics

From an ideological perspective, it is necessary to consider the superhero comic genre in two broad dimensions consistent with the foregoing discourse. One, as an American ideology that has been successfully implemented since 1938 to date and, two, as the legitimisation, justification, or rationalisation of the American ideology in societies such as Nigeria where comic creators have embraced it and are using it for culture portrayal. The second dimension of the superhero ideology is, of course, reasonably justifiable as an act of creative provenance or imitation because, in any

case, superhero comics distinctively thrive on revisions or reboots (Hyman, 2017; Fuchs, 2020; Kent, 2023) in line with the imitation prototype and ‘hit rule’ strategy of the culture industry (see section 2.4.1). Yet, the imitation is also the continuation of the origin ideology. The fact that permissible acts of creative provenance of the superhero concept continues the domination of American ideology is apparent in the fact that the Hollywood establishment significantly determines what imitation becomes a success on the global scene. Any superhero comic outside the sphere of American creators and publishers but noticed by Hollywood is always a celebrated success story by the creators, publishers, and audiences and fans. Such is the case of Comic Republic’s ongoing Hollywood animation adaption of *Ireti-Bidemi*. Another example is that of *Iyanu: Child of Wonder*, a coming-of-age adventure comic set in a futuristic Lagos State, published by YouNeek Studios, adapted for animation by Warner Bros and now showing on HBO Max and Showmax streaming applications. Whether the attention an African superhero comic gets from Hollywood is an indication of the product conforming to and continuing certain ideological perspectives or if it is because the social agency of the narrative is compelling is a matter for ideology critique. On the one hand, therefore, cultural portrayal in a superhero comic can be tokenistic, that is pander to the gallery ostensibly for inclusion of absent or less represented views. On the other hand, it can be authentic counter-portrayal where comic creators carve a distinct narrative pattern that is characteristically pro-African heritage portrayal.

Scholars have variously addressed tokenistic culture portrayal tendencies in superhero comics (see section 2.10). Muñoz-González (2017) and Schauer (2021) validate the concerns about tokenistic depictions of ‘other’ identities in superhero comics by noting that the narratives generally accentuate dominant Western status quo. The duo emphasise that theorists concur that capitalist notions and patriarchal hegemony in which male power is used to enforce social obligation over private needs are the main ideologies contained in superhero comics. Furthermore, Peppard (2017) adds that superhero comics must satiate the capitalist driven consumerism culture that enabled the growth of individualism as well as the penchant to seek satisfaction in material objects and ideas that reinforce self-gratification. Peppard argues that capitalism and consumerism not only have commercial consequences, they combine to create a culture of individualism in which people develop rigid and insular worldviews in line with notions of self-sufficiency in objects and ideas they have familiarity. Being that superhero comics is a creation of America, the point made by

Muñoz-González and Schauer, and elaborated by Peppard is that the genre is ideologically programmed to represent and perpetuate capitalist ideology and associated worldviews such as the promotion of individualistic self-sufficiency implied in the character of a powerful, can-do superhero. If the notion of hegemonic self-sufficiency is extended to countries, the USA as the world's omnipotent sociopolitical, economic, scientific, military, cultural, and ideological alpha is the undisguised central theme contained in the superhero worldview (see section 2.6). Indeed, in titles such as *Iron Man*, *Batman*, *Spiderman*, and *Superman* for example, the ideological narrative is a consistent archetypal portrayal which glamourises the supremacy of American power and might manifested in intellect, morality, resourcefulness and capabilities, wealth, military, technology, and all ramifications of science including expertise in mysticism, occultism, and extraterrestrial experiences. As such, Valentová (2021) adds that superheroes are archetypal constructions consistent with the *primus inter pares* American omnipotence, regardless of the source(s) of their abilities and powers – scientific, extraterrestrial, mysticism and occult, genetic mutation, or other sources. The narrative centre of gravity is also impliedly or explicitly America and even aliens align with and personify American values (as in *Superman* and *Wonder Woman* for example) or succumb to its might if they are foes of humanity.

Regarding the foregoing subject of American ideological omnipotence as central to superhero stories, scholars have used practical examples to buttress that the ideology is difficult to avoid in superhero stories supposedly produced to mirror other cultural experiences. For example, in respect of *Black Panther* and the positioning of *Wakanda* as a unitary African state with consequential global power, Asante and Pindi (2020), Benash (2021), and Song (2023) insist that although the story addresses critical global political, economic, and racial issues, *Wakanda* is a facade that aligns with the capitalist socio-economic world order not end it. That is, despite the framing of *Wakanda* as a superior, technologically advanced African state capable of changing the world order because of its rare resources and capabilities, it still aligned with the ideological status quo of the USA's supremacy thereby performing an ideology stabilisation function consistent with the categorisation of Geuss (1981). Given this situation and not minding the global culture industry's attempts at cultural inclusivity, it would seem that the portrayal of other cultures and their ideologies cannot be anything less than tokenistic or controversial in superhero stories.

The implication of the foregoing is that an overarching market and social ideology template exist for the superhero genre and it unavoidably conditions the creative provenance of the model in other contexts, especially the extent to which creators can overhaul and apply it for culture portrayal. A noteworthy strategy, albeit almost seemingly trivial because it is executed with stealth, ingrained in the superhero ideology which fosters this situation applies to the moral disposition of the superheroes themselves. In most cases, superheroes tend to operate as culturally detached, neutral citizens of the universe whose task is protecting an idealised global welfare and commonwealth under the inspiration and unity of the moral values of American omnipotence. For example, characters such as *Superman*, *Wonder Woman*, *Black Adam*, *Jon Jonzs*, and *Thor* – despite being a motley crew of aliens, non-American humans, and gods – have their cultural identities substantially de-emphasised and replaced by an essentialised superhero personality with their powers (re)purposed in tandem with a global rescue and protection mission. It is not that cultural markers of the protagonists such as language, dress patterns, belief systems, and civilisation are completely absent or unacknowledged. Rather, typically, their cultural features are retrospectively suspended and usually activated as backdrops for present purposes in continuation of the essentialised superhero character and context. With the foregoing in mind, it is reasonable to infer that the acknowledgement of the ideological conditioning and superhero personality essentialism informed Singer's (2002) submission that tokenism and trivialisation of other cultures are common in superhero comics while Cook and Frey (2017) added that a perennial problem of superhero comics is stereotypical renditions of race and ethnicity.

Logically, it is possible to eliminate or, at least significantly, reduce tokenism in superhero comics if members of the subject culture produce the narrative because the depictions will be authentic counter-portrayal. The reality is, however, that authentic counter-portrayals of African culture through superhero comics is comparatively scarce, fringe, and generally nascent. The intervention of African superhero comic creators and publishers such as Comic Republic undoubtedly opens promising pathways for authentic cultural portrayal. Yet, to be realistic, culture portrayal is second to the commercial motives in the superhero comics industry because the genre is first a business and stories are investments that must return a profit or the business dies. Regardless of whether it is the global superhero comic industry and its interconnections to Hollywood or, in respect of this study, the local Nigerian comic industry, business and market objectives always bear weighty influence on what is produced and how it is produced. Indeed, part of the reason Nigeria's comic

industry gyrates between being dead, comatose, and struggling is its inability to innovate and adapt as a business. The new generation of digital comic creators in Nigeria thus have to balance culture portrayal, business objectives, and the already existing essentialised superhero ideological template.

Consequently, existing ideological structures will influence the extent to which Yoruba language and culture can feature as authentic, counter-portrayal in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*. How characters are dressed; how frequently Yoruba is spoken and the form of Yoruba spoken; the depiction of settings; the cultural particularity of narratives and so on, are in reality not removed from the overriding influence of ideological criteria. For example, the superhero costume may seemingly appear to be a trivial matter of adornment but it is a paraphernalia specific in design for skin tightness and accentuation of body structure to exude power and exceptionality while simultaneously acting as branding for modern technology and consumer culture (Peppard, 2017). Put simply, the habitually body fitting superhero costume is part of the ideological ensemble which essentialise the ideal superhero, signify their superhuman prowess, and satisfy consumer expectations and needs. Therefore, the superhero costume, ordinary as it may appear, has what Marx (Marx, 1887/c.2008) calls exchange-value (see section 2.4.1).

As a paraphernalia that has exchange-value, the superhero costume becomes a product of specific form itself and its value or usefulness tied to the superhero who is typically a nondescript being without a costume. Examples abound of how the presence or absence of a costume communicate ordinariness or exceptionality of an individual. Peter Parker is an awkward teenage nerd but becomes the exceptionally skillful and smart *Spiderman* with his costume, Clark Kent is an unassuming and regular journalist but becomes *Superman* the man of steel with his costume, and Bruce Wayne is a reclusive billionaire philanthropist that becomes *Batman* with his costume. The superhero costume, therefore, is the single most striking feature that immediately informs the consumer of the wearer's awesomeness and distinguishes him/her from them (consumer). The adornment of a superhero intended to show African heritage is consequently a significant rendition given that costuming a superhero typically follows a preset aesthetic pattern that does not seem to accommodate cultural signification. As the main characters in a superhero comic, the appearance of the superheroes in both *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* is, thus, a critical site of negotiating authentic, counter-cultural portrayal of Yoruba culture versus tokenistic conformity.

The switch of terminology from audience/fans to consumer is neither slight nor mistaken in this discourse. First, it is an essential feature in the critique or analysis of the superhero ideology. Second, it underscores the capitalist ideological core of superhero comics as a business conforming to a tried and tested model before anything else and follows the tradition in comic scholarship where scholars variously invoke political-economic terminologies such as ‘consumer and labour’ to critique the genre and titles. In order of status, people are first consumers before they become audience or fans. The underlying trade of values between publishers of superhero comics and people is a superhero brand, which gratifies the tastes of consumers who, upon being satisfied with the product, become keen audiences or avid fans of that particular brand. As a product rooted in the capitalist mode, superhero comics are a mass production differentiated by physical branding but similar in ideology. The differentiation of a superhero comic through African properties for the portrayal of African cultural heritage is, then, the creation of a brand that presents a proposition that is yet unavailable as an authentic offering. In the prevailing ideological nuances of the global superhero comic industry determined by the American culture industry, creating such a brand is a daunting venture which Comic Republic, the leading publisher of African superhero comics, has undertaken. The extent to which the global superhero comic industry’s ideological makeup has influenced the portrayal of Yoruba language and culture in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* either as tokenistic or authentic counter-portrayals is in order.

3.4 Multimodal Depictions and Ideology: Theoretical Nexus in Yoruba Identity Portrayal

The nexus or connection between the multimodal theory and critical theory used in this study is simply image and textual depictions as conduits for the depiction of a cultural idea. The depictions are actions (see section 2.10) that suggest cultural agency and ownership as opposed to the continuation of the Western ideological status quo core of the superhero genre. Since the first superhero comic edition was published in the 1930s the genre has continued to grow in popularity around the world and evidence indicate it has a strong appeal that is not about to wane soon. In view of this, the emergence of African superhero comics was a certainty, being more a question of when, not if, superheroes of African descent conceived, created, and published by African creators and publishers will enter the industry. On the one hand, African superheroes can appear as those from America distinct only by their skin colour and using Africa as the centre for replicating

superhuman heroic deeds in ways ideologically consistent with the essentialised superhero template. On the other hand, including cultural portrayal to the essence of a universe or constellation of superheroes, as Comic Republic is doing through stories such as *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*, is a significant marker that adds branding and authentic-counter implications and introduces extra obligations for the superheroes and other characters in the stories.

The distinction of a group of superhero comics by the designation of African cultural heritage portrayal suggests that the genre's usefulness is creative provenance, an idea borrowed for its global fame and used to pass African socio-historical and experiential messages while its foundational American ideology is significantly suspended. The critical examination of the predominance and manifestation of either ideology – that is, tokenism that repeats tropes of the familiar superhero ideology or authentic, counter-cultural portrayal that render profound attention to the African experience – is an exercise for the roles words and images play and how they interact in the act of messaging. Already, language is a major focus of critical theorists in terms of how it stabilises or challenges power, domination, and other ideologies (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011; Fuchs, 2016). Language is recognised as a tool that carries and can be dissected to expose underlying framework of social intentions, meanings, and messages (Levi-Strauss, 1963, 1976; Halliday, 1978). The English-Yoruba language interaction in both *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* African superhero comics is a noteworthy duality capable of shaping portrayal in salient ways. For the fact that English is not indigenous to the Yoruba people, the incorporation of the language in both comics inevitably presupposes that cultural features and ideologies of “English” source can be present. Cultural and ideological aspects of English origin have indeed already entered the Yoruba culture through the language window and its effect is apparent even in Yoruba language. For instance, in one of the many displeasures scholars have expressed with the current state of Yoruba language (see section 2.3.1 in Chapter Two), Akinlade et al. (2021) labelled the contemporary version of Yoruba as “American-Yorubaism” in reference to the corruption of the language in speech and written form. The implication is that the American way of life expressed and experienced through English language – whether it is mainstream English or urban culture slang – has penetrated the Yoruba sociocultural fabric and systems of socialisation to the point that large portions of the Yoruba people no longer have sufficient proficiency and knowledge of the language. Consequently, there is an aura of fashionable swagger modification in the Yoruba language of today, especially with the urban young and youthful demography.

As such, the combination of Yoruba and English languages in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* is an avenue to analyse the ideology of cultural portrayal in addition to, significantly too, the agency of images and how both singularly and conjunctively establish or trivialise impressions consistent with their intended messaging. The multimodal theory and critical theory facilitate the foregoing.

3.5 Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter, the two theories which are preferred for the study were identified and discussed in the context of their application individually and their complementary value. The exact procedures for collecting and analysing data follows in the subsequent methodology chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0

METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is about the methodology, research design, and procedures relating to sourcing and analysing data towards fulfilling the study objectives as clarified in chapter one. The chapter is in two sections. The first part deals with the qualitative methodology preferred for the study and justification of its appropriateness relative to the research objectives. The second part explains the research design with emphasis on the population of study, sampling and sample, data collection and data analysis procedures, and the issue of ensuring quality in qualitative research.

4.2 Methodology

Cresswell (2003) notes that the knowledge claims researchers make are grounded in intelligent assumptions that determine the procedure of probing the subject and the nature of the outcomes or findings. Continuing on the subject, Cresswell adds that in research practice, scholars conceptualise their research approach and assumptions under terminologies such as paradigms, epistemology and ontology, and methodologies. Methodology is the central philosophical positioning of a study, the base that supports the entire procedural strategy and gives systematic direction to every action. Kothari (2004) describes it as the logic behind methods that serve as a structure to understand, interpret, and evaluate decisions in respect of a specific study. While mentioning that the main methodology paradigms are qualitative and quantitative approaches, Pandey and Pandey (2015) and Griffie (2012) also explain that methodology comprises the overall methodical and planned framework that guides the execution of a study and influences the nature of its outcomes consistent with philosophy of the adopted methodology. A succinct description that puts the foregoing notions into precise perspective is according to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (cited in Nieuwenhuis, 2016, p. 51) who describe methodology as, “the bridge that brings our

philosophical standpoint (on ontology and epistemology) and method (perspective and tool) together”.

For this particular research, the researcher adopts the qualitative approach to investigate the portrayal of Yoruba language and culture in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* African superhero comics. Jensen (2002) comments that qualitative methodology examines the occurrence of phenomena in particular contexts as opposed to the *recurrence* of similar elements in numerous differing contexts while Golafshani (2003) explains that the purpose of qualitative research is to understand, illuminate, and compare meanings to similar situations instead of making predictions and generalisations. Accordingly, qualitative researchers immerse in the context of a phenomenon to acquire nuanced information about it and make sense of the subject of investigation (Creswell, 2003). Based on the foregoing nature of qualitative methodology, Daymon and Holloway (2011) note that the approach favours nuances of context-bound subjects using flexible methods that allows the researcher to explore multiple dimensions of a subject. In other words, qualitative research is constructivist and subjective.

4.2.1 Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

Adopting the qualitative methodology for this study means that the knowledge sought is not for generalisation to the entire superhero genre or even other types of African superhero comics portraying cultural heritage, either Yoruba or another culture. Instead, it is context-specific knowledge relating to the claims and practices of an emerging genre in the Nigerian culture industry as it relates to the portrayal of Yoruba language and culture. The context specificity is the stories in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* published by Comic Republic. The fantastical reality of superhero comics is, as explained in the preceding chapters, determined by American publishers in line with American society and ideology but by virtue of permissible creative provenance, Nigerian comic creators are using the model to depict Yoruba sociocultural experiences. To acquire knowledge about the dimensions Yoruba identity manifests in terms of language and culture in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*, the qualitative methodology is preferred to gain in-depth understanding by exploring the nuances of portrayal in the comics, including from the comic creators and audiences as well. This is because the overarching interest of the researcher is not the novelty of the superhero comic genre in the Nigerian media ecosystem per se, but the exact

application of the superhero ideology to portray Yoruba identity. Language and culture are socially contextual realities, their essence being of little significance to members of other social units. Yoruba language and culture are properties that demarcate the social identity of the Yoruba people and they have appeared in superhero comics ostensibly to generate and promote visibility for the Yoruba cultural heritage to both local and global audiences. The research adopts the qualitative methodology to interrogate the ways that Yoruba social properties are included, framed, and communicated multimodally through the interaction of textual and visual elements. The execution of this research is in line with the qualitative methodology principles and completes the coherence between theory and method. In this regard, the orientation of the qualitative methodology towards context, nuance, and subjectivity is a suitable conduit for the multimodal analysis of both comics and subsequent ideology critique of Yoruba cultural heritage portrayal in terms of being tokenistic or authentic.

4.3 Research Design

Research design is the overall methodical design, strategy, framework, procedure or plan that guides the execution of a study. For Kothari (2004), research design comprises the criteria and sequential procedure for collecting and analysing data to achieve the aims of a research while, similarly, Kumar (2011) and Pandey and Pandey (2015) note that research design must specify the setting of a research project and develop detailed procedures for collecting and managing data in order to achieve predetermined objectives. This study adopts the case study design because it situates and enhances the analyses of Yoruba language and culture portrayal within the context of *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* superhero comics. Case study is the in-depth investigation of a real-world phenomenon in specified contexts, which may be an organisation, a social unit, an event, an individual, or any situation for the purpose of describing, explaining, and understanding the issue of interest (Yin, 2003). Whereas the design of a case study research can be for single and multiple cases, this study adopts the latter, the objective being to scrutinise how Yoruba language and culture are depicted within the two differing contexts of *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* African superhero comics. An explanation of the operational plan and strategic procedures undertaken in

respect of the study as they relate to population of the study, sampling technique, sample size as well as data collection and data analysis follows in the following sections.

4.3.1 Population of the Study

As Griffiee (2012) explains, population refers to the totality of people, things, or objects having the features or traits that a study is interested in investigating. Pandey and Pandey (2015) equally describe population as the total constituents of a distinct unit or group from which a researcher extracts a sample for a study. The duo of Pandey and Pandey draw the connection between population and sample in their explanation with the implication that identifying and describing the population precede sampling. There are two categories of population for this study broadly falling into inanimate or non-living population and the animate or human population.

Broadly, the inanimate or non-living population is the entire collection of African heritage superhero comics published by Comic Republic. The Comic Republic universe of superheroes has diverse stories that depicts or references different African cultures blending the contemporary with tradition, science, and mythology. The main dramatis personae (superheroes and villains) and other characters are primarily of various African descent but mainly Nigerian. The Yoruba culture is one of the many African cultures Comic Republic adopts for its objective of promoting African heritage locally and internationally. More narrowly however, the sub-population of interest to the researcher is the Yoruba themed superhero comics under the auspices of Comic Republic.

The animate or human population is in two sub-groups namely:

1. The creators who conceived and wrote the case study comics, this group have social semiotic usefulness. First, they are Yoruba persons whose cultural membership ordinarily suggest a measure of proficiency in the cultural specificities of the Yoruba society and, therefore, have the license to portray the culture. Second, as individuals, they are motivated sign (Yoruba language and culture) users who have personal motives and intentions they

want to achieve and consequently construct their portrayals accordingly to create representational, interactional, and compositional meanings.

2. The audiences/fans of Comic Republic especially those who have read the case study comics. This sub-population category also have social semiotic usefulness in that their social agency as per the Yoruba culture is critical to their judgments on the extent to which ‘Yoruba-ness’ is portrayed in the comics.

In respect of the two human population categories of this study, the case study comics enter a sphere of social semiotic interpretations in which both the creators and audiences/fans engage each other through the comics and negotiate their perspectives through the representational, interactional, and compositional meanings of the stories.

4.3.2 Sample and Sampling Technique

Sampling is the, “process of selecting a sample from the population”, using any of probability or random sampling technique or non-probability sampling technique (Pandey & Pandey, 2015, p. 43). Likewise, Kothari (2004) defined sampling as the act of selecting participants who will partake in a study. Importantly, Kumar (2011, p. 175) makes a significant submission regarding how epistemological and ontological inclination influences whether to use probability sampling or non-probability sampling as follows:

The selection of a sample in quantitative and qualitative research is guided by two opposing philosophies. In quantitative research, you attempt to select a sample in such a way that it is unbiased and represents the population from where it is selected. In qualitative research, number considerations may influence the selection of a sample such as: the ease in accessing potential respondents; your judgment that the person has extensive knowledge about an episode, an event or a situation of interest to you; how typical the case is of a category of individuals or simply that it is totally different from the others. You make every effort to select either a case that is similar to the rest of the group or the one which is totally different. Such considerations are not acceptable in quantitative research.

The implication of Kumar's (2011) submission is that probability sampling is suitable for quantitative research and non-probability is sampling oriented for qualitative investigations. Marshall (1996) maintained that whereas probability sampling is a rigorous method relying on meticulous knowledge of the population since generalisation of findings is typically the purpose, it is not always appropriate for naturalistic, qualitative studies where context-based phenomenon are investigated for depth and nuance. As such, non-probability sampling is better suited for qualitative investigations.

A sample refers to a limited number of subjects selected from the population and included in a research for the purpose of data collection (Yin, 2003; Griffie, 2012; Pandey & Pandey, 2015). Sampling and sample decisions are undertaken for pragmatic reasons such as to manage time and conserve energy as well as make a study more manageable and less cumbersome.

Keeping the foregoing discourse on sampling and sample in mind, the non-probability sampling technique was preferred for this study and the purposive sampling method was used to select both the human and non-human subjects. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to use their discretion and knowledge of the population to select samples that match features that are deemed crucial for a study (Pandey & Pandey, 2015), the rationale being to deliberately pick a sample that possess the necessary features required to solve the problem under investigation. The final objective with purposive sampling is to discover context specific findings not to draw generalisable statistical conclusions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this regard, the basis for the selection of both the human and non-human samples is Yoruba identity per portrayal in the comics and the judgments of audiences/fans.

4.3.3 Selection Criteria of Non-Human Sample

Given that Comic Republic makes promoting African heritage through superhero comics its unique proposition, two (2) comics were purposively selected from the Yoruba themed superhero comics of the publisher for case study analysis. These are *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*. The selection criteria that guided the inclusion of either comic is that they must:

1. By genre be designated or classified as any or a combination of African or Mythology or Folktale, or Action by the publisher,
2. Bear societal nuances either of a contemporary or ancient nature peculiar to the Yoruba,
3. Must have at least three (3) and not exceed seven (7) issues as of the time this research became actionable. Comics typically have few pages (Baetens & Frey, 2015; Gluibizzi, 2007) as little as twenty (20) pages and extending to thirty-two (32) pages comprising both the story and advertising messages. As such, the rationale for the issue criterion is to ensure that each of the selected comic has sufficient issues that will enable the reasonable observation and analysis of the study phenomenon.

As per their genre categorisation, both *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* share the folktale nomenclature. Whereas *Visionary* is also categorised under the African and Mythology genre, the other genre under which *Ireti-Bidemi* appears is Action. The uniformity of both comics in terms of their

folktale categorisation means the stories share a fundamentally similar cultural core idea making them suitable to scrutinise how each renders the core idea. The core idea referred to is the portrayal of African heritage, which, for both comics, is Yoruba sociocultural heritage.

4.3.4 Selection Criteria of Human Samples

The following are the selection criteria for participants in the two sub-categories of human population. First, is the creator sub-category. The factors considered in their selection are:

1. The individuals must be creative personnel who conceived the story idea, wrote it, and contributed in its image renditions, and
2. Number wise and based on the creative roles they performed, this category of participants is two (2) persons, one creator for each of *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*. The number of individuals in the creative role is predetermined because their identity and role number per comic title are publicly available information present in every issue of the comics.

The foregoing are the only inclusion criteria for the creator sub-category of human population. There were no gender, ethnic, socioeconomic, or educational qualifications expected of the participants.

For the audience/fan sub-category, the researcher placed an invitation in a Comic Republic specific fan group in Facebook soliciting for individuals to participate voluntarily in the study. The following are the inclusion criteria for selecting the sample:

1. The participants must be a member of “The Comic Republic” fan group on Facebook where fans discuss Comic Republic titles specifically and comics generally,
2. The participants must have spent at least three (3) months as a member of the Facebook fan group, and
3. The participants must be an adult Nigerian of Yoruba ethnic group, who must be, at least, twenty (20) years old. The ethnic criterion is included because appreciable knowledge of and familiarity with the culture is necessary for this category to make informed opinions and analysis of the nuanced presentations of the culture in the comics.

The foregoing are the only inclusion criteria for the audience/fan sub-category. There were no gender, socioeconomic, or educational qualifications expected of the participants.

4.3.5 Data Collection Methods

The data in this study is qualitatively collected using the following three methods:

1. Relational content analysis of *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* superhero comics. Data collected from this method is in respect of research question one as stipulated in chapter one. Table 4.1 below contains issue details of both comics as of the time when this study was actionable.

Table 4.1: Issue and page information of *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*

Comic Title	Number of Issues	Issue Number and Title	Number of Pages
Ireti-Bidemi	7	1: Young, Energetic, Unleashed	22
		2: Hope Has A New Meaning	38
		3: Not All Bad Guys Use Guns	28
		4: Hope is Rekindled	25
		5: An imposter “Among Us”	25
		6: Unstoppable Power Meets Immovable Hope	24
		7: A Tale of Two Vigilantes	25
Sum of Pages			187
Visionary	5	0: Ascension	25
		1: The Awakening	37
		2: The Undying Hunter	24
		3: Protectors of Iganle	23
		4: Gods of War, Lightning, Storms, Fire, and Fear	25
	Sum of Pages		134
	Cumulative Number of Pages		321

2. Semi-structured interview with the two (2) creators of both comics conducted electronically over Google Meet. The electronic medium was preferred because the

creators were either not based in Nigeria or were engaged in activities that rendered physical meeting impossible. Data from this method is in respect of research questions two and three as stipulated in chapter one.

3. Focus group discussion with the audiences/fans of *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* drawn from ‘The Comic Republic’ Facebook fan page, also conducted electronically but on WhatsApp group chat created and administered by the researcher strictly for the purpose of data collection. The focus group discussion was conducted on WhatsApp because not all the discussants had Facebook Messenger, the feature that facilitate group chat on Facebook, but all of them had WhatsApp. Generally, too, the discussants preferred using WhatsApp for chatting. The electronic medium was preferred because participants were scattered over wide ranging locations thereby rendering physical discussion impossible. Data from this group of participants is in respect of research question four as stated in chapter one.

The interview and focus group discussion were conducted to point of data saturation or the point where the participants provided no new information to what had been already said (Saunders *et al.*, 2018). Data saturation was determined in two ways:

1. One, at the point participants started to repeat or frequently refer to responses they already provided and elaborated, it was determined that they had exhausted their opinions, and
2. Two, the researcher expressly asked participants if they had any further views at the point of transiting from one cluster of questions to another. In addition, the researcher expressly asked participants if they had further contributions once they began to repeat previous responses.

The interview and focus group discussion were concluded based on the above-mentioned data saturation clues and on the affirmation of participants that they had given their views best as they can and had nothing new to add.

4.3.5.1 Relational Content Analysis Procedure

Generally, content analysis is a technique used to collect meaningful information and draw interpretations from texts and other documented content within the contexts of their use (Krippendorff, 2004). Mayring (2014) wrote that the advantage of content analysis is that it originates from the communicative sciences and the outcome of its application is always understood in the context of a specific communication material. In other words, the content analysis technique is applied to the analysis of a defined communication material and concepts therein to identify the pattern of their occurrence and use the patterns to arrive at inferential meanings within the context of the communication material (such as text, images, and speech). This method, thus, supports the investigation of nuance.

Whereas content analysis can be done via the conceptual route in which the presence or recurrence of themes are quantitatively tallied, there is also relational content analysis method which focuses on the relationship between co-concurrent words and concepts in proximity in a communication material and the coherent meanings they create (Krippendorff, 2004; White & Marsh, 2006; Wilson, 2011). Put simply, relational content analysis considers how the contiguous placement of communication modes and elements shape the overall message both explicitly and impliedly. Consequently, while content analysis is generally suitable for investigating, unveiling, and understanding nuances that may be overlooked, relational content analysis offers more flexibility for the same purpose because the consideration of the relationship between elements is a major attribute of the method. The relationship factor of relational content analysis makes the method suitable for the multimodal nature of this study since the relationship between textual and visual modes regarding the portrayal of Yoruba language and culture is the objective.

The researcher re-tooled the relational content analysis strategy to facilitate the collection of multimodal data regarding how creators of the reference comics rendered Yoruba heritage in text (language modality) with visuals (image modality). The modification that applied to the relational content analysis method is in respect of the social semiotics inclined multimodal framework of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) as discussed in chapter three as per representational, interactional, and compositional meaning. In this regard, the relational content analysis procedure was anchored on two principles:

1. The idea of representational meaning based on the inclusion or exclusion of socially particular experiential elements (narrative or conceptual) that are capable of leading the reader to deduce the performance and realisation of an action or a precise representation that signifies Yoruba identity. The extent to which contiguous textual and pictorial elements (Yoruba-English textual interaction and Yoruba-English-Images interaction) portray and emphasise Yoruba-ness was the purpose of this principle.
2. The idea of interactional and compositional meaning where the focus is on the overall impact the portrayals create such that when the reader engages with the story, they get corresponding impressions that either diminishes or elevates the depiction of Yoruba language and culture. In other words, the concern of this principle is if the relational interactions between the multimodal elements can create either strong or weak impression or leave either lasting or transient sense of Yoruba language and culture portrayal.

Drawing meanings from content is a systematic procedure and the researcher approached the method systematically using the framework contained in table 4.2 below as guide to the collection of relational content data of both textual and visual elements. The guide in table 4.2 is the continuation and manifestation of the re-tooling and application of relational content analysis.

Table 4.2: relational content analysis data collection guide

Unit of Analysis	Reference	Mode	Markers
Identifiers	Captions, speech balloons, thought balloons, and images	Yoruba-English-Images	Names of locations and characters, their visual renditions, signs and symbols, and actions/activities
Major concepts in story	Captions and speech balloons	Yoruba-English words	Sources, descriptions and naming of heroic powers, tools, and abilities; descriptions and naming of consequential actions
Depictions of major concepts in story	Speech balloons, captions, and images	Yoruba-English-Images	Visual renditions of described concepts
Speech and/or Conversation	Speech balloons and thought balloons	Yoruba-English words and sentences	Extent of using Yoruba language for conversations either in full sentences, mixed with English language, or little to no use. Form of Yoruba words

			and spellings used in conversation (whether urban culture influenced or unadulterated forms), use of intonation signs or its absence in Yoruba text.
Translations	Speech balloons and captions	Yoruba-English	Extent of translations owing to Yoruba language use.

4.3.5.2 The Interview Process

Daymon and Holloway (2011) and Ryan *et al.* (2009) identified three broad forms of interviews namely unstructured/non-standardised interviews, semi-structured interviews, and structured or standardised interviews. The standardised or structured interview follows a rigid procedure with a set of predetermined answer options to questions as opposed to the semi-structured interview which is a more open and interactive variant guided by an interview guide (a list of questions containing relevant themes of interest to a study). The semi-structured interview facilitates orderly, in-depth, probing conversations between the interviewee and researcher. The unstructured or un-standardised format typically takes the form of a conversation in which the interviewee takes the leading role. Qu and Dumay (2011) note that interviews are useful tools to understand the experiences of other people but, because it involves a considerable amount of effort and time to execute, it is typically applicable to a small sample size. Providing further elucidation to Qu and Dumay's position, Mason (2002) emphasises that interviews are suitable for circumstances where a researcher is interested in depth, nuance, complexity, and richness of data. Indeed, the subject of this research is nuanced and intricate making the interview method fitting to acquire the type of rich information necessary to achieve the study's objectives.

In light of the foregoing usefulness of the interview method in research, this study adopted the semi-structured interview variant to elicit information from the two (2) creators. The interviews were conducted electronically over Google Meet separately and individually for the creators. Mathers *et al.* (1998) submit that semi-structured must have an interview guide that must capture the types of questions that will be asked, the breadth of questions that will be asked, clear and uncomplicated phrasing of questions, and logical sequencing of the questions. In line with this requirement, an interview schedule was designed for the interview sessions to systematically direct

the trajectory of the interview and prevent it from being an incoherent discussion. The interview guide is include in the appendices section.

4.3.5.3 The Focus Group Discussion Process

According to Daymon and Holloway (2011), focus group discussions are conducted with a group of people to elicit their ideas, thoughts, and perceptions about a specific topic or issues related to a subject of interest. The goal in focus group discussions is to understand the topic from the discussants' perspectives. Other scholars agree with Daymon and Holloway's explanation (see Freitas *et al.*, 1998; Krueger, 2002; Dilshad & Latif, 2013; Mishra, 2016). However, scholars differ on how large the size of a focus group discussion should be. For example, Lictman (2014) opines that a large number of discussants is not required for focus groups because generalisation is not the goal but advised that at least six (6) but not more than twelve (12) discussants suffice. Daymon and Holloway (2011) suggest that depending on the situation, as little as three (3) discussants may be enough although between six (6) to ten (10) is recommended while Freitas *et al.* (1998) similarly concur that a focus group should have a minimum of six (6) and maximum of ten (10) discussants. In the view of Escalada and Heong (2014), focus group discussants should be a minimum of eight (8) and no more than ten (10), noting that a dominant discussant may hijack a small group while the researcher may have difficulty controlling the session if the group is too large. However, Mishra (2016, p. 2) questioned the idea of fixing numbers for focus group discussions arguing that:

[...] There is no 'best' solution to group composition, and group mix will always impact on the data, according to things such as the mix of ages, sexes and social professional statuses of the participants. What is important is that the researcher gives due consideration to the impact of group mix (e.g., how the group may interact with each other).

Daymon and Holloway (2011) echo Mishra's position because, despite recommending size limits, they later advised that manageability and complexity of topic should determine a researcher's selection of focus group discussants. For this study therefore, since six (6) is generally recurrent as the least number of discussants for focus groups, the researcher secured the voluntary

participation of six (6) audience/fans from ‘The Comic Republic’ Facebook fan page to participate in the focus group discussion. This figure is in the interest of manageability in terms of keeping the group within a reasonable size that is compact enough to ensure all discussants participate. A focus discussion guide was designed to direct the course of the interaction and it is included in the appendices section.

Although the discussants were fans of Comic Republic and therefore familiar with both *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*, they were nevertheless provided with PDF copies of all issues of both comics. Additionally the participants received one simple prompt to elicit relevant responses: they were instructed to read critically by paying keen attention to image depictions and language use and assess the comics’ portrayal of Yoruba language and culture based on the interaction between both modalities.

4.3.6 Data Analysis

The focus group discussion and interview data were analysed using thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method used to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes within data and describe them in rich detail. Alhojailan (2012) asserts that thematic analysis is appropriate for all investigations that seek to discover and discern the nuanced dimensions of data sourced from naturalistic and experiential settings because it enables the dissection and connection of lived experiences. Whereas themes are recurring patterns of ideas used to sort and reduce a qualitative data set meaningfully, the challenge is how to identify themes. Concerning the matter of theme identification, Braun and Clarke (2006) state that there is no general rule for the purpose since the activity is not based on an idea’s frequency of occurrence, thereby rendering rigid measureable indices inapplicable. Instead, the scholars argue that themes should be any idea that capture important information directly related to the research objective. Going by this logic, two significant implications arise:

1. Identification of themes is linked to ideas related to the research objective, and
2. The researcher is responsible for the systematic and meticulous application of their discretion in finding themes.

Consequently, Theron (2015) opines that the identification and codification of themes is an intuitive activity. Equally, Bazeley (2013) summarises the process of thematic analysis as involving reading transcripts, assigning labels or codes that represent an idea, and comparing and condensing codes to generate broad themes. Bazeley highlights three steps involved in thematic analysis as follows:

1. Identify, label or code patterns of ideas relevant to the research objective,
2. Sort and connect codes into related categories, and
3. Use the categories to build broad themes.

Bazeley's prescription does not differ from the perspective of Braun and Clarke (2006) because the former's template does not propose fixed rules in the identification of themes except that it is the researcher's burden to discover ideas and patterns relevant to the research objective. Helpfully, Ryan and Bernard (2003) provide the following eight clues that can signify to a researcher that an idea is a pattern:

1. Repetitions or ideas and topics that occur and recur,
2. Indigenous terms and expressions that are unfamiliar or used in unfamiliar ways,
3. Stories and examples through which people use to describe their experiences or express and idea,
4. Transitions or shifts that naturally occur in speech such as pauses, silence or change in voice tone could indicate progression from one idea to another,
5. Similarities and differences between emphasis or degree of expressions or ideas are conveyed,
6. Linguistic connectors which show the relationships of cause, effect, judgment or reason for actions,
7. Missing data or what respondents deliberately fail to answer, and
8. Theory-related material where the researcher has a set of predetermined themes from the theoretical literature.

These clues were helpful for the analysing both interview and focus group data. On the one hand, for example, the creators used anecdotes, repetition of ideas, silence and sudden shifts, and indigenous terms to introduce or buttress their responses during the interview sessions – these signaled theme worthy ideas to the researcher. On the other hand, focus group discussants' responses were characterised by similarities and differences comparisons and repetitions, these were clues that the researcher found useful in identifying and coding their responses into themes.

4.3.6.1 Procedure of Identifying and Coding Themes

In simple terms, coding is the division of data into discrete components that represents a pattern and coalescing related codes into broad, unified themes (Daymon & Holloway, 2011; Alhojailan, 2012; Lawrence & Tar, 2013). The process of coding is, however, "a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating process" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 150). Challenging as coding is it is necessary in thematic analysis. In this study, coding was performed using organic codes or codes that emerged from the data in the form of words and expressions used by the participants in line with the research questions. In this regard, two specific strategies were adopted to ease and enhance the orderly and logical identification and codification of organic themes.

The first of the strategy relates to the questions for both the interview and focus group discussion. First, the questions were crafted carefully with the research questions in mind. Second, the questions were clustered into units to indicate their association with specific research questions. This clustering strategy ensured that responses to questions in each cluster were treated as unit of related ideas thereby ensuring that a prior sense of clarity and direction governed the identification and coding of themes. In other words, the adoption of this strategy was to bring prior systemisation to the coding process. Practically, the implementation of the systemisation was as follows:

1. For research question two concerned with influences and choices that shaped creators' portrayal of Yoruba language and culture in particular ways, the interview questions linked to this objective were clustered into two separate groups. While the first cluster explores generic experiential factors, the second cluster relates specifically to each creator's comic and their portrayal intention and objective(s). This grouping strategy ensured that both the

factors that influenced the creators' portrayals and their respective overall portrayal intention and objective(s) were unveiled.

2. For research three concerned with challenges in publishing and managing African superhero comics, the relevant interview questions for the creators were clustered into just a unit.
3. For research question four concerned with factors that influenced how audience interpret both comics as portraying Yoruba culture, the questions were also clustered into a unit.

The second strategy concerns the actual application of the systemisation described above to the identification and coding of themes. The procedure of coding ideas and identification of themes was achieved by borrowing and modifying open coding, axial coding, and selective coding from grounded theory. Although the coding strategy is specific to grounded theory to explore phenomena and discover new dimensions and theories embedded in qualitative data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), the basic idea of the method was incorporated for thematic analysis in this study because:

1. The subject of investigation is largely an uncharted social and intellectual territory in Nigeria making it appropriate to explore and reveal new discoveries, and
2. It is one of the methods that thematic analysis is implemented.

Summarily, in the open coding stage, specific words or expressions from the data that capture a specific idea are used to code or label important points (Priest *et al.*, 2002). Next is axial coding in which codes identified during the preceding phase are compared and combined on the basis of their similarities to form new categories before finally proceeding to selective coding which entails further revision of the aggregated categories formed during axial coding culminating in the generation of broader and central explanatory concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Keeping the specific activity contained in each of the steps in mind, the researcher executed the thematic analysis process using the following five-step approach:

1. Data familiarisation phase: at this first phase the researcher immersed in the data by listening to recordings, transcribing recordings, and reading transcriptions critically several times to get a general sense of the trajectory of the responses and identify and apply colour codes to significant responses that are consistent with the idea each systemised cluster of questions revolve around.
2. Open coding phase: the identification of organic ideas began at this point with the researcher using terms, expressions, or words from the responses to derive codes in each systemised unit of questions. The researcher revisited the colour coded responses identified in the first phase and labeled codes using notable words or expressions that carried the essence of the responses. In respect of the interviews with the creators, seventeen (17) ideas were coded for research question two and fifteen (15) were coded for research question three. For the focus group discussion relating to research question four, two (2) ideas were coded.
3. Code refinement phase: The codes already created in the preceding step were reviewed at this stage to find common denominators between them and combine related ideas to create new categories. At this stage the seventeen (17) codes for research question two were reviewed and reduced by merger of related ideas from seventeen (17) to fourteen (14) with eleven (11) of those relating specifically to how the creators described their portrayal of Yoruba language and culture and three (3) relating to influences behind the portrayal. For research question three, the initial fifteen (15) codes were reviewed and reduced by merger of related ideas to (13) final codes. The codes for the focus group discussion relating to research question four was unchanged.
4. Development of main theme and associated ideas: in this penultimate stage, the codes were already in their final form. The main task performed in this stage was grouping the codes into subsets of associated ideas under an umbrella theme. Consequently, this stage of the analysis concentrated on finding appropriate generic themes organically from the responses. The strategy the researcher adopted in this respect was to find and use an

overarching word or expressions participants used to encapsulate and explain their sub-points. For all cases, the associated sub-points were the already finalised codes described in stage three. For research question two, three (3) main themes were identified with fifteen (15) associated sub-points. For research question three, three (3) final themes emerged with thirteen (13) associated sub-points. The two (2) coded themes for research question four remain unchanged. Tables 5.3 and 5.4 in chapter five are summaries of the outcomes of the thematic analysis process described here.

5. Reviewing themes: In this concluding phase, the researcher reviewed the entire process going over the themes and codes. The aim of this activity was to evaluate the extent to which the thematic analysis captured the data and tell an accurate story.

4.3.7 Suspension and Observance of Anonymity and Sundry Ethical Matters

Anonymity is a standard ethical tenet of research. While the researcher did not depart from this precept, the principle was both suspended and observed in this study. A clarification of this dual circumstance is next. In respect of the creators, both participants were availed of the anonymity requirement notwithstanding the fact that their names are already public knowledge as displayed in each issue of their comic. They were asked to select any random name of their choice if they prefer anonymous identification or indicate if they want their real names to be used. Both individuals expressly indicated that they wanted the researcher to use their real names during the interview and in the final report. As such:

1. The *Visionary* creator, who goes by the name Akintoba Kalejaiye, is identified as AK. The acronym AK is the initial letter of his first and last name.
2. The *Ireti-Bidemi* creator, who goes by the name Micheal Olasubomi Balogun, is identified as MB. The acronym MB is the initial letter of his first and last name.

All participants in the focus group discussion are identified anonymously and they individually selected an anonymous name of their choice. The following are the random anonymous names the discussants, the names are not gender specific:

1. Earth,
2. Gia,
3. LG,
4. Suave,
5. Tabitha, and
6. Vera.

In addition to the foregoing, privileged information and off-record information were excluded from the findings. Privileged information applied mainly to details or information about forthcoming issues and currently unpublished aspects of the stories. Information about unpublished issues were excluded from the findings. In cases where either creator referred to aspects of their story contained in issues released post the time this research became actionable, such information were excluded from the findings. Off-record information was provided just once during the interview; the information does not exist in any documented form because the researcher turned-off recording before receiving it. Although the researcher knows the details of the off-record information, it is not included in the findings directly or indirectly. These actions were in compliance to prior ethical guarantees given to the creators and their organisation.

4.3.8 Data Management

The researcher conducted the collection and analysis of data for this study, no third party was involved in the process. Both the interviews and focus group discussion were conducted electronically, the former being over Google Meet and the latter on WhatsApp group chat as previously justified in section 4.3.5. The data was managed to prevent unauthorised access and comply with ethical considerations discussed in chapter one. All interview recordings are stored in a USB storage disk and safely secured with a password known only to the researcher to prevent unauthorised third-party access. In respect of the focus group discussion conducted on WhatsApp,

the data has a first layer of encryption protection since WhatsApp is an encrypted messenger application that prevents third party access to conversations meaning no one can remotely see or access the discussion apart from the participants. In addition to the encryption, researcher took the following steps to keep the data safe:

1. The researcher opened a group named AS Discussion that is African Superheroes Discussion,
2. The researcher incorporated two layers of security measures to protect the discussion data, those being the use of a private identification number (PIN) to unlock the group chat and further setting it to CHAT LOCK to ensure the entire conversation was hidden and does not appear on the WhatsApp public panel even to researcher. To access the chat the researcher had to, first, search for the group name known only to him, and, second, supply the preset secret PIN.
3. In addition, the researcher's WhatsApp has two layers of security protection namely fingerprint verification and two-step authentication; both ensure that no third party can externally access conversations.

These layers of security were implemented to protect the data while on the researcher's phone. On the conclusion of the discussion, the researcher transferred the data to a laptop and secured it in a password-protected file. The researcher subsequently deleted the entire conversation from WhatsApp for EVERYONE, including himself. Finally, the group too was deleted. Before deleting the conversation however, the researcher emphasised to discussants not to let another person access the information from their end. They were implored to set the conversation to CHAT LOCK as well and delete the group once discussion is over. In any case, once the researcher deleted the conversation FOR EVERYONE, it was deleted for all participants.

4.4 Quality in Qualitative Research

Quality assurance in qualitative research is a contentious issue. Generally, scholars and researchers concur that validity concerns the efficiency of research instruments in generating appropriate data for a study while reliability relates to the consistency of results when the methodical parameters of a study is applied in different contexts, thus enhancing generalisation. In practice, validity and

reliability are the prime benchmarks of research quality for positivists whose information elicitation favours quantifying and measuring phenomena in concrete terms. Indeed, researchers tend to invoke both terms to demonstrate that a research followed best standards. For instance, Mohajan (2017) echoes a positivist preference by declaring that validity and reliability remains the best parameters of determining good research. However, Healy and Perry (2000) differ on the applicability of validity and reliability as universal measures of research quality, insisting instead that quality should be judged according to the paradigmatic terms. In other words, quality of a research should be evaluated based on the principles of the methodology adopted. Stenbacka (2001) and Golafshani (2003) agreed with Mohajan's position arguing that since quantitative study is oriented towards explaining and qualitative towards understanding, reliability is not relevant in the latter paradigm. Golafshani continues that whereas reliability and validity are treated as discrete concepts in quantitative studies, they are not viewed separately in qualitative research, being, instead, subsumed in terminologies such as credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness.

Ali and Yusof (2011) navigated the contentions around the assessment of quality in qualitative studies and condensed the schools of opinions on the subject into the following four groups:

1. Those who believe the only way to determine quality of qualitative investigations is through the scientific criteria of reliability, validity, and objectivity,
2. Those who insist there is no absolute way to judge the quality of qualitative studies,
3. Those who argue that quality of qualitative studies can be determined by modifying quantitative research yardsticks to fit the research context of qualitative studies, and
4. Those who say qualitative studies can only be judged through unique criteria developed for it.

In addition to identifying credibility, transferability and trustworthiness, as recurring terminologies of quality in qualitative research, rigour also featured as one the recommendations advanced by Ali and Yusof. However, Davies and Dodd (2002) cautioned that rigour in qualitative research must not be understood in the context of reliability and validity but in terms of embracing and explaining subjectivity, reflexivity, and social interaction that manifested in the conduct of a research project. For Davies and Dodd, therefore, in addition to credibility, transferability and

trustworthiness, addressing subjectivity through reflexivity demonstrates quality in qualitative research since it provides what Heshusius (cited in Blair, 2015, p. 14-15) referred to as “participatory consciousness”. While coming to similar findings as Ali and Yusof (2011), Rolfe (2006) contends that trustworthiness is the foremost measure of quality in qualitative investigations, arguing that the concept comprises credibility, transferability, and dependability. Daymon and Holloway (2011) agree with Rolfe (2006) and maintain trustworthiness is the central quality yardstick in qualitative research.

On the one hand, the painstaking effort and ability of the researcher to design, describe, and detail their procedures and decision-making process determines the quality of a qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003). On the other hand, (Daymon & Holloway, 2011) add that the researcher’s effort to show quality must communicate trustworthiness as an umbrella measure of quality comprising the following:

1. Credibility, achieved when a study’s findings are recognised as contextually true and meaningful,
2. Transferability, achieved when findings of a study can lead people to make connections to their experiences, settings, and situations they are familiar with, and
3. Dependability, referring to the consistency of methods and logic of decision making which makes findings dependable.

To achieve trustworthiness therefore, the burden is on the researcher to demonstrate thoroughness of methods, meticulous rigour, logic of decision-making and detailed description of the research process and findings. Priority was given to trustworthiness in this research and the researcher took steps to demonstrate the study is credible, transferable, and dependable. Particular steps taken to achieve trustworthiness relates to full explanation of the methodical procedure adopted to collect and analyse data, transparency on the logic of decisions, and detailed description of findings.

Additionally, reflexivity on researcher subjectivity and overall research process was included in the study. According to Mason (2002), reflexivity is critical examination of what one’s actions and the reasons for taking those actions. It extends to acknowledging, confronting, and often

challenging assumptions, and recognising the extent to which one's views, actions, and decisions shape the research. Reflexivity is an acceptable critical self-reflection technique in qualitative investigations that make the researcher's implicit motivations, assumptions, and biases plain to self and others (Morrow, 2005). Researcher embeddedness is an intrinsic feature of qualitative research thus making reflexivity necessary to articulate the researcher's subjectivities, involvement in research and the extent to which both condition the investigation (Morrow, 2005; Ali & Yusof, 2011; Damon & Holloway, 2011; Mohajan, 2017). The acknowledgement of implicit factors that influenced the researcher and articulation of strategies taken to ensure the research is robust enhance quality judgment (Damon and Holloway, 2011).

4.5 Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter, the methodology, methodical procedures for data collection and analysis, and logic of decisions that governed the entire process from data collection to findings were explained. The next chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This penultimate chapter deals with the presentation and discussion of findings to the four research questions clarified in chapter one and repeated in chapter four. The presentation and subsequent holistic discussion of the findings are in a sequential order according to the chronological arrangement of the research questions.

5.2 Re-Stating Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to study how Yoruba language and culture are portrayed multimodally in both *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* African superhero comics published by Comic Republic. By scrutinizing the use of Yoruba language and culture in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*, this study addresses the claim of cultural identity portrayal by the publisher. The focus in the foregoing purpose pertains to the depiction of Yoruba identity through the multimodal interaction of words and images using the American superhero model. The findings in respect of this purpose follow in the next sections.

5.3. Findings Regarding Research Question One

The poser in research question one is in what ways are Yoruba language and culture portrayed in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*? Given the focus of the question, the presentation of findings for each comic is separate. Data for this research question was generated through relational content analysis (see Chapter Four on Methodology) which served as the route to achieve the multimodal exploration of the text-image use and interaction. A synopsis of both superhero comics was provided in section 1.6 in chapter one. Outcomes of the analysis of *Ireti-Bidemi* comes first. These

findings are presented as per their representational, interactional, and compositional (see Chapter Three under Multimodal theory) implications as portrayals of Yoruba language and culture. The findings concerning the Yoruba-English language interaction was achieved by analysing text containers (speech and thought balloons), captions, and translations while findings relating to image-text interaction was achieved by analysing images together with language nuances (see Chapter Four under Data Collection Methods).

5.3.1 Findings Regarding *Ireti-Bidemi*

1. Textual Interaction Modal Analysis: English-Yoruba Language

The seven-issue folktale-crime superhero comic is not set in a fictional city that exists only within the pages of the comic as is typical of many superhero comics. Instead, the events unfolded in actual South-Western Yoruba cities in Nigeria. From issue one to seven the Yoruba cities in which the story occurred are Ife in Osun State (page 32 issue 2), Bodija, Ojoo, Mokola, and Ring Road all in Ibadan, Oyo State, including the *Ibadan University* representing the University of Ibadan. The National Arts Museum at Onikan, Lagos State is also a significant location in the story. This particular location was where Bidemi had an otherworldly experience through which she acquired superhero powers in pages nine (9) to twenty-three (23) of issue two. The locations appear in bold and clear text at the top of each page where distinct events happened. In addition, the names of the characters were predominantly and distinctively fully Yoruba with few exceptions being those of Jason Ogunde (on pages 9 and 15 of issue 5), Dorothy (for example on page 25 of issue 2 and page 7 of issue 5), Jade Waziri (page 7 of issue 6), and Marcus Chigozie (page 18 of issue 6). Yoruba names such as Bidemi Ogunde, Bayo Ogunde, Shola Ogunde, Bolu, Teye Oluwadamilare, Ajala, Ajoke, Kola, Akedinmu, dominated the story. However, further analysis of the English-Yoruba language interaction across all seven issues shows that Yoruba language was neither prominently used for conversations nor naming major concepts. Yoruba language appeared occasionally mainly in form of Yoruba words sandwiched among English language speeches. Conversational exchanges in wholly Yoruba language are rare. Given the language choice in which English is dominant, there were few translations of Yoruba to English. Consequently, English language was

the language of conversation with occasional use of Pidgin English with a Nigerian flavour mostly in issue one as copiously used in the robbery scene in pages eight (8) to twelve (12). To buttress this language modality finding, the number of times Yoruba language was used as single words buried within English language speeches or as complete sentences were tallied for all the issues and presented in table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Number of times Yoruba appeared in Irete-Bidemi issue 1 to 7

ISSUE 1		
Yoruba Speech	Page	Total
<i>Ori iya mi o</i>	8	2
<i>Jesu!</i>	8	
Yoruba words in English Speech	Page	4
<i>Abi</i>	12	
<i>Omo</i>	8	
<i>Ni</i>	11	
<i>Kuku</i>	11	
ISSUE 2		
Yoruba Speech	Page	Total
<i>Onikan wa o</i>	8	1
Yoruba words in English Speech	Page	Total
<i>Baba rugbo</i>	21	7
<i>Ife (kingdom)</i>	21	
<i>Olumo (Rock)</i>	21	
<i>O jare</i>	25	
<i>Joo (Jor)</i>	25	
<i>Haba</i>	25	
<i>Obatala</i>	32	
ISSUE 3		
Yoruba Speech	Page	Total
<i>Ase o ti e le</i>	23	1

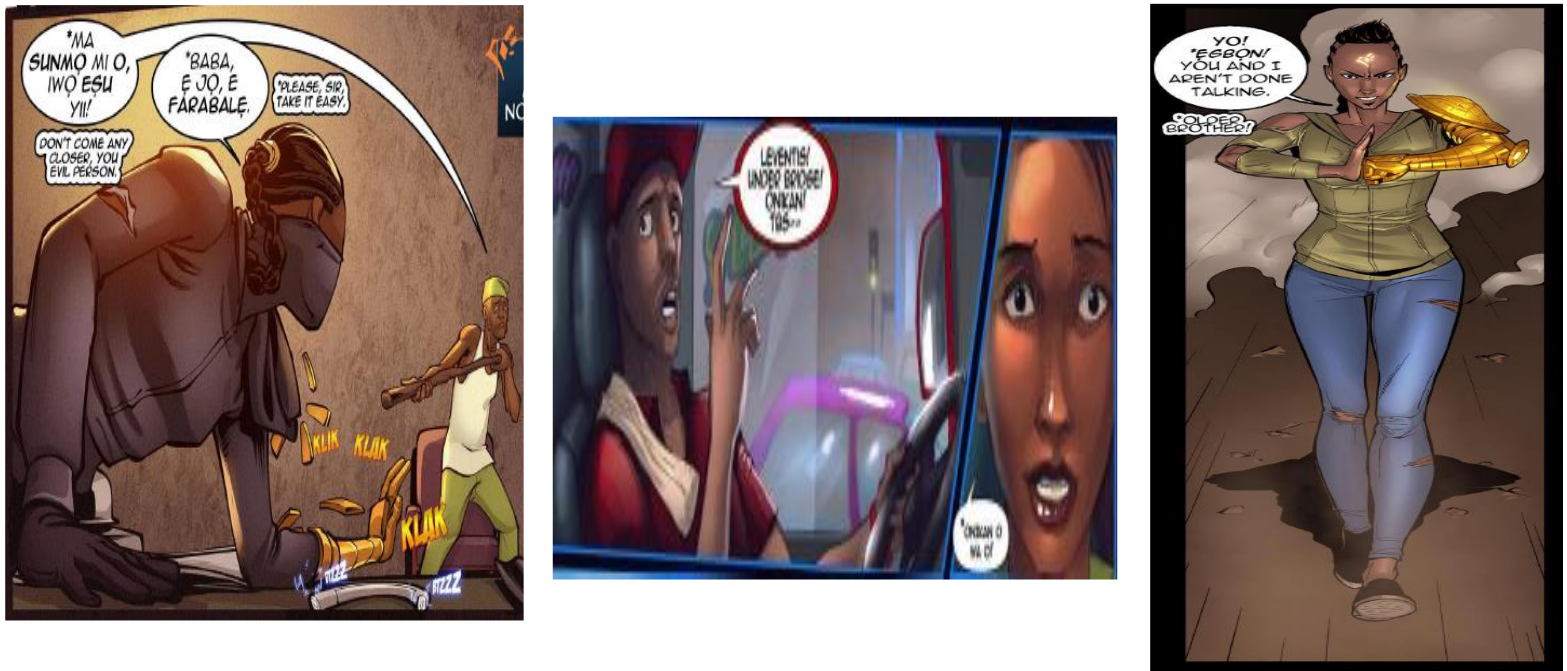
Yoruba words in English Speech	Page	Total
There were no single Yoruba words in English speech in Issue 3		
ISSUE 4		
Yoruba Speech	Page	Total
Ahh ah! Maa ke mo	6	5
Omo mi, kini oruko re?	20	
Adupe o!	20	
Ah! Kilode omo mi?	21	
Hmn! Omo daa da.	21	
Yoruba words in English Speech	Page	Total
Oga	8	4
Yeye	17	
Shebi	17	
Omo mi	19	
ISSUE 5		
Yoruba Speech	Page	Total
There are no full Yoruba speech in Issue 5		

Yoruba words in English Speech	Page	Total
Abi	6	2
Joo (joor)	11	
ISSUE 6		
Yoruba Speech	Page	Total
There are no full Yoruba speech in Issue 6		
Yoruba words in English Speech	Page	Total
Oya	6	3
Aburo	14	
Egbon	16	
ISSUE 7		
Yoruba Speech	Page	Total
Se emi lo n ba soro bayii?	11	4
Ahh! Egba mi o!	17	
Ma sun mo mi o, iwo esu yi!	17	
Baba, e jo, e farabale	17	
Yoruba words in English Speech	Page	Total

Sha	9	2
Oga	14	
Total Yoruba Speech	13	
Total Yoruba Words in English Speech	22	
Cumulative Yoruba Speech And Words		35

In total there were just thirteen (13) speeches fully rendered in Yoruba language and twenty-two (22) Yoruba words interspersed with English sentences in the one hundred and eighty-seven (187) pages from issue one to seven. Furthermore, there was just one conversation completed in Yoruba language in all the issues, this being in page seventeen (17) of issue seven (7) in the momentary incident between Bidemi the superhero (ine) and an elderly Yoruba man. This conversation is also the third instance in which Bidemi spoke Yoruba language, the first time being in page sixteen (16) issue six (6) where she used English-Yoruba code mixing by uttering the Yoruba word *egbon*, meaning elder sibling, while the third is in page eight (8) issue two (2). These three instances are shown in figure 5.1 below.

Figure 5.1: Only instances of the superhero (ine) speaking Yoruba



Source: Ireti-Bidemi page 17 issue 7, left image showing Bidemi and an elderly Yoruba man having a little confrontation in Yoruba; page 8 issue 2, middle image showing Bidemi alerting a BRT bus driver of her destination in Yoruba; and page 16 issue 6, right image showing Bidemi code mixing English and Yoruba languages with the Yoruba word 'egbon' added.

In the only traditional Yoruba village setting in the story contained in page thirty-two (32) of issue two (2), the villagers spoke English not Yoruba. Although there is a caption that indicates the conversation in that image was translated from Yoruba, the language was not spoken anywhere in

the image to warrant the need for a translation notification. This portrayal shows a disconnection between the traditional setting and the language spoken. Unlike other cases where a character actually uttered Yoruba sentences or words and subsequently translated into English as in the examples in figure 5.1 above, the case of this portrayal does not warrant translation notice because the villagers already spoke English language. Figure 5.2 below shows this portrayal.

Figure 5.2: Villagers speaking English Language instead of Yoruba



Source: Irete-Bidemi page 32 issue 2 showing villagers in Ife Kingdom observing and discussing a celestial event of Yoruba cosmological origin.

Socially, the characterisation of Bidemi in terms of her youthful age, family (a famous detective father, a bank manager mother, and a brother in a foreign country), and education creates an interactional representation of a person from an urban and financially comfortable middle class Yoruba family. The image extracts in figure 5.3 emphasise this impression of urban social class from the perspective of Bidemi's family.

Figure 5.3: Depictions of interactional representation of social class



Source: Ireti-Bidemi page 16 issue 4, left image showing Bayo Ogunde, Bidemi's detective father lamenting the abduction of his wife; page 20 issue four 4, right image showing an injured Bidemi listening to the news that her abducted mother has been released; and page 10 issue 5, bottom image showing Bidemi, her father and mother as well as Jason Ogunde, the elder sibling who flew into Ibadan following the kidnap incident.

This urban and social class interactional representation manifests variously in the story. Another example is epitomised by the wealth and opulence displayed by *Ajalu*, the masked villain as demonstrated in page seven (7) issue three (3) in figure 5.4 below.

Figure 5.4: Additional depiction creating interactional representation of social class



Source: Ireti-Bidemi page 7 issue 3 showing Ajalu, the masked villain commissioning a criminal for the bank robbery for the abduction of Bidemi's mother.

Other representational portrayals that add to the notion of contemporary urban lifestyle is the form of the Yoruba language used in the story. The Yoruba words are devoid of the characteristic intonation marks in addition to spelling some Yoruba words in ways consistent with urban culture modification. In respect of the latter feature, the case of *joo*, being a contraction of *jo wo* (meaning please), spelt as *jor* or *joor* in page twenty-five (25) issue two (2) and page eleven (11) issue five (5) is consistent with contemporary urban style as used in chats or on social media.

Therefore, the representational and interactional impressions of Yoruba language in the seven issues of the comic are strictly in terms of abstract properties mainly names of individuals and places. Conversations in Yoruba is almost non-existent. The few Yoruba words interspersed in English sentences are negligible. There are not concepts of consequence named in Yoruba language. There are no Yoruba idioms, panegyrics or incantations. Indeed, the incantation that Bidemi recited to invoke the spirit and powers of Ireti Moremi, her ancestral matriarch warrior queen in pages twenty (20) to twenty-one (21) of issue two (2) was in an unknown language not Yoruba. As such, the sociocultural significance of traditional Yoruba spiritual acts performed in Yoruba language was arrogated to an unknown 'other'. The significant event in which an otherwise

ordinary girl recited an incantation written in an unknown language to invoke and acquire superpowers from her supposed Yoruba ancestral matriarch warrior queen is shown in figure 5.5.

Figure 5.5: Bidemi recites incantation to invoke the powers of Irete Moremi to become Irete-Bidemi

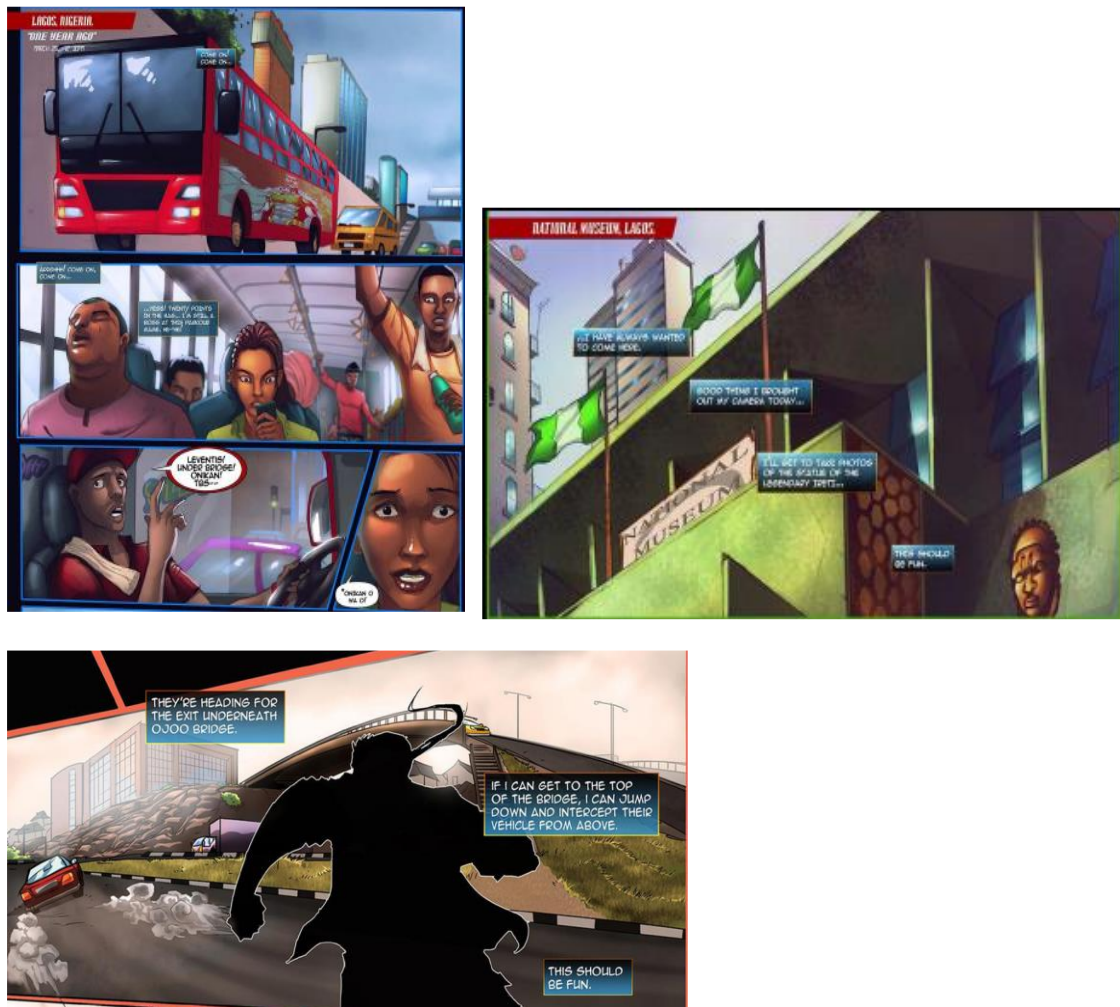


Source: Irete-Bidemi pages 20 to 21 Issue 2 showing Bidemi at a subterranean section of the National Museum reciting an incantation to invoke the powers and spirit of Irete Moremi to become Irete-Bidemi.

2. Image-English-Yoruba Interaction Modal Analysis

Regarding the image portrayals and interactions with words, findings showed that the images generally depict contemporary urban, South-West Yoruba cities. Compositionally, the locations depicted in the images are modally definitive of Yoruba locations because they contain landmarks or characteristic features that are close to their real-life appearance thus creating an interactional contact of familiarity that communicates Yoruba town or city. This tactic of using real-life landmark features of Yoruba locations to associate occurrences in the comic with Yoruba society rather than an abstract location or another culture is the most prominent portrayal strategy of Yoruba identity in *Ireti-Bidemi* story. In figure 5.6 below, the depiction of Lagos bears conceptual and narrative representational markers associated with the city such as the red type Bus Rapid Transport (BRT) system and commercial skyscrapers at Lagos Island while the *Ojoo* Bridge in Ibadan and the surrounding landscape also create compositional impressions consistent to reality.

Figure 5.6: Narrative and conceptual portrayal of urban Yoruba cities consistent with reality



Source: Ireti-Bidemi: Page 8 issue 2 left image showing a Lagos Street with the typical red BRT automobiles; page 9 issue 2 right image showing the National Museum and Nigerian flag with cable dishes and antennae hanging from homes in background; and page 9 issue 1 bottom image showing Bidemi chasing a speeding car around the Ojoo Bridge in Ibadan.

Consequent upon the urban slant of the comic, few depictions create sufficient impressions of Yoruba cultural identity in terms of, for instance, artefacts, religion, mythology and modes of dressings. In the image contained in figures 5.1 (the left image showing Bidemi and an elderly Yoruba male in a confrontation) and 5.2 are two notable depictions that present apparent clues suggesting Yoruba sociocultural experience. Specifically:

1. The depiction of the old man contained in the left image shown in figure 5.1 contains visual metaphors and conceptual structures in form of the dressing comprising traditional Yoruba *sokoto* (trouser) and *fila* (cap) complimented in text by the

conversation in Yoruba language. These combinations create a representational impression of Yoruba-ness as well as an interactional meaning by creating a sociocultural contact that points to Yoruba culture. In terms of its compositional meaning, further analysis of the same image indicates a meeting of generational lifestyles in which the urban and youthful meets the traditional and aged. This compositional meaning is specifically in terms of modality or the extent to which a portrayal depicts a lived reality or experience. While Bidemi modally represents the urban and youthful, the elderly man represents the traditional and aged. Yet, both are connected by their sociocultural history being the Yoruba language they used for a confrontational conversation. This emphasises Yoruba representation. However, the vector contained in the image in which Bidemi appears in a close-up and high angle perspective pushes the elderly man farther into the background giving him and the cultural essence reduced prominence.

2. In addition to the bottom image in figure 5.6, the background landscape in figure 5.7 below is a visual metaphor that depicts Ibadan with the characteristic brown rusted roofs in the old parts of the city thus creating representational, interactional, and compositional salience that represents the Yoruba city, as it exists in real life. However, this characteristic social marker is embedded in the background with a fading or vanishing visual effect that weakens its representational and interactional strength while the more socially conceptual foreground image is sharper, bolder, and nearer to the focal point of perception. In terms of compositional meaning, the informational value of the foreground is strong being that it occupies the greatest proportion of the image frame. However, the street and houses are general visual metaphors that could suggest any Yoruba setting not Ibadan specifically.

Figure 5.7: Visual metaphor signifying Ibadan



Source: Irete-Bidemi Page 7 to Issue 6.

3. The village scene in the image extract in figure 5.2 contains conceptual structures that could indicate a Yoruba village. The depiction of the man in close-up carries the most representational and interactional impression of Yoruba-ness. It establishes an interactional prominence accentuated by a semblance of the traditional *fila abeti-aja* (dog-eared cap) on his head. The location, identified in text as Ife Kingdom, combines with the image depiction to create an interactional impression of Yoruba society. This is despite the fact that the villagers did not speak Yoruba nor are there any other conceptually definitive imagery that suggests Yoruba identity.

There are other less specific sociocultural experience settings. In page seven (7) of issue one (1) for instance, the setting is a typical market scene in Nigeria. Apart from some women depicted in traditional *iro* (wrapper) and *buba* (blouse) traditional Yoruba female outfit noticeably the woman in yellow attire, neither the *garri* being sold in the market nor the general dressing of the traders and customers explicitly indicate it is a Yoruba setting. Hence, the image is more conceptually representational than creating a compelling interactional effect of Yoruba identity. The language too is in English further adding to the lack of sociocultural specificity. However, the location identification as *Garri Market, Bodija*, in Ibadan at the top right corner clarifies that the event in the image is in a Yoruba location. Further down in page eight (8) where the garri market scene continues and unfolds into commotion arising from a robbery, two Yoruba remarks uttered by the fleeing market users indicate the sociocultural context of the image. In this otherwise conceptual image, the foregoing impression of Yoruba society majorly derives from the Yoruba-English language interactions providing social context. These depictions are contained in figure 5.8.

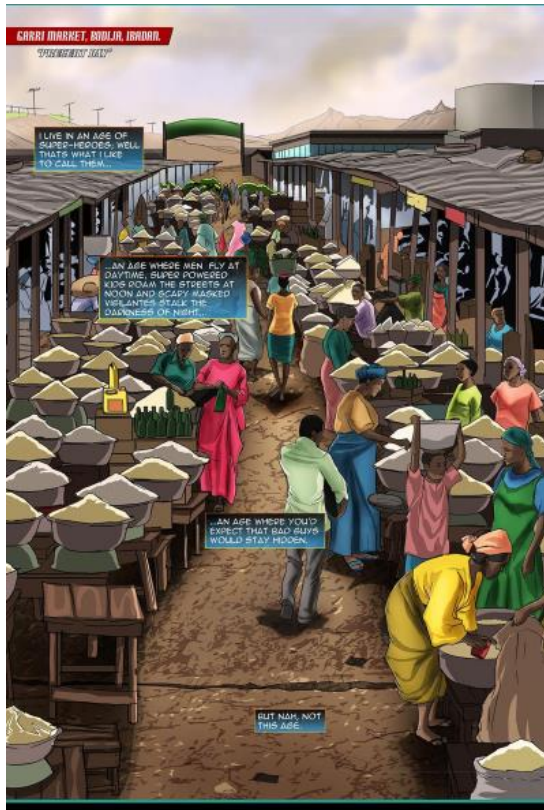


Figure 5.8: Conceptual garri market depiction deriving socially contextual representational meaning through Yoruba-English interaction.

Source: Irete-Bidemi pages 7 (above) and 8 (below) issue one.



A similarly conceptual image depiction of what could pass for any contemporary Southern Nigerian society exists in pages eighteen (18) to twenty-one (21) issue four (4) in which an injured Bidemi was rescued and treated by Ajoke and her grandfather at the latter's home. Whereas the man wears a flowing garment that has semblance of traditional Yoruba male *agbada*, and his granddaughter adorns a cornrows hairdo styled in a manner close to the female Yoruba *suku*

(bundle) hairstyle, these depictions are more conceptual and less representative, interactional and modally definitive of Yoruba-ness. The task of imposing Yoruba representation on these series of images was achieved by text in the form of names of the characters, those being Ajoke and Bidemi Ogunde, and the Yoruba speeches the old man made. This scenario is depicted in the two images in figure 5.9 below.

Figure 5.9: Language clarification of Yoruba identity to conceptual images



Source: Ireti-Bidemi pages 18 (above) and 20 (below) issue four (4).

Whereas the image and textual interaction in the village scene of Ife Kingdom in page thirty-two (32) issue two (2) has already been analysed, in the context of the broader depictions in the entire page, new implications of portrayal arise.

Figure 5.10: Yoruba cosmological event observed in urban cities and a village



Source: Irete-Bidemi pages 32 issue 2.

In figure 5.10 above, the composition combines three different image narratives occurring in different Yoruba locations, these being National Museum in Lagos State, Ife Kingdom in Osun State, and Ibadan University in Ibadan, Oyo State. The impression of geographical variance is achieved compositionally by framing events at Ife Kingdom (upper right) and Ibadan University (lower right) in square boxes thereby separating them from the bigger, page filling image of Lagos

where a Yoruba cosmological-celestial event is unfolding. The location captions at the top of each image frame clarifies the difference in setting. The depiction of the cosmological-celestial event at the National Museum in Lagos contains a vector in the form of a pillar of white light emanating from the sky and striking a specific location. In the second speech box located at the top right side of the page beside the Ife Kingdom image, the phenomenon is associated with *Obatala* thus, “*that beam of light is the embodiment of light, my people call him Obatala*. By linking the occurrence to *Obatala*, the Yoruba orisha or god of wisdom and creator of earth, the effect created is a representational and interactional impression of Yoruba culture in an unfolding significant event in a contemporary urban Yoruba city. The Ife Kingdom image accentuates the association of the occurrence to the Yoruba culture through the acknowledgement of its cosmological and spiritual significance in the speech balloon at the bottom of the frame. The frame containing the Ibadan University scene further accentuates the Yoruba culture and cosmological significance of the Lagos occurrence observed in the speech balloon that explains that the pillar of light represents the awakening of *Ireti Moremi*, the mythological warrior queen from whom Bidemi got her superpowers as shown in figure 5.5. Although the urban city portrayals dominate the images, the three depictions cohere to create representational and interactional impressions of Yoruba cosmological beliefs through English text.

In addition, the interior images of the National Museum show some artefacts that originate from Yoruba society. In the two images of the interior of the museum contained in figure 5.11, the following nuances are significant:

1. The first image on the left created a compositional meaning by framing and separating the interior of the museum from the exterior in which the green and white flag is a visual metaphor for Nigeria. The framed image contains Yoruba cultural artefacts such as *Sango*, the god of thunder and lightning framed in the monochrome portrait on the wall and Ife artworks beside *Sango* in the vertical glass frame. However, the interactional meaning of these objects is diminished because, distance wise, they are farther away from the focal point and are comparatively small. This compositional rendition consequently dilutes the strength of the Yoruba artefacts’ contact as per noticeability and evocation of Yoruba culture. Despite the compositional technique that directs attention to the artefacts, the interactional significance of the Yoruba objects is neither compelling nor profound because

other visual metaphors indicative of Nigeria have stronger interactional presence: they are bigger in size and closer to the focal point in terms of distance while also having depth of perspective.

Figure 5.11: Artworks in National Museum interior.



Source: Irete-Bidemi page 14 issue 1 and page 10 issue 2.

2. In the image on the right, the high angle rendition of the Eyo masquerade on the bottom as well as the standing golden statue of *Irete Moremi* on the right side create representational, interactional, and compositional modality that indicates and elevates Yoruba sociocultural history. The conversation between Bidemi and the museum worker mentions *Irete Moremi* as the central figure of interest in the scene thus emphasising Yoruba culture.

Finally on multimodal portrayals and findings in respect of *Ireti-Bidemi* is the subject of the appearance of the superhero (ine). Although she does not wear any special costume, her regular clothes are body fitting complemented with a face covering for disguise consistent with facial gear in superhero comics. This appearance is shown in figure 5.12 below.

Figure 5.12: Appearance of Bidemi



Source: *Ireti-Bidemi* Page 15 Issue 7 showing Bidemi (in hooded jacket, face covering, and metallic arm) fighting an impostor.

Nothing in the character's dressing creates any representational or interactional or compositional modality and salience as per Yoruba culture. A similar case is that of *Ajalu*, Bidemi's archenemy, who appears in bodyfitting suit and trousers with a rosharch face mask as already shown in figure 5.4.

5.3.2 Findings Regarding *Visionary*

Findings regarding how textual and visual elements combined to portray Yoruba culture and language in the *Visionary* story are presented next.

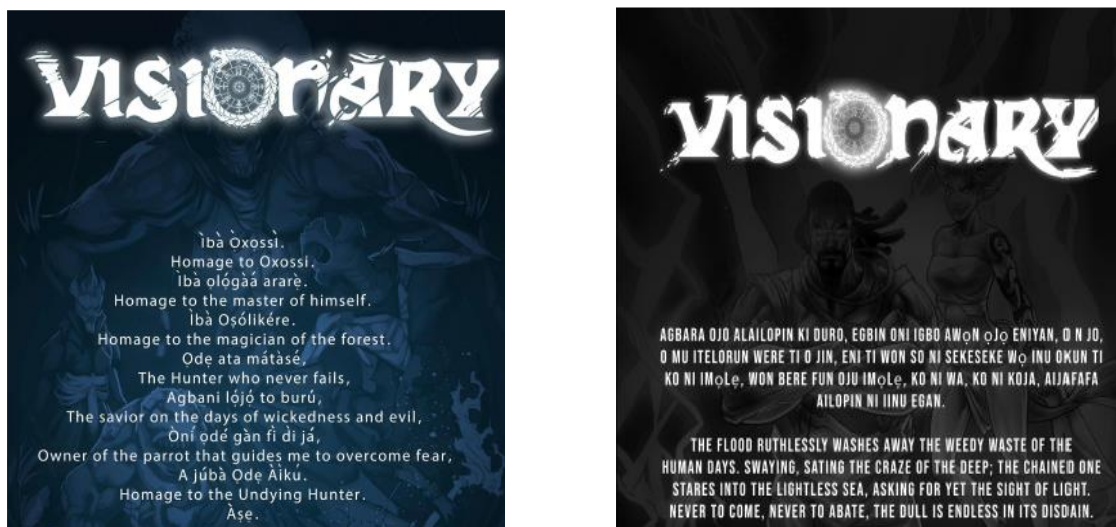
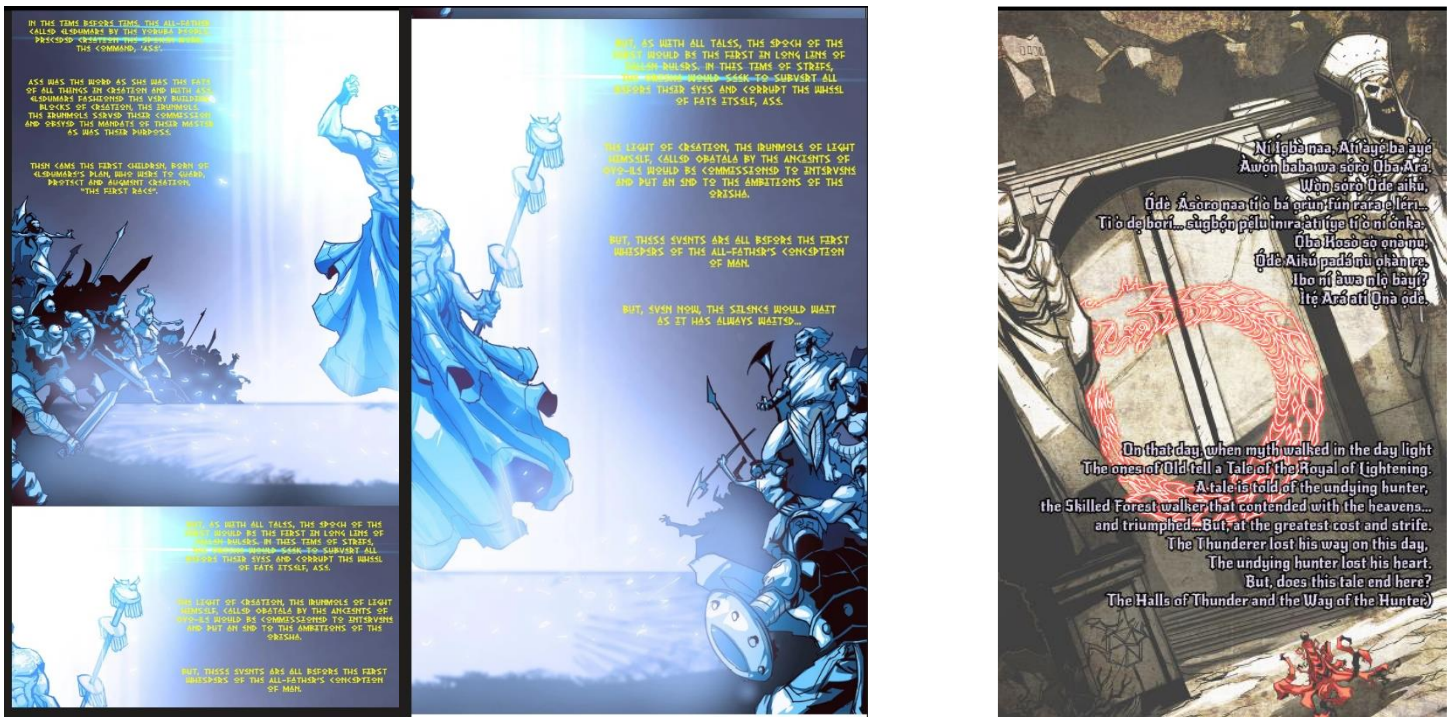
1. Textual Interaction Modal Analysis: English-Yoruba Language

Visionary is a folktale story that unfolds in contemporary urban Yoruba towns and cities where Yoruba deities, magic, myth, and the devices of modern warfare and technology combine in events of global consequence. In the entire five (5) issues of the comic, Yoruba language and English language coexist but the former language has elevated status for the fact that it is used abundantly for the following purposes:

1. In conversations, speeches, and translations,
2. To name concepts of consequence,
3. To name characters and places,
4. For incantation, and
5. Identify or name orishas (deities), spirits, and otherworldly creatures.

Except issue four (4), all other issues have prologues written in Yoruba language and translated into English. The only exception in this instance is Ascension: Issue 0 with its prologue written in English but about Yoruba cosmological beliefs regarding how earth was created and administered by *irumoles* (primordial heavenly creatures tasked with specific responsibilities) and orishas (deities) with *Eledumare* (God) overseeing the universe. In this regard, there is demonstrable representational, interactional, and compositional impressions of Yoruba language and culture in the comic even when a narration or conversation is achieved in English language. Figure 5.13 below is image extracts of the foregoing depictions.

Figure 5.13: Issue prologues written in Yoruba Language and/or English Language.



Source: Visionary Comic. Ascension: issue 0 prologue (upper left image); page 5 issue 1 prologue (upper right image); page 4 issue 2 prologue (lower left image); page 4 issue 3 prologue (lower right image).

The text in figure 5.14 are verbatim reproduction of the prologues shown in figure 5.13 owing to their illegibility in the latter figure.

Figure 5.14: Text of issue prologues written in Yoruba Language and/or English Language

In the time before time, the All-Father called *Eledumare* by the Yoruba preceded creation the spoken word, the command, “Ase”.

Ase was the word as she was the fate of all things in creation and with *Ase*, *Eledumare* fashioned the very building block of creation, the *Irumole*. The *Irumole* served their commission and obeyed the mandate of their master as was their purpose.

Then came the first children, born of *Eledumare*’s plan, who were to guard, protect, and augment creation, “the first race.”

But as with all tales, the epoch of the first, would be the first in long line of fallen rulers. In this time of strife, the Orisha would seek to subvert all before their eyes and corrupt the wheel of fate itself, *Ase*.

The light of creation, the *Irumole* of light himself, called *Obatala* by the ancients of Oyo-Ile would be commissioned to intervene and put an end to the ambitions of the orisha.

But, these events are all before the first whispers of the All-Father’s conception of man.

But, even now, the silence would wait as it has always waited...

Ni igba naa, ati aye ba aye,
Awon baba wa soro Oba Ara.
Won soro Ode aiku,
Ode asoro naa ti o ba orun fun rara e leri...
Ti o de bori...sugbon pelu inira ati iye ti o ni onka.
Oba Koso so ona nu,
Ode Aiku pada nu okan re.
Ibo ni awa nlo bayi?
Ite Ara ati Ona Ode.

On that day when myth walked in the day light
The ones of Old tell a tale of the Royal of Lightning.
A tale is told of the Undying Hunter,
The Skilled Forest walker that contended with the heavens...
And triumphed. But at the greatest cost and strife.
The Thunderer lost his way on this day,
The Undying Hunter lost his heart.
But does this tale end here?
The Halls of Thunder and the Way of the Hunter.

Iba Oxossi.
Homage to Oxossi.
Iba ologaa ara re.
Homage to the master of himself.
Iba Osolikere.
Homage to the magician of the forest.
Ode ata matase,
The Hunter who never fails,
Agbani lojo to buru,
The saviour on the days of wickedness and evil,
Oni ode gan fi idi ja,
Owner of the parrot that guides me to overcome fear,
A juba Ode Aiku.
Homage to the Undying Hunter.
Ase.

Agbara ojo alaiopin ki duro, egbin oni igbo awon ojo eniyan,
o n jo. O mu itelorun were ti o jin, eniti won so ni sekeseke
wo inu okun ti ko ni imole. Won bere fun oju imole, ko ni
wa, ko ni koja, aijafafa ailopin ninu ni innu egan.

The flood ruthlessly washes away the needy waste of the
human days. Swaying, sating the craze of the deep; the
chained one stares into the lightless sea, asking for yet the
sight of light. Never to come, never to abate, the dull is
endless in its disdain.

Source: Visionary Comic. Ascension: issue 0 prologue (top image); page 5 issue 1 prologue (left image); page 4 issue 2 prologue (top right image); page 4 issue 3 prologue (bottom right image).

The English-Yoruba language interaction in *Visionary* is almost devoid of English-Yoruba code mixing in speeches. The few instances in which this combination occurred were in pages thirty-one (31) and thirty-three (33) of issue one (1), pages sixteen (16) and eleven (11) of issue two (2), and page sixteen (16) of issue two (2) amounting to just five instances in the entire collection from issue 0 to four (4). For comparison table 5.2 below contains incidence of English and Yoruba language speeches in all the issues. The tally in the table is generated by counting the incidence of the language modality in speech balloon and thought boxes, as well as translations.

Table 5.2: Comparison of Yoruba and English Speech in Visionary

Issue	Page of Yoruba Speech	Frequency per Page	Total Yoruba Speech in Issue		Issue	Number of English Speech
Ascension: Issue 0			5		Ascension: Issue 0	33
1	7 10	2 2	4		1	70
2	5 6 8 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20	5 3 3 2 1 4 6 1 1 3 5 2 3	39		2	48

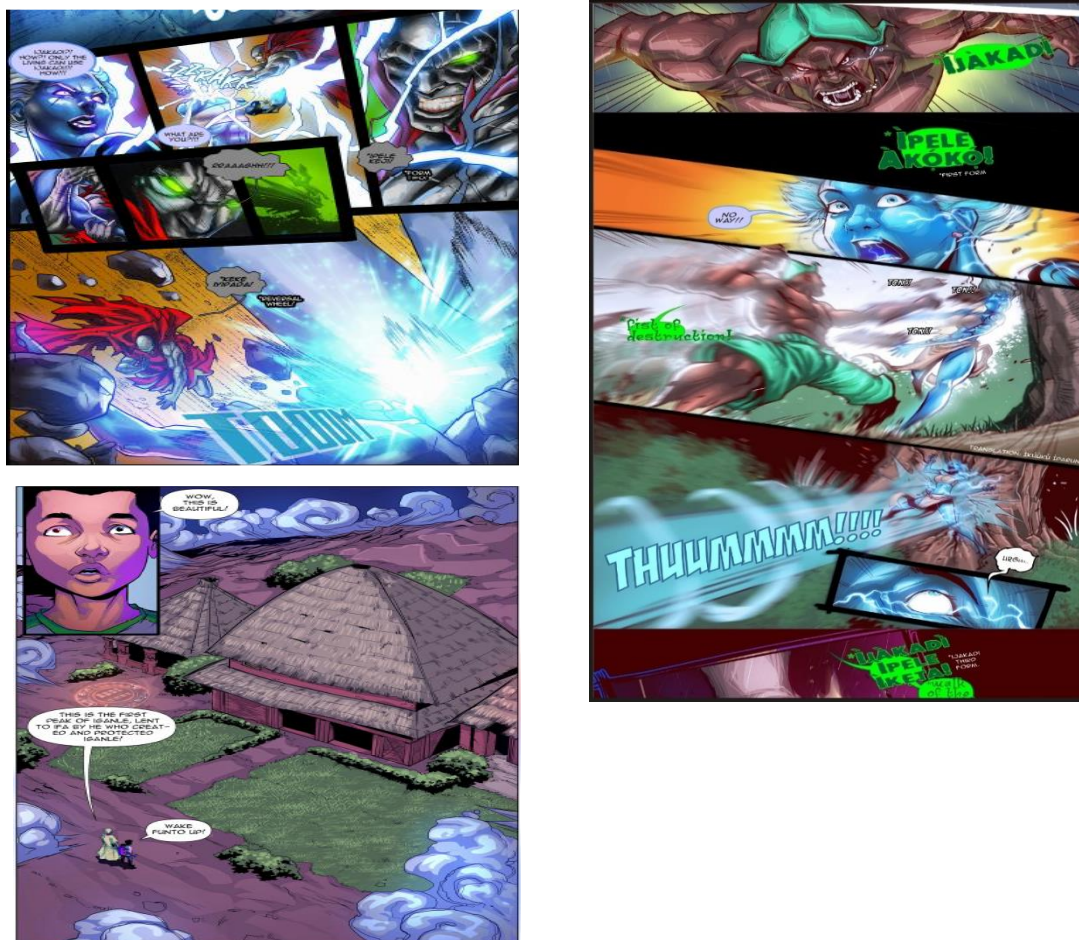
3	6	1	24		3	43
	8	2				
	9	2				
	10	2				
	11	2				
	12	1				
	13	3				
	16	2				
	17	6				
	18	1				
	19	1				
	20	1				
4	6	2	25		4	37
	7	2				
	8	2				
	9	1				
	11	1				
	12	4				
	16	3				
	17	7				
	20	1				
	21	2				
Total Yoruba Speech			97		Total English Speech	231

Considering that English is widely used for conversations in the comic, the finding that Yoruba language still had representational and interactional impacts is a function of the strategic use of the language in the following ways:

1. All events unfolded in Yoruba locations. There is the historical location as in the case of old Oyo Empire in the first image in *Ascension: Issue 0* where *Sango* and *Oxossi* were embroiled in a major battle, including the mythical and spiritual location as in the case of *Kosoo*, the otherworldly domain of *Sango*. In addition, there were contemporaneous urban centres as in Ibadan, Ile-Ife as well as the remote and magical location as in the case of Iganle village in Ondo State. All events of consequence in the story were characteristically of a Yoruba cosmological, mythological, and spiritual origin in which gods, spirits, and otherworldly creatures and men battled each other primarily at the mystical Iganle village thereby locating the story in Yoruba sociocultural experiences.
2. The *dramatis personae* who initiated and engaged in actions of consequence were all Yoruba deities, spirits, and otherworldly creatures who had Yoruba names. These characters are *Sango* (also called *Oba Kosoo* or King of *Kosoo*), the god of thunder and lightning with his familiar spirits *Ara* (thunder), *Iji* (storm), and *Ina* (fire); *Ogun*, the deity of iron, technology, and craftsmanship with his familiar spirit *Irin* (metal); *Eru*, an *eidos* or personification of fear; *Oxossi* (as opposed to the Yoruba spelling “*Osoosi*”, this spelling adopted in the comic is derived from the deity’s name in Yoruba inclined religions such as Santeria and Candomblé), the god of the forests and hunting; *Onisakoso* (the regulator), the giant stone guardian of Iganle; the *Sigidis* (the sentient statue/stone guardians of Iganle); *Apata* (the rock), leader of the stone guardian defense forces at Iganle; *Omiran Ibaje* (giant of decay, a spirit of destruction); *Arayan* (the leopard familiar beast of Omisefun); *Oba olofi meta* (three headed king, a familiar beast of *Eru*). This is in addition to giving human characters Yoruba names such as Danmole Ajanaku (the avatar of *Oxossi*), Funto Ajanaku, Omisefun, and Ifagbemi.
3. The naming of concepts of consequence in Yoruba language. In this regard Ifa (the divination system originating from *Orunmila*) and *Ijakadi*, being a martial arts form created

by *Obatala* for the defense of humanity, and its various *ipele* (stages) are integral to the imposition of Yoruba-ness on the story. Ifa and *Ijakadi* are central concepts in the *Visionary* story because Iganle village has an Ifa fortress while humans, familiar spirits, and beasts fought in *ijakadi* as in the case of *Oxossi* in issue 0 and Danmole's battle practices in pages twenty-nine (29) to thirty-two (32) issue one (1), *Arayan* page fourteen (14) issue two (2), and *Apata* in page ten (10) issue three (3) in the battles that occurred at Iganle. Figure 5.15 below contains extracts of images of both concepts of consequence.

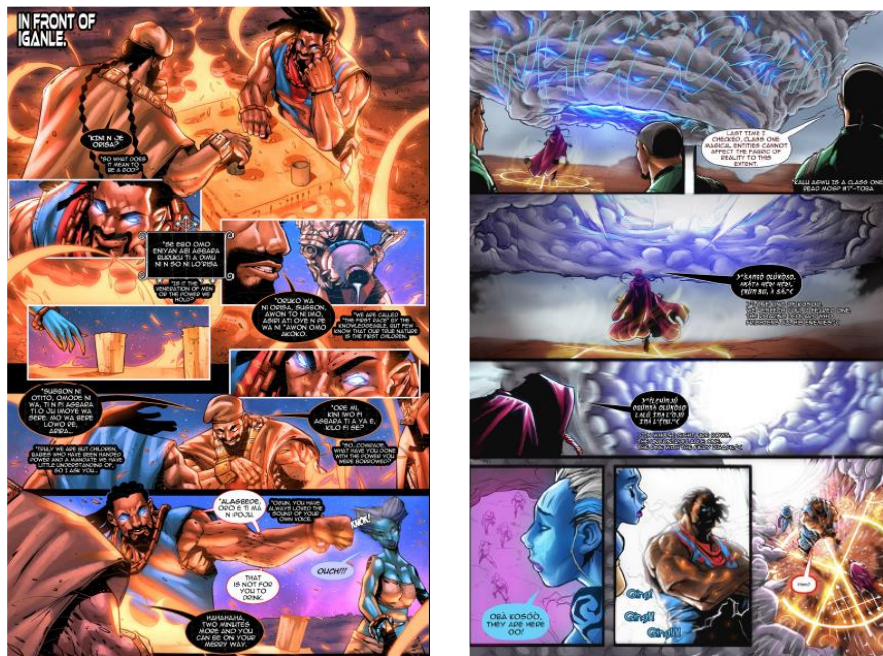
Figure 5.15: Manifestation of Ifa and Ijakadi as concepts of consequence



Source: *Visionary* page 10 issue 3 showing *Apata* fighting *Ara* using *Ijakadi* (upper left image); page 10 issue 2 showing *Danmole*, *Funto*, and *Omisefun* arriving at the Ifa domain in Iganle for divination (lower left image); *Ascension*: issue 0 showing *Oxossi* fighting *Ara* using *Ijakadi* (right image).

In terms of translations there are ample Yoruba to English translations consistent with the ninety-seven (97) Yoruba speeches that were uttered as contained in table 5.2. English language to Yoruba language translations are limited to twelve (12) in issues one to four mostly because major concepts and discussions were largely rendered in Yoruba language. The presence of ample Yoruba to English language translations created a situation where English did not overshadow Yoruba since major concepts and activities occurred in Yoruba language or were translated to Yoruba when they appeared in English. In figure 5.16 below, the abundant use of Yoruba language accompanied by translations to English is shown in the case of the conversation between *Sango* and *Ogun* and the incantation performed by a mystic to summon *Sango*.

Figure 5.16: Instances of Yoruba speech in conversation



Source: Visionary page 17 issue 4 showing Sango and Ogun having a conversation in Yoruba in front of Iganle (left image); page 10 issue 1 showing a mystic working with the military reciting Yoruba incantations to summon Sango from his Kosoo domain (right image).

Finally on the Yoruba-English language modality, there are no instances of Yoruba words spelt in line with contemporary urban culture modifications and the standard grammatical intonation marks were characteristically used across all issues in all Yoruba speeches.

2. Image-English-Yoruba Interaction Modal Analysis

On the one hand, *Visionary* is characteristically replete with striking image-text renditions that are strongly representational, interactional, and create modal and salience compositional impressions of Yoruba culture. On the other hand, careful study of the imageries and text indicate an intricate blend of portrayals comprising Nigerian Yoruba cultural properties, Afro-American religious and West Indies voodoo depictions, and structures suggestive of Western and Oriental cultures.

In respect of image-text interaction, the notable portrayals that bear definitive marks of Yoruba culture in speech and dressing were the deities *Oxossi*, *Sango*, and *Ogun*. Although bare-chested, *Oxossi*, shown in figure 5.13, wore the traditional Yoruba *abeti-aja* (dog-eared) cap with a *kembe* (baggy) knee-high trouser and has Yoruba *ila oju* (facial marks). *Sango* similarly wears a *kembe* but completes it with a upper shoulder length embroidered *dansiki* (shirt), adorns red coral beads associated with spirituality and royalty in Yoruba culture on his neck and wrists while his hair is twisted into long and dangling braids, although the deity is typically associated with plaited *suku* (bundle) hairdo styled with cowries and red beads. *Ogun* wears the full complement of *agbada* (flowing garment), *sokoto* (trouser), and *fila* (cap) with large, rectangular red beads on his neck and wrists. These portrayals are consistent with traditional dressing for Yoruba males, and, extension, male royalty especially regarding the adornment of beads. The extract in figure 5.17 below shows *Sango* and *Ogun*, alongside their familiar spirits, in their traditional Yoruba regalia.

Figure 5.17: *Sango and Ogun in Yoruba male attire.*



Source: *Visionary* page 12 issue 4 showing *Ogun* on the far left and *Sango* on the far right.

In addition to these main characters, Omisefun and the sentry at Iganle are the other two characters whose appearance signify Yoruba culture, the former being a woman dressed in a gown with *gele* (head tie) while the latter is dressed like a Yoruba hunter as shown in the left image in figure 5.18. All of these characters spoke Yoruba. Other portrayals in the comic are a delicate balancing of modernity and various modern cultures with Yoruba cosmological spirituality, thereby making the depictions retain a Yoruba sociocultural essence. This specific portrayal tactic is a significant analytic aspect critical to the positioning of Yoruba language and culture in *Visionary*.

Being that Iganle where the major events unfolded is a magical, rustic, and remote village located in a forest, *Visionary* has an interactional tendency that suggests the setting of the story is of earlier centuries. On closer analysis, it becomes apparent that the story is firmly set in a contemporary time that is suspended in a mythical and otherworldly space of Yoruba spiritual origin. In light of the overwhelming esoteric ambience of the story, a handful of image depictions clarify that events happened in modern and contemporary locations. Two significant scenes in respect of the foregoing are that of Danmole in a classroom in Ibadan with spirits only him could see and hear and the desert scene in which a mystic summoned *Sango* ostensibly for the National Advanced Central Security Service (NACSS) Magical Entity Takedown Squad (METS) division to annihilate, an event which is depicted in part in the right image in figure 5.16. Figure 5.18 next is an extraction of these two scenes in which modernity collided with ancient Yoruba orishas and spirits.

Figure 5.18: Scenes depicting the meeting between modernity and ancient Yoruba mythological gods and spirits..

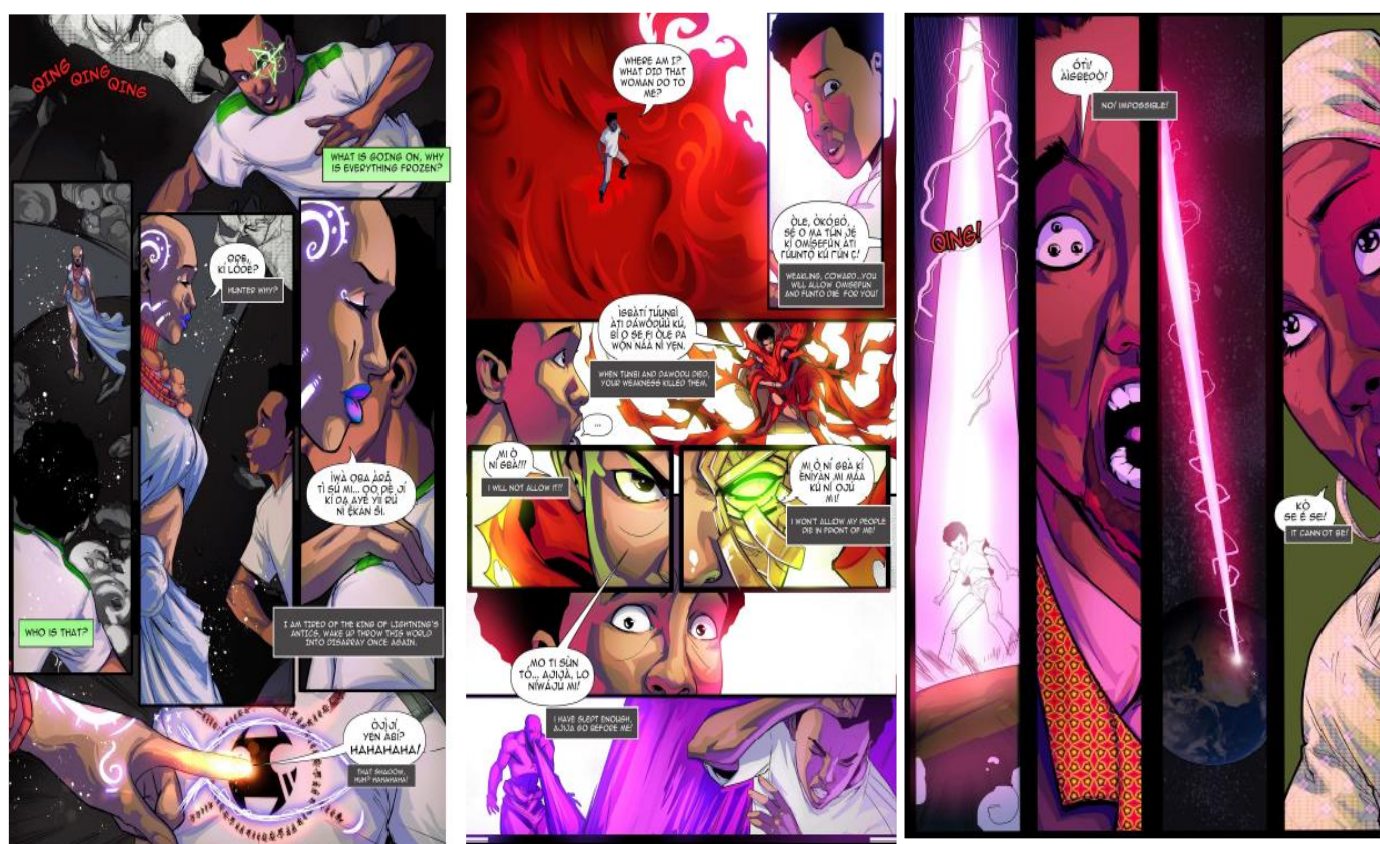


Source: Visionary page 9 Issue 1 showing a mystic summoning Sango for the NACSSMETS division to annihilate (left image) and page 6 issue 2 showing Danmole in a classroom and walking on the streets (right image).

In figure 5.13, the upper left image narration, re-written verbatim in the top image in figure 5.14, about the creation of the universe in *Ascension: Issue 0* situates Yoruba cosmological origin beliefs at the centerpiece of the world thereby elevating Yoruba culture to the prominent position of mother of the universe and source of human history and development. The implication of that Yoruba cosmological narration manifests in pages seventeen (17) to nineteen (19) of issue two (2). Following the battle at the Ifa domain in Iganle and threat to the lives of persons of the Oxossi

lineage, the spiritual realm intersects with the world of men culminating in the re-awakening of the long-dead Oxossi depicted in vector by the beam of light descending from heaven and striking earth (page 19 on the right in figure 5.19 below. This started a spiritual war of consequence involving gods, spirits, beasts, and men at Iganle village. Figure 5.19 below is the sequential depiction of this significant occurrence that centralises Yoruba culture at the heart of a superhero story.

Figure 5.19: Sequence of events leading to the awakening of Oxossi



Source: Visionary page 17 to 19 issue 2 showing the intersection between man of a modern era and spirits and deities culminating in the re-awakening of Oxossi who possess the body of Danmole.

The other major event that created the interactional impression of esoteric Yoruba spirituality of a previous age is contained in figure 5.20. In an otherwise ordinary forest in modern times, a spiritual portal opens and leads to the mystical realm of Iganle village. The circumstances in figures 5.18 to 5.19 collided and time became suspended in Yoruba spirituality that seemingly eroded traces of

the modern locations of the events. The vectors that depict the transportation from the ordinariness of man to the spiritual realm of spirits and deities are, again, the beam of light from heaven and the circular dragon wheel as shown in figure 5.20.

Figure 5.20: The celestial event signifying the transportation of events from the realm of modernity and man to a spiritual realm of Yoruba deities and spirits.



Source: *Visionary* page 19 issue 1 showing Omisefun, Danmole, and Funto accessing Iganle village magically.

The infusion of cultural tapestries from other sources with the foregoing Yoruba portrayals manifests in the following ways:

1. **Imageries of Western Nature:** in figure 5.13 the image to the left shows *Obatala*, the Yoruba orisha of creation, wisdom, and purity, with his distinctive staff and European

looking soldiers with swords, shields, and lances. Although the orisha's form suggests Westernised portrayals of Greco-Roman gods, the staff is distinctively associated with the deity while the cosmological narration imposes a Yoruba character on the image. Still in figure 5.13, the image on the right is that of an imposing picture in the background showing a mighty doorway with stairs and giant human statue pillars. Both human statues wore priest-like cassocks or robes. While the statue on the left looked Caucasian and/or Semitic, the other has a deathly appearance having the face of a wraith with a bishop mitre hat on its head. This image creates an interactional meaning of Western culture and Christian origin but the Yoruba narration translated into English superimposed on the foreground placed Yoruba culture in a significant position of overriding prominence by virtue of language. Further examples of Westernised depiction overridden by Yoruba properties especially in name are *Ara* and *Irin*, *Ogun*'s metallic and robot like female familiar spirit signifying metal and technology as shown in figure 5.21 below.

Figure 5.21: Image-Text rendition in which language is used to impose Yoruba identity on westernised image renditions



Source: *Visionary* page 6 issue 3

2. **Images of Oriental culture:** this is mainly manifests through oriental martial arts that was the major fight form humans and beasts in *Visionary* used in their duels against foes. This fight form creates an impression of oriental martial arts but a Yoruba origin was given to it by associating its creation to *Obatala*. Naming the fight form *ijakadi* (meaning wrestling) further imposed a Yoruba character by virtue of creative provenance. The background depiction and vector in figure 5.22 below shows the incorporation of oriental martial arts into *ijakadi* as part of the concepts of consequence in *Visionary*.

Figure 5.22: Image depicting oriental martial arts incorporated into *Ijakadi* by provenance



Source: *Visionary* page 7 issue 2.

3. **Image and textual reference to Afro-American and West Indies culture:** the incorporation of these cultural dimensions is in both words and images. In terms of words, the choice of spelling form adopted for the orisha *Oxossi*, as already explained directly derives from Afro-American and West Indies Yoruba inclined mythology but the deity's appearance is Yoruba with his Yoruba facial marks and dressing. The other critical portrayal of this nature concerns symbology specifically in terms of *veve*, a religious symbol or ensemble used to venerate, invoke, and signify the identity and power of a deity or spiritual being. This concept is borrowed by provenance from voodoo and applied to the

deities and spirits featured in *Visionary*. Specifically, there were *Sango* veve, *Oxossi* veve, and *Ogun* veve as shown in figure 5.23 below.

Figure 5.23: Voodoo veve applied by provenance to Yoruba deities



Source: *Visionary* page 8 showing Sango's veve (left image), page 11 showing Ogun's veve (right image), and page 15 showing Oxossi's veve (bottom image) all in issue 4.

Apart from the provenance veve depictions, a symbol distinctively recognised in Nigerian Yoruba society associated with Ifa is the *Opon Ifa* (Ifa divination board). The *Opon Ifa* appeared in the

story, albeit once, in page ten (10) of issue two (2) in front of the Ifa domain at Iganle village to bestow ownership of the location to the Ifa cult as shown in figure 5.24. Yet another Yoruba cultural property incorporated is the traditional *ayo* board game that Sango and Ogun play while discussing as contained in the left image in figure 5.16.

Figure 5.24: Image of Opon Ifa or Ifa divination board

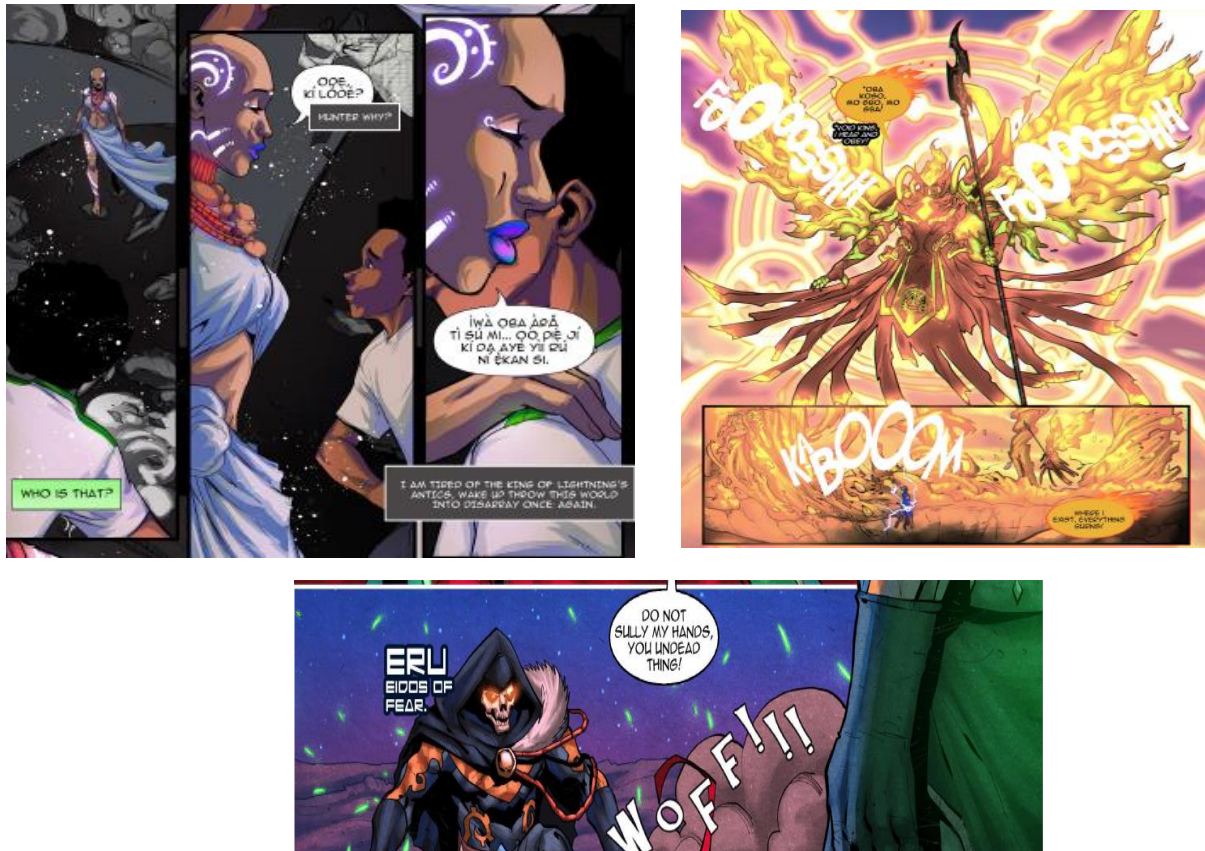


Source: Visionary page 10 issue 2 showing Opon Ifa, the bright circular symbol on the ground in the upper left.

4. **Character Costume:** regardless of the imposition of Yoruba identity on the characters through name, language, mythology, and dressing, other generic portrayals, which may appear negligible and insignificant, are in terms of stature with most of the central characters anatomically depicted with chiseled and muscular bodies consistent with the typical superhero feature. The depiction of *Sango*, *Ogun*, *Oxossi*, *Apata*, and *Eru* in this characteristic exaggeration of bodily structure trait of superhero characters is a subtle construction that brings the entities, especially *Sango*, *Ogun*, and *Oxossi*, into essentialised ideas of physical fitness and strength of superheroes. The interactional meaning created

therefore, is of fitness and strength as a way of essentialising the orishas in tandem with superhero archetypes. This nuance also extends to the female spirit *Ara*, who has a well-defined abdomen with a trim figure. In addition to the foregoing, another significant feature relates to costuming. Although by virtue of the prominent roles of characters such as *Sango* and *Ogun* Yoruba dressing is conspicuous, the costuming is generally eclectic including the archetypical superhero body fitting apparel noticeably for male characters and the scanty, body revealing clothing of female characters. *Eru* typifies the body fitting costume for males. *Ara* and the unnamed female spirit typify the female version, typically a scanty body fitting upper body piece and shredded clothing for the lower body. Figure 5.25 below shows this costume rendition. It suffices to say that while these character costumes are consistent with essentialised superhero forms and do not initiate any interactional impression of Yoruba identity, the image-language modality in which Yoruba names, concepts, and language were characteristically used to impose Yoruba identity on the characters is continued in these instances.

Figure 5.25: Images of essentialised superhero/non-Yoruba costumes



Source: Visionary page 17 issue 2 showing an unnamed female spirit in scanty body costume (top image); page 12 issue 3 showing Ina in a fiery and fitting costume; and page 13 issue 4 showing Eru in body fitting costume with cape and hood (bottom image).

5. **Powers and Abilities:** Generally, the characters possessed and used mainly magical powers that originate from esoteric Yoruba cosmology, spirituality, and otherworldly dimensions. These powers were invoked through Yoruba incantations, spells, and commands. The battle that engulfed Iganle village resulted from magical rituals and incantations that summoned *Sango* from his otherworldly *Kosoo* domain to earth as shown in the image on the right in figure 5.16. Further examples of incantations or magical commands are *Sango* summoning *Iji* as shown in the left image in figure 5.23 and when Ifagbemi summoned *Omiran Ibaje* and *Apata* summoned *Onisakoso* in figure 5.26 below.

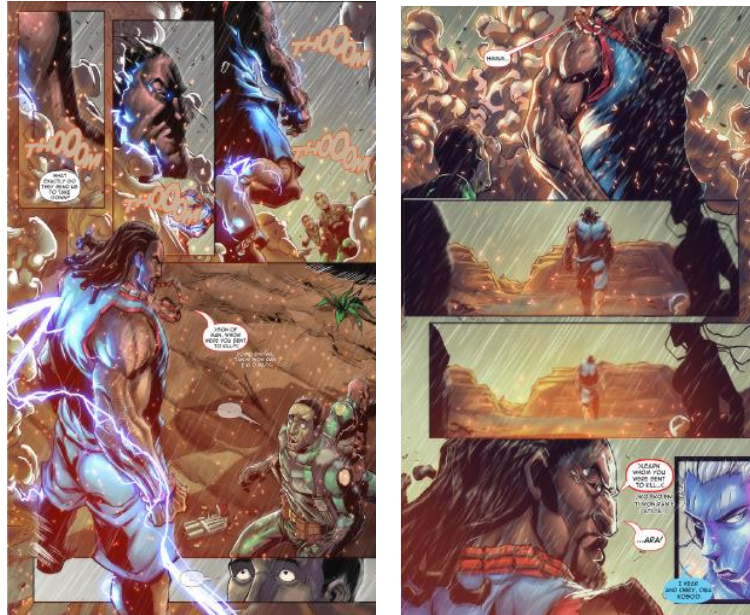
Figure 5.26: Using Yoruba incantations to summon spirits and beasts



Source: Visionary page 16 issue 3 Ifagbemi demonstrating his power by using incantation to summon Omiran Ibaje and page showing an unnamed female spirit in scanty body costume (top image); page 13 issue 3 showing Apata demonstrating his magical power by summoning Onisakoso through incantation.

The arrival of *Sango* on earth is a significant occurrence containing a critical but subtle undertone that creates an interactional impression of the superiority of Yoruba deities and their powers over men and their modern devices. This impression manifests when the deity easily triumphed over the military's ammunitions and spells, warned them before matching away and asked *Ara* to destroy them as shown in figure 5.27 below. The superiority implication appeared in several places as the confrontation unfolded. In the bottom of the right image in figure 5.27, the interactional impression of the superiority of the Yoruba deity is depicted by rendering *Sango* in a high angle point-of-view thereby giving him a huge and imposing mien. In contrast to *Sango's* imposing stature, the soldiers are rendered in low angle point-of-view, looked tiny as a result and, by virtue of the vectors on their face and expressed in the action of running away, an interactional narrative of fear, shock, and confusion is created in relation to *Sango*.

Figure 5.27: Combative contact between Sango and soldiers with modern devices of warfare.



Source: Visionary page 18 issue 1

Finally, Danmole's powers are a spiritual eye and *ijakadi*. It is easy to discern that Danmole is skilled in *Ijakadi* because of the numerous depictions to the fact in pages twenty-nine (29) to thirty-two (32) in issue one (1). However, his spiritual eye was mentioned only once at the Ifa domain where Ifagbemi complimented the boy's ability to spiritually detect the trap of illusions he had created to lure and destroy the remaining descendants of Oxossi, being Danmole, his sister, and Omisefun, the matriarch of the Ajanaku family. Figure 5.28 is an extract of the event described in the foregoing.

Figure 5.28: Reference to Danmole's spiritual eye



Source: Visionary page 11 issue

In appearance, Danmole is a frail looking, troubled pupil. As an individual, the boy did not perform any significant role. However, following the sequence of confrontational and life-threatening events, mainly Ifagbemi's attempt to kill the descendants of Oxossi and a momentary otherworldly experience during the battle in which a female spirit urged Oxossi to rise and protect his descendants, he became an avatar of the deity and fought off the assailants of the family. That is, Danmole's deeds does not come from his *Ijakadi* skills but derives from the possession of his body by the spirit of Oxossi. This gave him a new form and endowed him with immensely accentuated spiritual powers. The possession of Danmole's body by the deity of the forests is yet another point of contact between the ancient and the modern with the consequence that power bestowed upon the modern figure is of a Yoruba spiritual nature rather than an ability entirely of a fantastical superhero fiction.

5.4. Findings Regarding Research Question Two

Research question two is in respect of the creators' portrayal motivations as follows: what influences and choices informed the comic creators' decisions to portray Yoruba identity the way they did in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*?

The logic of this question rests on two levels to unveil the overall frames of Yoruba language and culture portrayal in the comics. The first level is the researcher's content analysis of the comics performed in respect of question one through which different portrayal strategies were unveiled. The second level is the creators' personal statements on their portrayal styles and intentions; this became known during the interview sessions with both creators. With this in mind, in addition to understanding the factors that made the creators depict Yoruba language and culture the ways they did, it was necessary to ask the creators to state and explain the objective or intention they sought to achieve through their respective portrayal. A connection between actual portrayal strategy and objective and factors responsible for the portrayal is established. The interview was conducted with this relationship in mind such that the thematic analysis for this research question is in two parts namely: thematic analysis for actual portrayal strategy and objective of Yoruba identity and thematic analysis for factors or influences behind the portrayal. In summary, three main themes, two for the actual portrayal intention and one for the influences behind the portrayals, emerged post thematic analysis. Each main theme has a list of associated sub-themes and ideas as shown in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Summary of research question two main themes and associated ideas

Yoruba Identity Portrayal: Visionary			Yoruba Identity Portrayal: Irete-Bidemi		
Theme	Creator Objective	Linked Sub-Themes/Ideas	Theme	Creator Objective	Linked Sub-Themes/Ideas
Beautification of culture	To package, present, and exemplify the Yoruba culture and language to local Yoruba people, other Nigerian ethnicities and international audiences as a beautiful cultural heritage not something that is diabolic, dark, and evil.	1. Place and language exemplification, 2. Exemplification of historical and/or mythological properties to arrest dilution and disregard from both internal and external forces, 3. Integration and exemplification of Yoruba culture in Nigeria and diaspora, 4. Exemplification of Yoruba cultural practices (<i>ijakadi</i> as an example), 5. Counter religious colonialism narratives, 6. Counter institutional disregard for culture, and 7. Counter destruction of <i>Omoluabi</i> moral code	Modern Urban Lifestyle	To depict Yoruba culture and language as not traditionally rigid but flexible and open to infusing lifestyles from other cultures.	1. Creator's urbane and traditionally non-rigid personal lifestyle, 2. Modification and infusion of Yoruba historical tale with the purely fantastical superhero style as a route through which modern urban Yoruba society is depicted, 3. Acceptance of <i>Irete-Bidemi</i> by the public as a mark of its relatability with readers whose contemporary lifestyle is mirrored in it, and 4. Dressing and speaking style deliberately in line with contemporary urban lifestyle.
Influences on Creators' Portrayal of Yoruba Language and Culture					

Theme	Linked Sub-theme/Idea
Experiences and Interests	1. Childhood upbringing: differing experiences pertaining to family background and upbringing in relation to the Yoruba language and culture mainly. 2. Personal interests: differing interests through and post childhood in relation to Yoruba language and culture as well as perceptions of the superhero genre. 3. Colleague's indigenous African female character influence

5.4.1 Influence on Portrayal: Experiences and Interests Theme

When both creators were asked how their background and upbringing was in relation to Yoruba language and culture as a way to unravel influences on their portrayal, each creator, despite being Yoruba, painted different experiences as a child and adult. Those experiences ultimately influenced their intention and portrayal of Yoruba identity in their respective comics. The creator of *Visionary*, Akintoba Kalejaiye, forthwith referred to by the acronym AK, experienced traditional Yoruba life and acquired knowledge about Yoruba cultural history early in life as a child. His Ifa priest uncle was pivotal to the creator's acquisition of Yoruba cultural history and religious knowledge. The creator described the significance of that experience on his life thus:

I am a Yoruba man. Not only am I a Yoruba man, I was raised by Yoruba people. I remember when I was much younger one of my uncles was a *babalawo*, which was instructive in my upbringing. Basically, a *babalawo* is an herbalist or a priest [...] my uncle was a priest of Ifa, you know, growing up I used to walk with him a lot. He would come over to our family home in the village and I went with him for things like Oro festival, do things like hunting. I did all those things when I was younger and what it also meant was that I was privy to a lot of stories and traditional experiences. Like *Osoosi* who is a central character in my story. It was from him I heard the basics of these stories [...]

Continuing on how his background influenced his perception of and disposition towards the Yoruba culture, AK noted that:

[...] they majorly influenced my experiences as a child growing up in Yoruba land and having an uncle who was a traditional priest. I grew up in Ijebu, I am an Ijebu man and, you know, there are loads of festivals in Ijebu land. Basically, they influenced me as a kid to see the beauty inherent in our culture and tradition.

The childhood experience of Michael Balogun, the creator of *Ireti-Bidemi* forthwith identified as MB, contrasts AK's exposure to traditional Yoruba culture and language. The *Ireti-Bidemi* creator explained that as a child his Yoruba language proficiency, both in terms of speaking and understanding, was little because English was the language of communication at home. The following is an excerpt from MB capturing his Yoruba language knowledge from childhood to present time:

I didn't grow up with my parents, you know, speaking Yoruba to me. They speak to themselves [...] to a logical extent we picked up on a few things. And that was it. I could understand, I could speak a little bit but that was as far as it got. Now, growing up on my own, leaving the house and going into secondary school, I went to a government secondary model college and, you know, I mixed with other students [...]. So, yeah, to an extent, because of that mix I was able to grow in terms of my Yoruba language speaking ability [...]. So, on a very surface level I can write, not the type of Yoruba with the *ami*, properly but speaking it deep I have to be like, you know, very calm [...] without any, like having to infuse English language [sic].

For MB, the acquisition of Yoruba language proficiency was a gradual process of social interaction and self-training that continued into his undergraduate and postgraduate days where contacts with people who spoke Yoruba habitually, especially as a student in Ibadan, helped improve his Yoruba language speaking ability. The creator admitted that, *“so, growing up, I basically had to teach myself how to speak Yoruba.”*

The contrasting childhood upbringing and family background inevitably created a situation in which both creators framed and interpreted their portrayal of Yoruba language and culture in line with their personal experiences. The varying multimodal rendition of Yoruba identity observed in research question one in terms of cultural portrayal as well as form and frequency of use of Yoruba language aligned with the childhood upbringing and background of the creators. While AK had a strong interaction with traditional Yoruba culture and language from childhood and manifested it by making traditional Yoruba features dominant in the *Visionary* story, MB's mild and tempered experience of the same cultural identity accounted for the dominance of contemporary social imprints in *Ireti-Bidemi* as noted in findings to research question one. Indeed, both creators confirmed that the portrayal of Yoruba identity in their respective stories is linked to their personal life experiences. Responding to whether a connection exists between their personality and life experiences and their portrayals of Yoruba language and culture in their comic, AK affirmed that, *“Yes, Visionary is from experience. It is my own personal story that I reflected in Visionary”* while MB emphasised that, *“So, most of the characters I create are based off my personality, both male and female. How I speak [...] my experiences.”*

In addition to their different upbringing, the creators' culture industry interests also emerged as a portrayal-influencing factor. Being that both men are comic creators, the foundational interests

that influenced their creative orientation towards the superhero genre were scrutinised. While growing up, AK's interests were both foreign superhero cartoons (such as *Voltron*, *Defender of the Universe* and *Iron Man*) and traditional Yoruba cinema mainly Herbert Ogunde films. *Power Rangers*, a foreign superhero show, sparked MB's interest in the superhero genre. Despite the fact that the foreign superhero content stimulated AK's interest in the genre, the creator applied creative provenance to the superhero genre by modifying and creating his own idea of a hero. According to the creator:

[...] I remember back then *Iron Man*, *Voltron*. You know all these cartoons that were very much present when I was growing up and those were the things that, as much as I can recall, really sparked my interest. But eventually as I grew up I realised that yes, this would be something that I would like to develop my own version of what I thought a hero is.

A fallout of this interest and decision to interpret super heroism in a personal way is the creator's love for otherworldly heroism that, as indicated in research question one findings, was the mainstay of *Visionary*. The creator described his love for otherworldly heroism as follows:

[...] And I remember back then developing an interest in otherworldly heroism like when people give themselves up. You know, become altruistic, to give up themselves and live their lives in the pursuit of protecting and helping other people. That caught my interest [...] and would be important in my life, not just my writing.

Thus, AK's preference for otherworldly heroism and its emergence as a dominant feature in *Visionary* is a personal interest that derived from three influences namely:

1. The traditional Yoruba cinema of Herbert Ogunde that typically centered on Yoruba esoteric and mystical culture and which the creator was interested in as a child,
2. The fantastical superhero idea of cartoons the creator watched as a child, and
3. The exposure to traditional Yoruba beliefs, practices, and culture.

On the other hand, MB explained his interests to be the trio of fascination with superhero content, an aptitude for gymnastics that the creator used as a child to impress his friends by executing acrobatic maneuvers reminiscent of the moves superheroes make in their various quests, and love

for drawing. The following is an account of the creator's early contact with the superhero genre and its influence on his storytelling style:

I remember things from primary school. I remember things from my nursery school [...] I remember I had a friend who had some *Power Rangers* action figurines that he used to borrow me to take home and play with. I'll come up with stories with them, write them down and, you know, bring them to school the next day, all of us kids, you know, play *Power Rangers* [...], and I also had a flair for gymnastics. I could do flips. That just made me [...] like my own superhero because I could do things other people could not really do. So, to answer that question that was when I first came in contact with superhero genre.

A profound encounter that made MB create a female Yoruba superhero was the African female character a colleague had created. According to the creator:

But coming to *Ireti-Bidemi* in particular, there was a growing collection of male superhero characters, you know. Everybody who was creating a superhero character was creating a male superhero character. It was either captain Nigeria or Mr. something. Everybody had a male character. Then I had a friend, or I still have a friend, rather, who had a female character [...] and I looked at that character and I really liked it. She really resonated with me. In looks she was very traditional from head to toe, something about her just felt Nigerian and indigenous. And I told myself, you know, I want to create a female character. At that point, I already had a male character [...] but I wanted a female character so I came up with *Ireti-Bidemi*.

Although AK's characters in *Visionary* and MB's in *Ireti-Bidemi* were largely Yoruba identified by Yoruba names, the latter's were rarely depicted in a pictorial manner that immediately create a representational and interactional impression of Yoruba identity. This situation is because, as already presented elsewhere in this section, backgrounds and interests differ. AK's interest is using otherworldly heroism to tell traditional Yoruba stories while MB sought a different route, preferring to portray Yoruba identity in *Ireti-Bidemi* primarily in a contemporary urban sense mostly devoid of mysticism and otherworldly interventions but containing elements of Yoruba history combined with fantasy. As such, while AK deployed a range of traditional Yoruba cultural artefacts (*ayo* board game, beads, traditional Yoruba dressing, *Opon Ifa* etc.) in the composition and presentation of characters in *Visionary*, MB rendered his characters wholly in a contemporary

style. The *Ireti-Bidemi* creator notably explained that this strategy was because of a personal creative deficiency in the following manner:

[...] I started crafting *Ireti* [...] but along the line, I found out something about myself that made me take a different step in a different direction with the character. So, I found out that I didn't have a very strong suit for fantastical stories. Fantastical stories are basically stories, you know, that are mostly fantasy [...] I found out that, you know, I didn't really have a flair for that. I tried watching *Harry Potter* when I was growing up and it wasn't for me. I tried watching *Game of Thrones*, it wasn't for me [...] all of these types of movies had one thing in common: they are generally fantasy [...] so, I decided to change the direction of *Ireti*. So, what I did was I made her a character that had died in the past, who fought people and then died in the past like some 200 to 300 years ago. But, you know, I also wanted to retain the element of fantasy [...] so, what I did was that she passes down her abilities to her descendants. But there is a caveat to that: the descendant has to be female meaning whoever is of that bloodline must be female to inherit the powers.

The implication of the situation narrated above is that to combine fantasy with realism, MB drew inspiration from Yoruba sociocultural history to create the *Ireti-Bidemi* superhero character. The character is essentially an avatar whose *Ireti* persona functions in a dual capacity, first, as a purely imaginary creation, and, second, as the fantastical personality that partly carries the reality of *Moremi [Ajasoro]*, a legendary Yoruba heroine and queen who liberated her people from the trauma of marauding invaders. The creator narrates this provenance thus:

[...] so people who know a lot than I do advice. Why not make this person like this person from this historical time? And then I look up that person and I'm like, okay this person actually had a very huge impact in their time and, you know, let's make it part of our work. Originally, *Ireti* was just *Ireti*. Then I broke her into two characters [...] *Moremi* is relevant in Yoruba culture as the woman who liberated her people from those masquerades [...] they were called Ugbo [...] you know, they will come as masquerades. They will kill, they will steal. So, she allowed herself to get captured then she got their secret and told her people these guys are just human beings wearing masks. You get, and then she went on to do a lot of other things. So this is the inspiration behind *Ireti*, this is the inspiration and even though it's going to be very fantastical, it has history in Yoruba culture.

Summarily therefore, both *Visionary* and *Ireti-Bidemi* applied provenance to the superhero genre to portray Yoruba identity albeit in different forms, to different extents, and informed by different experiences and interests. The ramification of the foregoing influences behind the portrayal of Yoruba language and culture in *Visionary* and *Ireti-Bidemi* is revealed in the finding on how the creators described their portrayals and intention or objective behind it.

5.4.2 Portrayal of Yoruba Language and Culture: Beautification of Culture and Modern Urban Lifestyle Themes

Before asking the creators to explain the portrayal intention or objective in their respective comic, they were first asked if, in their opinion, there is any connection between superhero comics as an American creation and cultural infiltration and domination. The purpose of this line of questioning was to uncover and understand the depth of the motivations that informed the creators' respective depiction of Yoruba language and culture. Both creators responded differently to the question. The following copious excerpt is from the response AK gave to the question:

So, what you must understand about comics, and really any form of writing, is that it espouses culture of people. When you have a form of literature, no matter what form of literature, there is always a core opinion that the writer of that literature or the developer or the creator is ultimately trying to push forward. And superhero comics or graphic novels are not different. For example, *Superman* as a character [...] same thing for *Captain America* [...] in their early history they fought Nazis. That was what they were created to do. And you notice that these characters are wearing the bright, bold colours of the American flag. So, when you talk about cultural domination you are right.

If you want to talk about the biggest comic market in the world right now there is no way around it, it is the US market [...] and when you think of American superheroes the first one that comes to your mind, which is rightfully so, is *Superman*. He was the first, he is the most dominating, and he is the most popular superhero on the face of the planet followed closely by *Spiderman*. What are the colours of these two heroes? Both heroes wear blue and red so ultimately there is no way to talk about superhero comics and how it moved from being a niche, you know, to being a popular perspective without talking about culture. Nowadays superheroes are in the internet and everybody knows about superheroes. It wasn't that way

when we were growing up. It was like a geek who liked superheroes but nowadays it's everywhere and everybody loves *Batman*, everybody loves *Spider Man*. So, there is really no way to talk about superhero comics and not talk about culture. At the end of the day what is the motto of *Superman*? [...] *Superman*'s motto is truth, justice, and the American way. There is no way to talk about any superhero and not talk about culture.

On his part, MB does not think a link exists between cultural domination and the superhero genre. The creator opined that superhero comics tend to role model good deeds and inspire people to be better individuals rather than subjugate them. His response is as follows:

Well, the short answer is I don't think so. I don't think the idea of a superhero is to infiltrate and/or impose, you know, on other parts of the world like Africa. I don't think that's what it is. What I think, if there is anything, I think why we do what we do is more or less to inspire. If you look at *Superman* for example, *Superman* is a character that was [...] created then just as a medium of inspiration, you know. There was war, people were dying, and they needed something to look up to. Indeed, when *Superman* was created it worked, people had something to look up to even though it wasn't real. And that's why in today's world when you're making a *Superman* movie if you don't get it right, if you don't get his portrayal or depiction right you'll be heavily criticised. So, it's more or less like creating a symbol of hope, something for people to look up to, to be inspired by, becoming role models. We can't condone something that would, you know, cause damage or problems. If it was, I believe I would have stayed clear away from it or even if we don't stay away from it we would have created our own, you know, and use them to inspire hope. Or try to make them like a worldwide beacon of hope.

The creators' responses represent two sides of the same coin that can be simultaneously true. Ultimately, their views on this question, in addition to the previous theme on influences on their portrayal patterns, combined to account for the personal intention or objective behind their distinct portrayals of Yoruba language and culture. Responding to the question on how Yoruba language and culture were portrayed in their respective comics, AK encapsulated it under the umbrella of 'beautification and exemplification of culture' while MB described his as 'modern urban Yoruba reality and experiences in an increasingly integrated world'. As shown in table 5.3, AK's intention with *Visionary* is to beautify Yoruba language and culture and present it as a beautiful and rich

cultural heritage instead of as a dark, archaic, and evil system. For MB, the purpose is to present Yoruba language and culture as an active member of the world open to sharing its ways of life as well as embracing cultural features from other societies; in other words, a society that is not traditionally rigid and insular.

For the portrayal of Yoruba language and culture in *Visionary*, AK explained that, “[...] in *Visionary* one of the things that was very important to me was not just the depiction of Yoruba culture but the beautification of the Yoruba culture.” For example, the creator cited how over the years, the Japanese have deliberately branded their culture as a beautiful and rich heritage through literature and culture industry products such that the *Samurai* and their *Bushido* code of conduct have become global phenomenon. This is externalisation of the beautification of culture, which the creator used to rationalise his beautification agenda of the Yoruba language and culture. Based on the foregoing, the creator queried the lack of deliberate and strategic exemplification of Yoruba culture as follows:

Then why is it that we can't do the same with our culture? Why can't we beautify our culture? Why can't we exemplify the best parts, the beauty inherent in our culture? Why is it that *Sango* always has to look like, you know, in some tattered clothing? Why? Why can't we make him beautiful? Why can't we make depictions of our culture impressive to look at? And this was very instructive in how I developed *Visionary*.

The creator's beautification of culture intention is based on two interrelated factors being:

1. The social factors (internal and external influences) that have made it urgent to embark on such a mission as a way to rescue Yoruba language and cultural heritage from infiltration, abandonment, disregard, and rejection even by Yoruba people, and
2. The exemplification of specific sociocultural elements that were portrayed in *Visionary* owing to consequences arising from the social factors.

In other words, a cause-effect justification for the portrayal. For the social dimension, AK lamented a trio of factors namely religious colonialism, institutional disregard for culture, and destruction

of the *Omoluabi* moral code as undesirable situations that are accelerating the lack of regard for Yoruba culture and language. For religious colonialism, the creator decried the fact that the Abrahamic religions have conditioned the Yoruba people to see Yoruba culture as intrinsically diabolic to the point that members of the ethnicity do not have a healthy understanding of their history. He cites the following anecdote to buttress this point:

I'll tell you a story though it happened some years back; this was in 2017/2018. There is this culture week that happens in Lagos where, you know, they either go to a cultural centre or the national museum [...] and they have this, you know, open convention for people to come in and see art and plays and drama and all of that [...]. I remember that we went for one of those and we met the commissioner for culture in Lagos. And while having a conversation with him and *Visionary* became a topic wherein we were talking about the fact that, you know, in *Visionary* we espouse culture and the Yoruba language and things important to language development like *Ofo* or incantation that they were inside the comic because it was very important to also be authentic. Guess what the commissioner's response was to us? His response [...] was a surprise and his exact words were *se kii se wipe e n gbe iborisa la ru ge* by which he means is it not that you are encouraging idol worship now? To an over 50-year-old Yoruba man our espousing, our exemplification of our culture in comic to him was a form of idol worship, was a form of devil worship. And it broke my heart that day. So if the people at the top of our society see our culture as such a terrible thing then what exactly are we expecting of the younger generation? What chance do they stand?

In another scenario when AK addressed the challenges of reception *Visionary* has faced, the creator narrated another anecdote relating to how religious colonialism has increased the lack of understanding and consequent rejection of Yoruba cultural beliefs by Yoruba persons thus:

There are the negative part, parents and people who do not understand or do not subscribe to the Yoruba way of living or the Yoruba core culture, who to them having a Yoruba identity is just their name. They've been so overwhelmed by western ideology in form of, I am not trying to knock anybody here, in terms of western religions that they can't see anything positive in our religion. I remember getting into a very heated argument with an elderly man who insisted that *Esu* is Satan. And I had to really

explain and educate him that no, in Yoruba culture *Esu* is even one of the neutral gods literally. *Esu* is neither good nor bad; he walks in-between. He is a messenger for God. He is a mischief-maker and mischief doesn't depict evil. You know, today *Esu* can help someone because he feels like it, tomorrow he can lead them to their ruin because he feels like it. He walks the neutral path.

Institutional disregard for culture bothers on government, Yoruba traditional sociocultural structures, and Yoruba individuals taking actions that dilutes the Yoruba culture. Keeping in mind that the first of the two anecdotes above relates to a Yoruba government personnel at a Yoruba government organised cultural event, AK noted that government tend to underestimate the need for deliberate and sustained exemplification of culture. He added that the Yoruba society itself is compromised with the *Omoluabi* (or virtuous person) ethos being progressively bastardised and disregarded over the years when, in comparison, the *Bushido* code in Japan is still being glorified and edified in actual social actions and relations and promoted through the culture industry. This excerpt is how AK described this situation:

If you think about it, what is difference between *Bushido* and *Omoluabi*? *Omoluabi* is not fictional, it is truly the way Yoruba people live their lives. A person has been said to steal in Yoruba culture. What we do is we will mobilise and take stones and use those stones to block the person's father's house so that when other people come and see the person's father's house they will know this house raised the thief. In our culture, corruption and negativity are both reviled societal vices. We have forgotten all of these things. Our people have forgotten and let go of all of all these foundational principles that made up our community. Today you see things like people hailing a corrupt politician, someone that our forefathers would have exiled as a thief. These are the purposes of telling these stories, of exemplifying this culture and traditions, to remind our people of who they are, what they once had and, what, I am sorry to say I don't want to offend anybody, but what possibly has been stolen from us.

Based on the social factors (institutional disregard for culture, Abrahamic religions' negative conditioning of Yoruba peoples with respect to Yoruba beliefs, and corruption of the *Omoluabi* values) the creator raised and discussed as necessitating beautification of Yoruba language and

culture, the specific features that were portrayed to create an interactional impression of Yoruba traditional ways of life are:

1. Place and language exemplification,
2. Exemplification of historical and mythological legacies,
3. Integration and exemplification of Yoruba culture in Nigeria and the diaspora, and
4. Exemplification of Yoruba practices.

Exemplification of place is essentially about naming locations after real Yoruba places, as revealed in findings to research question one. The creator emphatically declared, “[...] *the story is situated and happened in Yoruba land. A lot of the locations in the story may be in Ife, it may be in Oyo state, it may be in Abeokuta at one point. These are locations in Yoruba land [...].*” An instructive location that featured in *Visionary* is *Kosso*, *Sango*’s domain. The creation of *Kosso* as an actual mystical enclave in the comic is the application of creative provenance to its original use in Yoruba mythological history. In Yoruba mythology, some believe that *Sango* hung himself after losing a battle while others refuted the claim saying *oba ko so* or the king did not hang. AK explained the significance of *Kosso* as an actual place in *Visionary* created by provenance from an historical statement of refutation as follows:

Another thing I did in *Visionary* was one of *Sango*’s names, which was seen as very derogatory thing to him, is *Oba ko so*, which means the king did not hang in his traditional story. But I now chose to, instead of using it that way, to make *kosso* an actual place in Yoruba land in *Visionary*. So that when *Oba Kosso* is said, you are actually referring to the king of *Kosso*.

Language wise, AK’s intention with the copious use of undiluted Yoruba language and the deities speaking Yoruba was to portray the language as equal to any language in the world and, by virtue of being a property of the Yoruba people, superior to any other language not original to the society. On this, AK noted that English language was a secondary language in *Visionary* because, “[...] *as much as I wanted to beautify the culture and exemplify the language it was also important not to*

alienate the readers. There was no way to make a fully Yoruba comic without alienating some readers.” The solution was consequently to make principal characters like *Sango* speak Yoruba and translate their speech into English while other characters can switch between English and Yoruba. Even then, the intention remained to create an interactional impression that Yoruba was superior to English language. The creator clarifies this intention in the following excerpt:

So, it was very important to me to ensure that there was not just a beautification but also a communication with the readers wherein the fans of *Visionary* will know that the reason why *Sango* speaks in Yoruba is because to him every other language is nonsense. And we are allowed to do that. I am allowed to do that. As a Yoruba man I am allowed to say my language is supreme. I am allowed to say that [...]. For instance, *Sango* only speaks Yoruba throughout the entire comics not because he doesn't understand every other language as a god. Of course he does. But because he believes every other language is beneath him. That's the reason why he speaks in only Yoruba [...] for instance incantations are always in Yoruba. We didn't change that for any character.

A key characteristic of *Visionary* is the preponderance of deities and spirits consistent with the otherworldly heroism interest of the creator. Through this interest, the creator sought to exemplify and beautify the legacy of Yoruba historical and mythological history in ways comparable to how some Western mythologies have been made beautiful, appealing, and marketable. For instance, while comparing Yoruba mythology and Norse mythology with specific reference to *Sango* and *Thor*, AK recounted a conversation with an anthropologist who made him realise that, “[...] *the archaeological evidence points that the Norse might have had some influences from us in creating a thunder god,*” including the fact that Yoruba mythology predated the Norse's by thousands of years. Following this encounter, AK described the profound effect the realisation had on him in this manner:

And what that told me within that conversation is that we have so much to show to the world about how beautiful and about how much they can learn from our culture, our way of life. But that is only going to happen if people understand and are ready to wake up to the responsibility today in

depicting our people accurately, properly and stop waiting for the white man to come and help them and to come and tell their story.

In respect of the foregoing therefore, giving the deities *Sango* and *Ogun* a beautiful physical makeover and appearance was one way AK used image modality to render both characters in appealing ways to contemporary audiences while retaining their aura of Yoruba traditional identity. The extract below is AK's description of the rationale behind this beautification:

[...] in Yoruba culture *Sango* does not wear blue. He wears red but not blue. But when we were developing the aesthetic style of *Sango*, we told ourselves it would look beautiful for us to depict him in an armless Yoruba *dansiki* and booboo short [*kembe*], that would be beautiful to look at. If you look at the way we depicted *Ogun*, *Ogun* is wearing his full *agbada* with *fila* [...] in Yoruba culture *Ogun* is the god of war but he is also the god of metal, he is the god of science, he is also the god of ceremonies. You will notice that in the issue where *Ogun* showed up he was dressed as the god of ceremony. He was flamboyant. So, how important is the Yoruba identity to *Visionary* and how I think that is being pushed forward to my readers. The identity is core.

Still on the beautification of Yoruba historical and mythological characters, AK emphasised the urgent necessity for this attitude towards Yoruba heritage to save it from counter-progressive internal and external influences. He narrated the following anecdote relating to how foreign investors sought to change *Sango*'s historical nature to a pathologically cruel character and make him speak English as conditions for going forward with an adaptation project for *Visionary*:

I remember there was a time we were doing a negotiation with some White people who wanted to, you know, translate our comics into TV and into motion pictures and things like that. And one of them had a very big problem with the fact that *Sango* feels that every other language is beneath him. And he was very insistent that *Sango* had to speak English. And there was also another insistence he wanted. He wanted *Sango* to be a bad guy [...] and I had to explain to him that look, unlike every other character the traditional characters don't belong to me. They belong to the entire race and I'm going to be doing a disservice to myself, disservice to my entire tradition, my entire people if I allow *Sango* to be depicted as a two-bit bad

guy who just wants to kill people. And I refused and the negotiation fell through.

The beautification of culture for AK must necessarily be integrative and intentional, extending to other parts of the world where the Yoruba culture and tradition are present. To do this, AK incorporated Yoruba religious symbols and spelling convention from the West Indies and South American Candomblé and Santeria religions. The veve symbols and the spelling of the deity of the forests and hunting (see *Visionary* analysis in research question one) were the routes he achieved this inclusion and integration as a way of beautifying and exemplifying the totality of Yoruba cultural history in all its variety across the world. The *Visionary* creator described this beautification aspect thus:

[...] you will notice the spelling of *Osoosi* in *Visionary* is not our own. But it's a Yoruba name [...] exactly from Candomblé, Santeria. You're going to see names and depictions in *Visionary* that are inviting our South American cousins to come and partake in this. To tell them that we see them and we don't ignore them. The use of veve for instance. We don't use veve, we have graphic depictions of the gods in our culture but I used it in the comic. You know it is in Candomblé that veve is used. But all those people acknowledge themselves as Yoruba and they are indeed Yoruba. And I felt that there was no need, you know, to push them away. There was a need to invite them in and say, look, we see you, we agree that you are Yoruba and we are ready to allow your own depictions to merge with our own depictions. So, the truth of the matter is that the way we chose to exemplify Yoruba [...] is not one Yoruba culture [...] it is important for me to state that I have always appreciated the fact that our cousins across the sea kept their culture. Of course, the culture was influenced by where they were. What is culture but a way to understand the world?

The creator noted that there is, in fact, direct influence of Yoruba people from other parts of the world in *Visionary* as shown in the excerpt below:

I remember even *Omisefun* [see section on *Visionary* analysis in research question one]. The name came from one of my very close friends, an American who, you know, her father was from Cuba [...] she was so instrumental in talking to me about *Visionary* back then about what I wanted to do, what I was trying to depict and eventually I honoured her

by putting her name in the comic. But she is not a Nigerian, she is a Yoruba woman from Cuba.

Finally, for the beautification intention of Yoruba language and culture, AK sought to exemplify parts of Yoruba cultural practices that seem to have almost disappeared under the influence of internal disregard and from the intensity of media promotion of features from other cultures. *Ijakadi* [see section on *Visionary* analysis in research question one] is the main subject here. The combat form was included to give it visibility with provenance renditions consistent with oriental martial arts. Responding to whether *ijakadi* is wholesale borrow of oriental martial arts with a Yoruba spin, AK explained the cultural roots of the fight form and the inclusion of oriental martial arts features thus:

You will be wrong to say *ijakadi* is an oriental martial arts form and I will explain. In Yoruba culture, we have two defensive forms that we have named our ways of combat, *ijakadi* and *gidigbo*. There are actually *gidigbo* practitioners in Oyo, people who teach people *gidigbo* [...] now the truth of the matter is that the nature of *ijakadi* in the comic is one that speaks to our culture. Our culture of naming things in a specific manner. So, you have *ijakadi apa kini*, *ijakadi apa keji* which are different forms of *ijakadi*. You know, *orun*, *oke*, *ile*, falling heavens [...] if you have ever seen people wrestling in Yoruba before, when you wrestle in Yoruba and you want to defeat someone you lift the person from the ground, you show him to the heavens and slam him to the ground to depict your victory.

I am not a martial arts person but I understood the fact that you can't have someone wearing an *agbada* and fighting, the *agbada* will obviously affect their ability to be effective. So, I will actually acknowledge the oriental influence but I will state that there are real world practitioners of the *ijakadi* and *gidigbo* and our influences were drawn from, you know, from what they do.

The modern urban lifestyle theme in respect of Yoruba language and culture portrayal in *Ireti-Bidemi* is a consequence of MB's personal interests, upbringing, and overall lifestyle. The creator described the connection between the portrayals of Yoruba identity in relation to his personal lifestyle as follows:

So, basically, my message is you can leave in a world where, you know, it feels as if you need to dwell in tradition but you can choose to do both. You can choose to dwell in tradition, dwell in your culture and also pick the other man's culture and the other man's language. For a lack of better word, you don't have to necessarily, and this is me using myself, how I live my life – I'm not an overly traditional person [but] I am very much grounded in, you know culture [...] I would not do certain things. Yeah, I don't want to go deep into those things that I will not do with regards to tradition [...] so that is also infused into my characters.

The creator further clarified the intention of his portrayal of Yoruba identity in *Ireti-Bidemi* thus:

So my depiction of Yoruba language and culture is relatively as far as my understanding. I didn't necessarily try to do anything out of the ordinary because Bidemi, even though her name is Yoruba and even though she lives in Ibadan which is like a core centre for the Yoruba people, and, you know, the Yoruba language, she's more or less like a modernised character. She speaks English for the most part of it and her dressing can be Yoruba when she wants to but she's like me. So, most of the characters I create are based off my personality, both male and female. How I speak, how I joke and my experiences. I am a very Nigerian person. I'm a very Nigerian individual but also I'm very flexible, yeah. I'm not rigid, when the condition requires me to do certain things I do them but if I'm supposed to do it just for the sake of doing because everybody is doing it, I would not. That's why I said I am very flexible.

A follow-up query on whether the *Ireti-Bidemi* story can essentially be interpreted as depicting a modern urban, middle class Yoruba society with significant presence of Gen Z popular culture tendencies, MB responded affirmatively thus, “*very correct, it's almost as if you wrote the comic.*” Furthermore, when asked if it is correct to describe Bidemi as not representing traditional Yoruba identity in terms of language and dressing, MB responded by saying, “*yes, she is very modern.*” The creator noted that this element of modernity and the dominant contemporary urban culture is a feature that makes *Ireti-Bidemi* relatable to and drives her popularity with audiences while also serving as an inspiration:

So, based on what I know, I know she has a very strong fan base. Recently, we carried out a poll on who people see as their favourite, she was third. So, people actually voted. That was organic. The results are out there on social media. So, she has a huge following, a huge reception. I want to really get more people to read about her and, you know, get to really like her because I feel like she's a character that you can relate to.

The foregoing orientation to the portrayal of Yoruba language and culture is generally consistent with the creator's view of the superhero genre as a vehicle of global cultural integration, cultural dynamism, inspiration, and role modeling rather than cultural domination. Indeed, the creator exemplified this orientation through a significant provenance element that forms part of the Bidemi's superhero power ensemble. The following excerpt concerns this aspect of the story:

People see her face but, for some reason, they don't seem to recognise her. And the explanation to that is coming back to the mystical and fantastical element of the story. There's something that whenever, I don't know if you noticed whenever she's activating her powers, that her metal arm, there's something that glows on her forehead. If you ever noticed, there is like a tattoo on her forehead. If you look at any of our posters or one shot she's striking a pose, there's a glow on her forehead...so it's something called a *glamour charm*. I got that from [...] the animated series *Young Justice*.

Nevertheless, the incorporation of the *Moremi* story from Yoruba history and culture with the fantastical *Ireti* (see section 5.4.1) is a noteworthy provenance route through which MB portrayed Yoruba identity.

5.5 Findings Regarding Research Question Three

The third research question is what challenges do comic creators encounter in the publication and management of superhero comics intended for portraying African culture. Following the creators' responses to question three that sought to understand the challenges responsible for the retarded development of the Nigerian comic industry, three (3) main themes with associated sub-themes or

ideas arose. The summary of the themes produced from the thematic analysis is contained in table 5.4 below.

Table 5.4: Summary of research question three main themes and associated ideas

Theme	Sub-theme/Idea from AK	Sub-theme/Idea from MB
Institutional Barriers	1. Government disinterest and apathy 2. Failure of traditional sociocultural institutions	1. Government disinterest and apathy
Comic Industry Barriers	1. Poor and inadequate distribution channels 2. Shortage of quality story telling 3. Shortage of quality art 4. Lack of robust production pipelines to make output conform to standards	1. Lack of money 2. Lack of reliable talent to create quality content 3. Lack of collaboration between creators and publishers and other allied stakeholders in culture industry that could enhance the visibility of comic characters by putting them to other uses
Socioeconomic-Audience Barriers	1. Poverty and poor standard of living making people live in survival mode and rendering them uninterested in reading comics and, also, subscribing to read comics 2. Lack of public awareness of the existence of comics 3. Lack of public acceptance of comics as a form of literature to tell stories	1. Audience unwillingness to pay subscription token

5.5.1 Institutional Barriers Theme

The role of institutional intentionality featured in reference to government as a policy making body. Both creators decried government's apathy or disinterest in supporting and investing in the comic industry. In the case of AK, the dimension from which the creator viewed government's

failure is in respect to the refusal to see value in, promote, and protect culture and support creatives whose work exemplify and edify culture, as is the case with African superhero comic genre in Nigeria. This factor surfaced and has been discussed in findings to research question two as one of the social failures that informed AK's overly traditional portrayal of Yoruba language and culture. The *Visionary* creator lamented government's lukewarm attitude thus:

They do not see a point in encouraging people who are trying to push literature that beautifies our culture. They do not see a need either encouraging them or investing in them [...] there isn't a drive from the government to encourage our culture and, you know, and tradition. So, it's truly unfortunate.

On his part, MB similarly affirmed that there is lack of government mechanism that delivers adequate support for the comic industry. However, he expressed optimism that the opportunities for productive collaborations are available on the condition both government and the comic industry stakeholders are able to find mutually beneficial contents that can help government generate revenue while promoting the comic craft. The following excerpt is how he expressed his opinion with an anecdote:

So, we did approach an arm of government [...] in charge of the entertainment sector in Nigeria and we tried to do something with them sometime last year, it didn't turn out how we wanted it to. But I believe that there is a lot of opportunities when it comes to working with the government towards pushing out, you know, the superhero genre, superhero movies in general. I think there's a lot of opportunities there but we just need to find the right way to tap into it because the government is always looking for ways to generate money for the country. We just need to find the right type of content or the right type of pitch that we will give them and they would look at and say okay, this is going to benefit us and benefit the country as a whole. But I think for now, you know, we're probably still dangling and I don't think there's anything at this point.

5.5.2 Socioeconomic-Audience Barriers Theme

The ramification of government extended to the socioeconomic conditions in the country where poverty and poor standard of living put citizens in survival mode such that they have neither disposable time nor income to pursue interests such as reading and appreciating comics. In respect of the government-linked socioeconomic barrier theme, AK explained the situation this way:

I remember when I released *Visionary* one and two, we did a school drive where we would go to schools to present comics to children. And I remember there was a day in one school this kid walked up to me and he recited from those *oriki* that was in the comic word for word without the comic in front of him. He had memorized it all, the entire conversations in the comic. That was how much he loved the superhero. But one thing I realised is that when I think about that boy I wonder whether he would have been able to keep up with the comics. Because there is the nuance of all the countries that we've just spoken about are first world countries wherein the next meal is not a problem [...]. The idea of food being a problem in the US is not as pervasive. When you look at Maslow's theory and you look at, you know, the things like food and shelter and clothing; in first world countries, those are no problems. What that does is that it allows them to explore other things apart from being on survival mode, apart from trying to just be alive. That is not a position in our country; that is not the position in Africa. It is difficult to ask a child to be reading comics when he has not eaten for the day [...] yes, the fans are there but at the end of the day how many people do you think have access to good enough internet, that they can pick up their phones and say they want to read comics on it? Or even subscription? How many people?

The issue of subscription is both socioeconomic barrier and audience barrier for MB. The creator lamented that the audience will rather read comics free than pay a token to subscribe and subsidize the production. Comic Republic faces this situation and MB narrated the context as follows:

[...] when we first started Comic Republic we did a very unusual thing for almost, for over twelve [12] years. We gave out all our comics for free. You didn't have to pay anything to read, our comics were available online for free [...] But see, the major problem now that we have moved to a subscription base where you pay a small amount of money per month, you have little, too few people wanting to subscribe. I mean we have charts

and right now people subscribe almost every day [...] but you still find people saying the amount is too expensive. The amount is just like we should subsidize the production. But it's like [referring to readers] "I used to read their comic books for free before now its paid, I will not be reading here anymore." I see comments like that all the time and I'm like you had this thing for over twelve [12] years free of charge. Now, you're not paying for each book, you're paying for the entire library just a sum of money for the entire library for a month and it's too much. How do you want to grow the industry when you can't even support just one thing once a month [sic]?

Furthermore, on the audience barrier, AK emphasised that public awareness and public acceptance of comic as a valid means of literature and storytelling is grossly lacking in Nigeria. The creator mentioned that serious investment in and growth of the Nigerian comic industry cannot happen in the absence of public awareness and acceptance. Attributing the developed state of the comic industry in places like the United States, Japan, and South Korea partly to public awareness and acceptance of comics as a form of literature, AK compared these factors to Nigeria and Africa thus:

Now coming to Africa, has this awareness, has this renaissance happened in Africa yet? Unfortunately the answer is no. Is there the possibility that it will happen? The answer is yes. Because in terms of readership you want to assume that when it comes to manga and American comics the highest consumers have to come from majorly like the US, maybe Europe. But you will be shocked to know there is a massive market for American comic and manga in Africa. But why is it that this same people who are so readily able to consume American comics and will fight and argue about whether *Batman* beats *Superman* have no regard for the homegrown comics? There is a discussion there. Both the public awareness and the public acceptance of these homegrown stories, there is a nuance to that.

5.5.3 Comic Industry Barriers Theme

Finally, the creators discussed how industry barriers also stunt the growth of the comic industry in Nigeria. The shortage of money, lack of collaboration between comic industry stakeholders and allied industries, and dearth of reliable talent are the key industry-related problems MB identified and discussed thus:

Owo ooo! (Meaning money). Money is a major factor. Everything that would succeed needs money, no matter how sentimental you want to be [...] Money has been a major deciding factor on whether or not the comic industry would boom. Unfortunately, we've not been able to get a lot of money into it.

Another thing is lack of collaboration. From our own experience, a lot of people want to do things their own. People want to start their own company and, you know, put it out there, and make their own money. It doesn't work that way [...] Comic Republic is strong because of collaboration, because we are collaborating with this person, that person, this investor, that investor, you know. People are basically coming and they have seen that okay, there's something here that we can gain from. So, those are like the major factors, like the two key factors, I believe is slowing down the comic industry in Nigeria.

The creator noted that the absence of collaboration is a factor preventing the culture industry in Nigeria from developing into a strong, integrated, and influential institution such as the Hollywood establishment. The scarcity of reliable talent that can be trusted to produce quality art timeously is the final factor MB mentioned noting that the shortage constrains quality storytelling and art. This point is similar to AK's point that the comic industry is hindered by shortage of quality art and storytelling and lack of a robust production pipeline, resulting in poor standards and output. The creator explained this factor this way:

Now the last one I'll speak to has to do with the industry itself and quality assurance. [...] I don't know whether you notice but majority of the comics when you read them all the characters look similar [...] On the side of the produces the quality assurance process that needs to ensure that quality stories and quality art and quality comics are going out there [...] has to be in place.

The matter of robust production pipeline is in respect of internal processes within the companies themselves. The creator used the Comic Republic internal process to buttress the importance of a robust production pipeline noting that the success of the company is partly attributable to a strong process that ensures their comics have good art and tell compelling stories as follows:

[...] Of course, it makes our process a bit longer than it would for who would just sit in the sitting room and draw, but it also ensures that when the comic comes out we are putting out the best. So, from my perspective what Comic Republic is doing differently is making sure there is a production pipeline. An efficient one, an effective one in place that is being followed by everybody.

Finally on the themes for this research question, AK emphasised that the lack of homegrown distribution channels through which comics can flow seamlessly and affordably from the creators down to readers is a major problem affecting the Nigerian comic industry. His view on this factor is as follows:

The second one is distribution channels. The reality on ground is the distribution channels in Nigeria system [is not strong] [...] unless you are going to one of the big boys publishing comics, unfortunately you will not meet a good distribution. And of course these companies we are talking about, majority of them are not Nigerian or homegrown companies. Yes, they are basically international companies or extra national companies. I remember one of the people who published our comics was an Indian company in Nigeria. They were the first to do it and that's because they saw the value in it. But unfortunately homegrown companies don't have the same resources and vision.

5.6 Findings Regarding Research Question Four

The fourth and last research question is what factors inform how audience interpret *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* as portrayals of Yoruba identity? For research question four, the focus group discussants were asked to assess and interpret both *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* in terms of their portrayal of Yoruba language and culture and provide specific reasons for their views. Unlike the creators, the discussants' names are fictitious (See section 4.3.7). Two main themes arose from this process namely traditional representation and contemporary fashionable lifestyle. Generally, the discussants concurred that both comics portrayed Yoruba identity but in varying extents. They described *Visionary* has more traditional while *Ireti-Bidemi* is more of a contemporary fashionable lifestyle. The following quotations are how discussants assessed and interpreted both comics differently in terms of their portrayal of Yoruba language and culture:

LG: Okay, so *Ireti-Bidemi* does not really show culture in comparison to *Visionary*. *Ireti-Bidemi* just mentions *Moremi* and that's the most we've gotten. On the other hand, *Visionary* gives more, showing the god of thunder, *Sango* and the rest.

Suave: [...] *Ireti-Bidemi* partially signifies Yoruba language and culture but I think the *Visionary*, in my own opinion, strongly signifies Yoruba culture and language [...] anybody seeing that will know this is from a Yoruba culture. While the *Ireti-Bidemi*, it's because it's a modern day thing [...] dating back to the old *Moremi* from the story, this is what will make you think this is from a Yoruba culture or storyline.

Earth: With the powers, the story line, with, also, the use of the Yoruba language. With even the places, it could've been a bit more but it is adequate considering if the reader isn't a Yoruba person.

Tabitha: Yes, I think *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* represent Yoruba language and culture quite well. They both include elements like proverbs, traditional names, respect for elders, spiritual beliefs, and even fashion. The way characters switch between English and Yoruba also feels very natural and realistic [...] they've done a really good job of showing our culture in a modern and relatable way.

Vera: Both comics incorporated Yoruba language in a meaningful way, majority of the characters in both comics have indigenous Yoruba names. *Ireti-Bidemi* made subtle use of Yoruba language and greetings. But *Visionary* in particular made use of lots of Yoruba phrases. There was also a lot of Yoruba proverbs, mythology, and anecdotes which portray Yoruba heritage and made it a thrilling read.

By “culture”, the discussants mean aspects of Yoruba identity other than language. Culture in the context of the discussants' usage include features such as dressing, ornamentation, food, names, art, and religion. This distinction is important because it marks the discussants' demarcation of culture in total and language specifically as part of culture. On the culture point, the discussants generally agreed that culture as a way of life is relative and subjective but LG raised the contentious point that American superhero, “*don't have culture and we know that, just backstories,*” Gia agreed adding that, “*yeah, but to be fair Americans don't have culture like ours.*” Continuing this line of thought, Vera included that, “*it's true. For example, heroes like Superman and Wolverine don't really have any element of “culture” in their characters' storyline.*” The discussants mean that American superhero comics do not have a rich cultural or traditional heritage like Africans, making them rely mainly on contemporary mundane and fantastical imaginations to drive their stories. However, Suave clarified the contentious culture discourse this way:

I wouldn't say they don't have a culture, I feel that is also their culture. I just feel that Africans have a stronger sense of cultural belief [...] but I think we are losing it also. We are losing our cultural sense, or because the western world are being, you know, because of civilisation we are losing our sense of culture that is why a normal African person feel like, ok, doing a white wedding. That is actually their culture. So, I wouldn't say they don't have a culture. In fact, we imbibe more of their culture than we imbibe ours, which is really affecting our system.

The discussants' multimodal interpretation of the comics' portrayal of Yoruba identity places *Visionary* in the traditional representation box because its depictions convey a clear interactional impression of Yoruba language and culture consistent with findings of research questions one and two. Conversely, they situated *Ireti-Bidemi* in contemporary fashionable box because it contrasts *Visionary* depicting modern urban lifestyle. The most prominent factor that the discussants stressed as being important to them in interpreting either as representing Yoruba identity is the use of language. All the discussants affirmed that *Visionary* adopted strong, rich, and grammatically accurate Yoruba language. Ironically however, responding to the question on which version of Yoruba they preferred, only two of the six discussants said they preferred the deep Yoruba used in *Visionary* while the remaining four opted for the Yoruba version used in *Ireti-Bidemi*. The pro-*Visionary* Yoruba version views expressed are as follows:

Vera: The Yoruba language in *Visionary* is preferable in my opinion because it actually portrayed more of the language also offered translation to non-speakers. *Ireti-Bidemi* on the other hand only had a sprinkle of Yoruba language and could easily be a western comic if those were removed.

Suave: The *Visionary* because it depicts strong Yoruba culture and lingo.

In respect of the pro-*Ireti-Bidemi* Yoruba version, Gia preferred it because, “*it was easier to read [...] the one in Visionary, the Yoruba was too strong. Like not my regular day Yoruba*”, concluding that the standard Yoruba grammatical signs used in the *Visionary* complicated the ability to read

and comprehend easily. For Earth the preference is, “*because I enjoyed the blend of the Yoruba and English language.*” The choices of the remaining two discussants follow below:

LG: reason is *Ireti-Bidemi* is more simpler unlike the *Visionary* which has thick Yoruba. Although very rich in Yoruba culture, it really stressed me because I needed translations a lot. *Ireti-Bidemi* had a lot of slangs that I’m used to and just sprinkled Yoruba there.

Tabitha: I prefer the Yoruba language version in *Ireti-Bidemi*, it feels more natural and closer to how we actually speak, mixing English and Yoruba in a way that reflects real conversations. It also uses familiar proverbs and expressions that really connect with me. I like the Yoruba language in *Visionary* too, but it feels more formal and sometimes less natural for everyday conversation compared to *Ireti-Bidemi*.

In terms of the English-Yoruba language duality in *Visionary*, the discussants all agreed that they found the translations into English useful because it aided reading and comprehension. Nevertheless, some of the discussants insisted that reading and comprehension was still stressful despite the translations, preferring if the conversation had taken the form present in *Ireti-Bidemi*. Regarding the translations, LG, for example, said, “*it did [aid reading and comprehension] to an extent but it was very stressful.*” For the question that dealt with discussants’ recommendation to creators of African superhero comics, the participants advocated for more undiluted cultural depictions but majority wanted a tempered language style that is easier to read, less rooted in Yoruba grammatical correctness, devoid of the intonation signs, and consistent with urban culture modifications. The following excerpts are discussants recommendations discussants made for future African superhero comics:

LG: In my opinion, I feel they should balance the language and modernity, seeing we’re in the modern era as one who would love to be in touch with their culture. They could mix it, strong culture but light on the language because most of us aren’t lucky to be very fluent. So, having English,

which is the accepted universal language with the mix of Yoruba will be lovely.

Gia: More cultural representation. Adequate mixture of Yoruba and English.

Vera: I would suggest that they stick true to African roots and languages and not try to westernise it too much as this could lead to a misrepresentation of African culture and heritage and would be no different from the culture borrowing that western comics do.

Tabitha: I think future African superhero comics should use Yoruba the way it's done in *Ireti-Bidemi*, more natural and closer to everyday speech. The mix of English and Yoruba feels realistic, and the use of proverbs makes it culturally rich without being too hard to follow. Adding more of that conversational Yoruba, while still showing respect, tradition, and identity will help readers connect more deeply with the characters and story.

The implication of the foregoing quotations is that the discussants would love to see a stronger cultural representation in terms of traditional features of the Yoruba identity. However, they prefer tempering Yoruba language with English and using Yoruba language forms that comply with modern-urban conversation conventions as a way to interest the audiences – majority of whom are not proficient in reading and writing their indigenous tongues – and aid their reading and comprehension. The discussants used *Visionary* and *Ireti-Bidemi* to benchmark African superhero comics, compared it to American superheroes, and expressed a preference for the former for its potential to include and portray African mythology, experiences, historical events, and folklore. Tabitha, for instance, submitted that African superhero comics are relatable because, “*they reflect our everyday life, values, and heritage [...] they connect with our languages, traditions, and myths [...] they just need more recognition and support.*” Vera added that, “[...] *African superheroes are based in familiar African setting not somewhere unrelatable like Asgard, for example.*” On this account, all the discussants reasoned that the African superhero genre is a potentially successful medium of cultural heritage portrayal and profitable business provided challenges such as funding, quality art and storytelling, institutional support and public awareness and acceptance are in place. Suave captured the hurdle the comic industry in Nigeria must overcome to realise its potentials in the following excerpt:

We still have a long way to go in the sense that, I think Africans are shying away maybe because of our culture, shying away from putting these stories out there. Or we don't have enough creative publishers or storytellers that can coin all these things and make them, at least, just put them out there. When I was reading this, a colleague of mine was like, "what are you reading?" It's catchy [...] the graphics, the picture separation. When I said it's a superhero comic they were expecting me to say something like DC, *Batman*. I was like it's an African superhero comic. Almost immediately the guy lost interest, he was like, "really? You get time." Someone else was surprised, he wasn't aware that Africans are now trying to put our comics out there.

Although they are not comic creators, the problems discussants identified as hindering the Nigerian comic industry are consistent with those mentioned by the creators. Similarly, just as the creators mentioned that cultural ownership is essential for the African superhero comic genre to distinguish itself and make global impact, the discussants also emphasised that superhero comic creators in Nigeria must embrace local cultures as their unique selling proposition. In the final analysis, the discussants prefer African superhero comics to include copious cultural histories, traditions, folklore, experiences, and features in their stories while adopting a language that is modernised to facilitate easy reading and comprehension.

5.7 Discussion of Findings

Similar to the sequential presentation order of the findings, the discussion of findings in this section follows the same chronological arrangement.

5.7.1 Discussion of Research Question One Findings

It is necessary to reiterate that the context for which the multimodal theory and critical theory were applied in this study pertains to the objective of Comic Republic to portray and promote African heritage using the American superhero model. Regarding the Yoruba themed *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* superhero comics therefore, an important critical theoretical concern is whether either

or both comic primarily continues the essentialised American superhero model such that the claim of Yoruba identity portrayal is negligible or if and how it is modified for noticeable Yoruba representation. In either case, the “how” that leads to conclusive submissions is the function of the various multimodal depictions and the logical and reasonable impressions they create explicitly and impliedly. This crucial connection between both theories is an important point of analytical departure that was established in the findings to research question one in form of two principles of the multimodal theory namely:

1. Motivated sign user agency of the comic creators in respect of using and/or modifying the Yoruba cultural properties differently according to personal intentions (see Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Kress, 2010 in Chapter Three) and
2. Provenance and experiential meaning, in which an original idea, the superhero model in this case, is borrowed and applied to narrate experiences in another context (see Adami, 2016; Jewitt & Henriksen, 2016 in Chapter Three).

As motivated sign users whose organisational and personal objectives were to portray and promote African heritage, the creators’ superhero provenance anchor was not wholesale repetition of the genre’s established template. The presence of ample Yoruba sociocultural properties such as names of characters and locations as well as the inclusion of Yoruba mythology, religion, cosmological beliefs, and social history impressed a definitive Yoruba identity on both *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*. Ehineni (2019) cited in chapter two elaborated that the Yorubas name individuals in unique ways that capture situations such as family and birth circumstances, religion of the family, and profession of the family. This unique naming convention is present in both comics in names such as *Bidemi* (a child delivered while the father was away), *Bayo* (to encounter joy) and *Kola* (to gather wealth) in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Ifagbemi* (indicating that the bearer is from an Ifa worshipping lineage) and *Omisefun* (signifying affiliation to water deities) in *Visionary*. The prominent inclusion of Yoruba deities *Obatala*, *Sango*, *Ogun*, and *Oxossi* (*Osossi* in Yoruba spelling), including the naming of spirits (*Omiran-Ibaje*, *Ara*, *Irin*, *Ina*, and *Iji*) and beasts (*Arayan*, *Oba-Olori Meta*, *Onisakoso*, and *Apata*) in *Visionary* create obvious representational,

interactional, and compositional impressions of Yoruba identity. For *Ireti-Bidemi*, the important role of the quasi-fictional *Ireti-Moremi* stamped a Yoruba cosmological, mythological, and spiritual identity to the comic. This is in addition to both using actual contemporary and historical Yoruba towns and cities as location.

When the typical practice in superhero comics is compared with the foregoing provenance and experiential learning which Yoruba identity was depicted in character names and locations in both comics, the significance of the portrayal is remarkable. In the problem statement (see section 1.2 in Chapter One), the point was made that American superhero comics typically use fictitious locations in which the nerve around which developments revolve represent actual American cities. Gotham City in *Batman* and Metropolis in *Superman*, both representing New York are popular examples of this situation. Whereas it is possible to miss the subtle reference to the actual cities in these instances, especially non-members who are unfamiliar with the contextual nuances of the society, the direct use of Yoruba cities and towns in both *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* is a major sociocultural context provenance tactic that eliminates inferences occasioned by non-specificity. Indeed, in response to research question four, a discussant emphasised that this location tactic is important in making them feel a representational and interactional aura of Yoruba-ness.

To continue the other dimension of the foregoing sociocultural provenance tactic, the strategy also applies to names of superhero characters. Usually, many superheroes tend to fluctuate between alter egos in which their real identity is different from their superhero identity. A notable example of this trait is Clark Kent as *Superman* (see section 3.3.2 in Chapter Three). In both *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*, the superheroes retained their proper noun Yoruba names, Bidemi and Danmole respectively when they transformed to their superhuman alter egos. This tactic strengthens Yoruba identity portrayal since neither creator continued the essentialised identity transformation feature by giving another name to the characters.

The umbrella tradition of the critical theory is the deconstruction and re-imagination of practices for the transformation and reformation of social structures (see Horkemier, 1972; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011; Fuchs, 2016 in Chapter Three). In a way, the creators' Yoruba name provenance tactic for portrayal of Yoruba identity through the characteristically American superhero genre

with preset features is consistent with the critical theoretical tenet. The strategy is akin to the re-tooling of the core ideological features of the genre for transformative culture industry depiction in which the use of cultural properties is not performed by external “other” but by members of the culture. Therefore, the creators’ portrayal of Yoruba identity and experiences is an exercise of cultural ownership as motivated and intentional users of the culture’s body of cultural properties. At the global level, controversies occasioned by cultural representation have generally trailed the culture industry’s agenda of cultural inclusion. The superhero genre specifically has been criticised for tokenistic cultural inclusion (see Singer, 2002; Cook & Frey, 2017; Muñoz-González, 2017; Asante & Pindi, 2020; Benash, 2021; Schauer, 2021; Song, 2023 in Chapter Three). The foregoing motivated cultural portrayal of the Yoruba society exhibited by the creators of *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* is a significant development in the deconstruction of cultural presence and ownership in the superhero genre.

Nevertheless, both comics retained emblematic elements of the superhero genre, mainly in dressing and appearance. From the pictorial angle of the multimodal theory, the dressing in *Visionary* is diverse comprising Yoruba cultural attire and ornaments worn by both deities and humans alongside the characteristic superhero costume. In *Ireti-Bidemi*, Yoruba attire and ornaments are overwhelmingly absent because the characters appeared mostly in regular modern clothes yet the special superhero costume feature is also generally absent. Whereas this is another avenue the representational and interactional impression of Yoruba culture is apparent and stronger in *Visionary*, the same pictorial mode ironically continues the superhero costuming culture. The rendition of characters either in muscular or trim and fit body structures wearing special, body fitting costumes with or without capes, hoods, masks, and facial coverings (see figure 5.25 in respect of *Visionary* and figures 5.4 and 5.12 in respect of *Ireti-Bidemi*) are subtle but salient ways in which the creators blended Yoruba identity with fundamental superhero features. As Peppard (2017) cited in chapter three noted, the costuming of superheroes is not trivial, the feature separates the ordinary audience from the superhuman characters and acts as a major point of branding for tantalising and satiating capitalist consumption culture. The costume and appearance in superhero comics as elements with critical exchange-value (see Marx, 1887/c.2008 in Chapters Two and

Three) is reinforced in both *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* for the fact that their inclusion, no matter how subtle, confirms both as standard, essential markers of the genre.

The language modality is another crucial aspect of the creators' exercise of their agency as motivated sign users. As shown in tables 5.1 and 5.2 for *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* respectively, the latter comic used Yoruba language more than the former generally and more strategically to the extent that, on the strength of research question one findings alone, Yoruba identity is representationally stronger in *Visionary*. Nevertheless, the simultaneous use of English and Yoruba languages in comics intended to promote and portray Yoruba heritage, language specifically in this case, has deeper implications. On the one hand, the extent to which Yoruba language can make stronger impact in the presence of English language is when there is a multilingual tradition in which members of the Yoruba society are proficient in both languages. This is because multilingualism is a route to protect and continue to transmit the uniqueness of a people's indigenous ways of life between generations (see Stępkowska, 2019 cited in Chapter Two). In the absence of a strategic multilingual tradition, Sesan (2013), cited in chapter two, submitted that when two languages coexist, one would be dominant while the other suffers retrogression. As shown variously in chapter two, Nigeria lacks a deliberate multilingual policy that ensures indigenous tongues like Yoruba language do not suffer decline in the presence of English language. This situation has led to deterioration in the ability of Yoruba people to read, write, and understand their language (see Adeniyi & Bello, 2006; Akinkurolere & Akinfenwa, 2018; Sosan & Okewole, 2023 cited in Chapter Two).

To fast-forward a bit to findings of research questions two and four, which align with the language modality discourse, the *Visionary* creator clarified that the adoption of English language was to prevent the alienation of potential audience, both Yoruba and non-Yoruba alike. This is reasonable and aligns with the submission in section 3.2.2.4 in chapter three that English language has an understandable role of packaging the Yoruba culture to wider audiences. In their responses to research question four however, most discussants, despite being Yoruba, preferred the language modality in *Ireti-Bidemi* citing their lack of proficiency in reading and understanding Yoruba language. As such, beyond the strategic use of Yoruba language in *Visionary*, the matter of

reception is crucial in considering the impact of the portrayal beyond appearance on the pages of the comic. This brings to the fore the point of Mporu and Salawu (2018) in chapter two that the media can hasten the decline of a language or strengthen it by ways it is used. While the scholars' submission is true and consistent with the media's transmission of cultural heritage function (Lasswell, 1948 in Chapter One), the broader factor that determines the success or failure of the media's effort is the disposition of the society and all its constituent aspects. In other words, institutional intentionality, the phenomenon discussed in chapter two and which surfaced significantly in the findings of the other research questions. This factor is discussed at length in subsequent sections. It suffices to say that in the matter of language portrayal preference, the discussants' sentiments echo the necessity for strategic social engineering in which members will be proficient in their mother tongue rather than look upon it as an inconvenience.

While research question one findings clearly indicate that the creators used their motivated sign user objective to deploy Yoruba cultural properties by provenance to the superhero model, the delicate subject of how the portrayals depict Yoruba identity more or less must be considered conjunctively with research question two findings.

5.7.2 Discussion of Research Question Two Findings

The textual and pictorial portrayal of Yoruba language and culture in both *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* regarding whether they are either authentic or tokenistic is a complex and nuanced subject influenced by:

1. The creators' background in terms of experiences as per their development as individuals relative to the Yoruba culture and language, and
2. Personal interests, mostly in relation to the culture industry products.

In the comics they created, the creators' experiences and interests motivated an intention and time objective along different lines. In other words, the respective intention or objective of the creators regarding Yoruba society and their notions of presenting realities and practices for storytelling informed the contrasting multimodalities the creators used to depict Yoruba language and culture.

The intention and time factors have significance in critical theory because, as Horkheimer (1972) cited in chapter three noted, time, reality, and transformation are fundamental and interrelated aspects on which the deconstruction of social issues rests. The obvious and implied orientation to intentions about time and reality in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* are important socio-historical features the creators repurposed the superhero model to achieve the portrayal of Yoruba identity. Therefore, the two critical elements cannot be ignored in the dissection of how the creators framed Yoruba language and culture in their respective comics.

From the multimodal theory perspective, the intention of the creators as motivated users of signs, symbols, ideas, and concepts in respect of Yoruba identity is an integral pillar in a social semiotic inclined analysis. The importance of this single factor is established and emphasised in social semiotic multimodal analysis tradition (see Adami, 2016; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Jewitt & Henriksen, 2016 in Chapter Three) with the implication that although meanings of modes are tied to cultural and social conventions, they shift based on the user's intention(s). When considered conjunctively with the time factor, referring to the creators' depiction of social reality either within a singular era or across eras, both the intention or objective and time factors combine to create a situation in which labeling portrayals as either tokenistic or authentic is too simplistic and dismissive of nuance. Broadly, the intention and time factors locate *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* within the time-space-processes framework of this study (see figure 2.1 in Chapter Two) and, consequently, necessitate paying attention to the intricacies and nuances associated with how societies retain or remake and reflect their identity over time. To be emphatic, both comics iterate between times, practices, and processes blending contemporary and urban Yoruba sociocultural realities with traditional experiences. Whereas *Visionary* has a stronger presence of time iteration signifying the creator's intention to bring Yoruba traditional worldviews into active agency in the present, *Ireti-Bidemi* is located in contemporary urban social experiences in which Yoruba practices contend with and accommodate various modern influences. It is within the foregoing realisation and recognition that the multimodal portrayals of Yoruba language and culture in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* are subjected to critical theoretical analysis.

Regarding the interface between Yoruba and English languages and various image depictions in both comics, the intention and time factor created social nuances that indicate Yoruba society in

different ways. As copiously presented in the discussion of research question one findings, the fact that names of Yoruba persons and locations dominated both comics make obvious representational and interactional indication of the Yoruba society through written mentions. Indeed, in their responses to research question four for example, the discussants identified the use of Yoruba names as communicating Yoruba identity in both comics. From an English-Yoruba language modal analysis therefore, the implication is that even when these names are sandwiched within English language speech or captions, the uniqueness of their sociocultural nature clearly prompt Yoruba origination. A slight but prominent cultural implication of language existed in *Visionary*. Although the spelling of all character names was according to Yoruba grammatical convention in the comic, a notable variation concerns the deity of hunting and forests spelt as *Oxossi*, the spelling of the god in South-America where the Yoruba culture reaches, instead of *Osoosi* as it would be spelt in Nigerian Yoruba. As Biobaku (1958) and Oti and Ayeni (2013) cited in chapter two noted, Yoruba cultural influence reaches as far as the Caribbean, West Indies, and South-America where the Lucumi, Santeria, and Candomblé religious practices bear legacies of Yoruba beliefs. The spelling of the orisha of hunting as *Oxossi* rather than *Osoosi* is a reference to and representation of Yoruba cultural extensions beyond South-West Nigeria. This particular feature exemplifies intention as a function of motivated sign user in which the creator attempts to create the impression of a social reality continuum despite geographic dispersal and obvious differences in sociocultural realities. On the one hand, this particular portrayal strategy has reasonable critical theoretical implication on the account that the deconstruction and expansion of Yoruba-ness to kindred peoples in other societies has historical value in terms of cultural education and awareness especially for younger generations whose knowledge of their cultural history is deficient (see Adeniyi & Bello, 2006 in Chapter Two). On the other hand, the fact that the portrayal combines practices and processes across social spectra may be problematic. This is on account of possible counter-argumentations of cultural appropriation by the kindred peoples and/or cultural dilution by Yorubas in Nigeria thereby resulting in controversies similar to those cited in chapter two in respect of representation and inclusion in culture industry products (see Willingham, 2022; Tassi, 2025; Kokkinidis, 2025). In other words, while this portrayal strategy in *Visionary* has sound critical theoretical validity, it is also potentially a double-edged sword.

Despite the clear Yoruba impressions character and location naming created, two important nuances in the English-Yoruba language duality are important points of analyses. These are the form of Yoruba used and the frequency of Yoruba in speech and translations. On these factors, the implication of intent and time iteration is substantial. Although the setting of is contemporary, *Visionary* infuses ample traditional Yoruba features in ways that seem to blur notions of modernity while *Ireti-Bidemi* mirrors a contemporary and cosmopolitan urban Yoruba society combining intercultural social nuances, different generational tendencies, and values and lifestyles consistent with modern Nigeria. Consequently, *Visionary* has substantial Yoruba speeches (including incantations and idioms), the words appear with full complements of standard grammatical tonal marks, and did not use urban culture influenced spellings. *Ireti-Bidemi* has scanty Yoruba speech; the words are devoid of grammatical tonal marks and include Yoruba words spelt consistent with urban culture trends. This factor also accounts for the prevalence of Yoruba to English translations in *Visionary* and negligible presence of same feature in *Ireti-Bidemi*.

On the foregoing account of English-Yoruba language interaction, there seem to be sufficient reason to label *Visionary* as authentic portrayal of Yoruba language and *Ireti-Bidemi* as tokenistic. Indeed, for instance, the argument can be advanced that the fact that the superhero character in *Ireti-Bidemi* scarcely spoke Yoruba limits the visibility for and conferral of importance on the language and removes the representational and interactional impact that could have otherwise been created had she spoken more Yoruba language. Yet, arriving at this position as finalised submission amount to disregard for the nature of the media in relation to the workings of other critical institutions of social stability and how both influence and reflect prevailing realities. It is necessary to recall that Tuchman (1978) described the media as constructing social reality and that the culture industry, which the comic industry is part of, is a major media channel for constructing social reality. In constructing social reality, the media operates as an ideological apparatus that stabilises prevailing sociopolitical, economic, and cultural hegemonic order of powerful institutional forces (see Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2020; Althusser, 1971/2014; Smythe, 1981; McQuail, 2010; McChesney, 2015; Rab & Sprague, 2022 in Chapter Two). Alternatively, it can carry and introduce counter-ideological perspectives in a bid to set an agenda that stimulates change either at the behest of other formidable institutional forces or by itself in its capacity as an

institution. Prevailing social realities thus become a function of institutional intentionality. Across all chapters of this study, institutional intentionality feature as a major concept in which Nigeria generally and the Yoruba society specifically fails.

The inability of Yoruba institutions to implement intentional structures that stabilises and entrenches the identity of the Yoruba society allowed various external influences and internal tendencies to easily dilute and energise the gradual decay of the sociocultural values of the people. Indeed, the absence of institutional intentionality was denounced as the root of the deteriorating use and lack of proficiency in Yoruba language in contemporary Nigeria by scholars such as Salawu (2011), Oti and Ayeni (2013), Sesan (2013) and Familugba (2021). The deteriorating use of Yoruba language, particularly in contemporary urban centres and among younger generations, has resulted in the situation where English language is the dominant tongue of conversations and education. The result is a growing generation of people who are either unable to speak and write the language or speak and write a diluted, popular culture influenced, and Westernised version which was the form Akinlade et al. (2021) referred to as “American-Yorubaism”. One way to understand the Yoruba identity portrayed in *Ireti-Bidemi* is as a mirror of social reality in which diluted Yoruba language under the influences of contemporary urban generational and western culture is prevalent. It is the Yoruba language form preferred by the majority of the discussants because they find the Yoruba language version in *Visionary* too complicated for them to read and comprehend and at variance with their lifestyle. Recalling that both AK and MB essentially poured their personality and experiences into their respective comic:

1. *Visionary* is a beacon promoting original Yoruba language forms and advocating for motivated social embrace of those original forms over diluted Yoruba language constantly shifting under the influence of modernity, generational idiosyncrasies, popular culture, and external social influences, while
2. *Ireti-Bidemi* is a mirror reflecting the mutually inclusive social reality pertaining to Yoruba language in which cultural flexibility and dynamism creates significant social conundrum for the Yoruba identity.

On account of this social reality regarding Yoruba language, *Ireti-Bidemi* is not a tokenistic portrayal but a depiction of the prevailing situation regarding the language's dynamism and associated social consequences, while *Visionary* is an intentional product whose purpose is to signify an agenda for the revival and visibility of Yoruba language and culture. Both have critical theoretical validity. Both have validity in terms of the creators' intentions, shaped by their experiences and interests, which motivated their portrayal strategies.

However, scholars have expressed discontent at the influence of factors like religious and language colonialism as well as globalisation in eroding Yoruba culture and values (see Akintoye, 2010; Familugba, 2012; Olasupo, 2013; Odejebi, 2014; Adekola, 2021; Akinlade et al., 2021; Adejumo, 2023 in Chapter Two). The bastardisation of the *Omoluabi* moral ethos is a key testament to the corruption of Yoruba values that scholars (see Olanipekun, 2017; Oladiji et al., 2020; Adejumo, 2021; Banjo & Afolaranmi, 2023 in Chapter Two), Yoruba people (see section 2.3.1 of Chapter Two) and the *Visionary* creator, Akintoba Kalejaiye all decried. This situation apparently calls for institutional intentionality [educational, traditional, media and culture industry, political] in reversing the trend by treating Yoruba language and culture as primary socialisation matter within Yoruba society. In terms of culture industry products, the implication is that the portrayal of Yoruba language and culture must be an intentional activity that promotes core traditional Yoruba values and lifestyles – this will be the sector's institutional intentionality contribution to the revival of the culture.

The intentional social necessity casts a critical theoretical reconsideration on both *Visionary* and *Ireti-Bidemi* in terms of the extent either superhero comic – consistent with Lasswell's (1948) media functions – transmits Yoruba ways of life in a Yoruba society that is suffering a disconnect from their language and cultural roots. Given this situational necessity, the construction of social reality by depicting what currently prevails no longer suffices, what is required is re-constructing society in line with the values and lifestyles of its culture, which – as described by Hofstede et al. (2010), Spencer-Oatey (2012) and Wason (2017) – forms a people's unique identity and ways of experiencing and interpreting the world. Keeping the foregoing in mind, a subtle but strong implication arising from the displeasures and agitations of people and scholars is that intentionality

that prioritises sociocultural exemplification should supersede individual whims. Indeed, all the discussants insisted that sociocultural exemplification and portrayal are necessities that must prominently feature in the African superhero comic sector going forward. In effect, this is the internalisation of the social institutional intentionality to the Nigerian comic industry as a part of the ecosystem of institutions at the vanguard of cultural protection and promotion. This expectation is neither unrealistic nor outlandish because even the comic creators admitted it is necessary.

Applying the foregoing reconsidered critical necessity of media function to the current state of Yoruba language and culture, the multimodal interfaces between English-Yoruba language and pictures in the two case study superhero comics reveal the creators' orientation to culture based on how practices materially manifest across time in a society. In this regard, *Visionary* is replete with cultural depictions that are unambiguously core Yoruba in contrast to *Ireti-Bidemi*. Recalling and keeping the time-space-processes framework in mind, the fact that *Visionary* tells a story in which nearly forgotten traditional Yoruba worldviews collides with a modern world, occupied an elevated status, and resulted in existential implications in modern society accounts for the overt representational and interactional Yoruba impressions through language, practices, religious, and mythological exemplification. The intentional portrayal in which Yoruba identity receives status-conferring framing aligns with the clamour for the media and culture industry to suspend mundane intention for social intentionality that promotes Yoruba language and culture. On the same foregoing logic, *Ireti-Bidemi* falters not because Yoruba identity is absolutely omitted but for the reason that the story portrays more of the contentious contemporary reality that obtains in Yoruba societies and has a stronger interactional presence of the fantastical powers and abilities of the superhero genre. Yet, Yoruba cultural history is the nucleus of the *Ireti-Bidemi* story considering that the super heroine's main powers originate from a Yoruba source.

The differing time orientation and extent of inclusion of traditional practices in both comics requires further critical consideration because it seemingly creates an erroneous notion of rigidity versus flexibility. One of the profound usefulness of the critical theory is in contemplating ideologies such as globalisation and balancing the associated notions of uniformity on account of global citizenry versus maintaining sociocultural identities. In other words, the divide between social permissiveness that brings a society into the comity of globalised nations resulting in

globalisation of cultures (see Raikhan et al., 2014 in Chapter Two) versus social cautiousness in which societies prioritise and protect their needs over the willful embrace of globalisation practices and processes that may injure their context. The culture industry and genres such as the superhero model is one way the globalisation phenomenon and divide exist. Regardless of the fact that several societies have their own culture industry, most have been flexible with the tendency to incorporate styles pioneered or promoted by Hollywood thereby continuing the globalisation of cultures, even if tempered, in some form (see Perren & Schatz, 2004; Sigismondi, 2012; Ibbi, 2013; Miskell, 2016; Lyu, 2023 in Chapter Two). Indeed, neither *Ireti-Bidemi* nor *Visionary* is rigid in the matter of accepting or infusing external cultural features – the real contention is to what extent are external features incorporated because of permissiveness given the pressing social need to revive and accelerate Yoruba heritage? In other words, permissiveness versus cautiousness. In *Ireti-Bidemi*, the flexibility is majorly of an urban society that blends both homegrown contemporary urban culture with Western features, in *Visionary* the flexibility is of an allied African cultural nature with de-emphasised traits of Western influences. In other words, although it is in *Ireti-Bidemi* that permissiveness towards external perspectives was indicated and emphasised as a portrayal intention, the same feature is present but exercised with caution for the portrayal of Yoruba cultural properties in *Visionary*. Indeed, the disconnect discussants registered in respect of *Visionary* is due to the sociocultural cautiousness of the creator in which ample Yoruba language was deployed as a strategy to prevent willful permissiveness where English language is prominent. As such, the presence of time is both contemporary and historic to various extents in both comics owing to the creators' experiences, motivations, and intentions.

Not minding their different orientation to intention and time, the creators' motivation for the portrayals in their respective stories spotlight the elastic affordance of provenance as a major feature of social semiotics multimodality pertaining to the manipulation of the superhero genre for Yoruba sociocultural portrayal. The significance of how the creators applied provenance in their respective comics cannot be overemphasised for hegemonic reasons. First, beyond its entertainment façade, the superhero genre is a route to execute stealthy cultural encroachment and domination in favour of Western ideologies (see Muñoz-González, 2017; Schauer, 2021 in Chapter Three). However, the creators differed on this fact and their differing views influenced their

portrayal to the effect that the *Visionary* creator exercised social caution and used the comic to counter Western cultural hegemony while the *Ireti-Bidemi* creator combined social permissiveness with tempered Yoruba sociocultural outlook. Second, superhero comics thrive on replicating the American created superhuman hero versus villain trope (see Hyman, 2017; Fuchs, 2020; Kent, 2023 in Chapter Three). Three of the popular and essentialised forms of superheroes are human characters whose powers derive from mystical sources as in *Dr. Strange* of Marvel, human characters whose dedication to disciplined training gave them special skills as in *Batman* of DC, and gods and deities as superheroes as in the case of *Thor* of Marvel. These three forms exist in both *Visionary* and *Ireti-Bidemi*. However, the intention of the creators as motivated users whose purpose was to promote Yoruba identity added a social experiential meaning that created the impression of a superhero narrative rooted in Yoruba culture as opposed to one that repeated the familiar American superhero story templates. In *Ireti-Bidemi*, the superhero is a skilled martial arts fighter whose armour and special power originated from a mystical Yoruba source while in *Visionary* Yoruba orishas, *ijakadi*, and Ifa were the tripartite central powers that derived from Yoruba mysticism and combat training. This imposed a Yoruba cosmological, historical, and cultural identity on the superhero stories even as the motives behind the confrontations in the comics significantly departed from the messianic protector and saviour of the universe ideal typical of superhero comics.

5.7.3 Discussion of Research Question Three Findings

Beyond the social intentionality of the comic industry, the motivated sign user objectives of the creators and their provenance strategies regarding the modification and application of the superhero genre for portraying Yoruba language and culture, institutional intentionality is necessary to engineer and ensure society-wide impact for portrayal of [Yoruba] cultural heritage to achieve mileage with audiences at home and abroad. Put in another way, institutional intentionality is the most profound barrier that has kept Nigeria's comic industry moribund and limited the impact of African superhero comics both as a business concern and as an artefact of

cultural messaging. This factor was a recurrent theme that the creators lamented and discussants identified as well.

The most critical structure in this regard is government from whose domain comes policy decisions that should enhance meaningful standards of living for citizens, including supporting and attracting investment in the local comic industry. The culture industry as a value chain of allied creative enterprises (see Hesmondhalgh, 2008; UNESCO-FCS, 2009 in Chapter Two) suggests that governments must have a holistic and strategic mindset comprising cultural, business, education, and infrastructural dimensions to realise the full benefit of the creative ventures. In all of these aspects, the Nigerian society has been shown to fail with significant consequences for the local comic industry (see section 2.8 in Chapter Two). Kunzle (1973) cited in chapter two, indicated that an essential function of comics is that they must carry topical messages. Evidence suggests that the government has realised that [superhero] comics are effective and potent for carrying topical messages going by the nationalisation of cartoon and superhero content for the propagation of indigenous perspectives (see NOA, 2024 in Chapter Two). If the African superhero niche must thrive in Nigeria, policies such as that credited to the NOA are a step in the right direction. Beyond policy formulation, institutional intentionality of the government must prioritise implementation for the desired results. The implementation of actions such as the foregoing is the panacea to the creators' lamentations of absent institutional intentionality on the part of the government. Implementation is important because insincerity has characterised culture industry policies in Nigeria (see Oke, 2023 in Chapter Two).

Yoruba sociocultural institutions as custodians of the Yoruba heritage also have critical roles to play primarily in terms of holding the Yoruba values and ways of life sacred and incorruptible. On this account, the revitalisation and preservation of the *Omoluabi* moral code is the focal point. The views of the creators, specific and emphatic of government and tangentially inclusive of sociocultural institutions mainly present in Akintoba Kalejaiye's thoughts, indicate that the potential inherent in using superhero comics to tell indigenous stories and portray African heritage cannot be maximised without institutional support of government as well as traditional sociocultural institutions. Asaju (2018) cited in chapter two acknowledged that Yoruba values and customs have been changing over the years yet little is understood about the roles and

objectives of individuals and organised structures steering the transformation. This is a tacit admission of the culpability of Yoruba institutions and individuals in compromising the Yoruba culture. One significant purpose culture is used to achieve is the engineering and stabilisation of power and political hegemony (see Ortner, 2005, 2016; Rodesth, 2018; Schwartz, 2018; Ofoegbu, 2024 in Chapter Two). In the case of the Yoruba society, a notable example in this respect is the controversial entanglement of Yoruba religious institutions and the sacred *Oro* deity in the political events of 2023 (see Sunday, 2023; Francis, 2023; Olasupo et al., 2024 in Chapter Two). The example extends to the various dimensions the *Omoluabi* ethos and other cultural practices are being compromised (see section 2.3.1.1). As such, it is the responsibility of Yoruba sociocultural institutions such as Yoruba Council of Elders and Yoruba Council of Obas and individuals to undo the damage done in order for Yoruba identity portrayals in superhero comics to have stronger impact. Institutional intentionality comprising government and traditional sociocultural institutions become one arm of the challenges inhibiting the growth of the local comic industry.

The second arm of the institutional intentionality problem is the comic industry itself. Although much of the industry's obligations in respect of portraying African heritage has been discussed, it is necessary to emphasise the need for the practitioners to embrace robust production, collaborative and ecosystem mindset, and storytelling standards capable of transitioning the industry from an epileptic, obscure, and nondescript culture industry component to a strong reckoning in the minds of all stakeholders. The third and final arm is the audience whose interest in African superhero comics is not negotiable if the genre must thrive in Nigeria. The sociocultural and economic significance of fandom and strong audience bases were elaborated, for example, by Jenkins (2018) and Linden and Linden (2017) in chapter two, and demonstrated by Tuase (2023) in respect of foreign fandom practices being adopted and recreated in Nigeria. It is logical to affirm that for the type of fandom and audience culture that accompanies foreign comic industries to happen in Nigeria, pertaining specifically to Yoruba cultural heritage portrayal, the three forms of institutional intentionality must exist and operate as follows:

1. Government must implement policies that will enable citizens have good socioeconomic standards of living as it exist in societies where comics have a strong presence. This will

enable audiences have disposable time and income to pursue other interests apart from living in survival mode (see Akintoba Kalejaiye's point in this regard),

2. Government must support, encourage, invest in, and collaborate with the comic industry to accord the industry visibility and prominence,
3. Traditional sociocultural institutions like the Yoruba Council of Elders and Yoruba Council of Obas must protect the cultural ethos and values from wanton corruption by both internal and external forces while encouraging intergenerational promotion of the culture to prevent it from deterioration and decline, and
4. The comic industry must produce and amplify quality stories that exemplify the Yoruba language and culture.

5.7.4 Discussion of Research Question Four Findings

The act of portrayal is the function of interpretations and framing by the source of a depiction to achieve certain objectives. Logically therefore, to attain portrayal objectives mean there must be target receivers who will subject the portrayal to interpretations and act accordingly based on their interpretation. This relationship between creator of portrayal and audience interpretation is central to superhero comics and is similar to a sort of producer and consumer relationship. Indeed, without the audience or fans, the success and popularity the superhero genre enjoys will not exist. Jenkins (2018), cited in chapter three, implied this importance in the submission that the audience or fans' role is participatory and the various activities they perform such as consuming a comic, discussion and conversations about a comic, and using comic paraphernalia in socially impactful ways are important status conferring actions. Consequently, it follows that the assessment of the audience is a necessary and critical component in the matter of Yoruba language and culture portrayal in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*.

In the findings and discussion of research question two, the factors that motivated the creators to portray Yoruba language and culture in their comic one way or the other were identified as their experiences and interests. The discussants generally saw the signification of Yoruba identity in both comics, albeit more in respect of *Visionary* and less in respect of *Ireti-Bidemi*. For the most

part, the opinions of the discussants were consistent with findings and discussions of research questions one and two. Whereas the discussants' interpretation was a stronger multimodal portrayal of Yoruba identity existed in *Visionary* for the copious use of Yoruba language, names, and pictures depicting traditional Yoruba dressing, religion, and artefacts, *Ireti-Bidemi* registered Yoruba identity in their minds predominantly in the Yoruba names of the characters and locations. Given that the comics were able to create an impression of Yoruba identity in the minds of the discussants indicate that the provenance modification strategies adopted by the creators did achieve their motivated intentions of portraying Yoruba language and culture.

A noteworthy conundrum that arose, however, relates to language and the Yoruba society. The fact that discussants preferred the language modality in *Ireti-Bidemi* has already been factored into the discussion of research questions one and two findings. For a society whose language is already undermined and scholars are agitating for its strategic use and revitalisation, this finding emphasises the extent of the social problem regarding the state of the Yoruba language and the declining literacy and proficiency rate among members of the society, especially younger generations. Although the discussants do not see their language modality choice as a problem because it is in agreement with their urban, trendy, and pro-Western cultural influences lifestyle, it, again, points to failures of institutional intentionality in engineering a homegrown cultural and ideological values set. However, a clear institutional intentionality failure the discussants mentioned as affecting the success of comics intended for cultural portrayal in the country is government's nonchalance. It was obvious that the core American character of the superhero model was clear to the discussants and they suggested that it could be an avenue to plot the encroachment and gradual erosion of Yoruba sociocultural attributes. It was for that reason the discussants advocated for institutional intentionality to support and empower the comic industry to produce more comics that are uniquely pro-Yoruba (and Nigerian) culture.

Regarding the foregoing, the discussants demonstrated both individual awareness and social agency instead of being mere audience who largely consume media content without actively initiating or getting involved in any critical participatory action that affects the course of the content (see Jenkins, 2007 in Chapter Two). As explained in section 2.7 of chapter two, this action separates audience from fans. Admittedly, the type of active and engaging fandom practices that

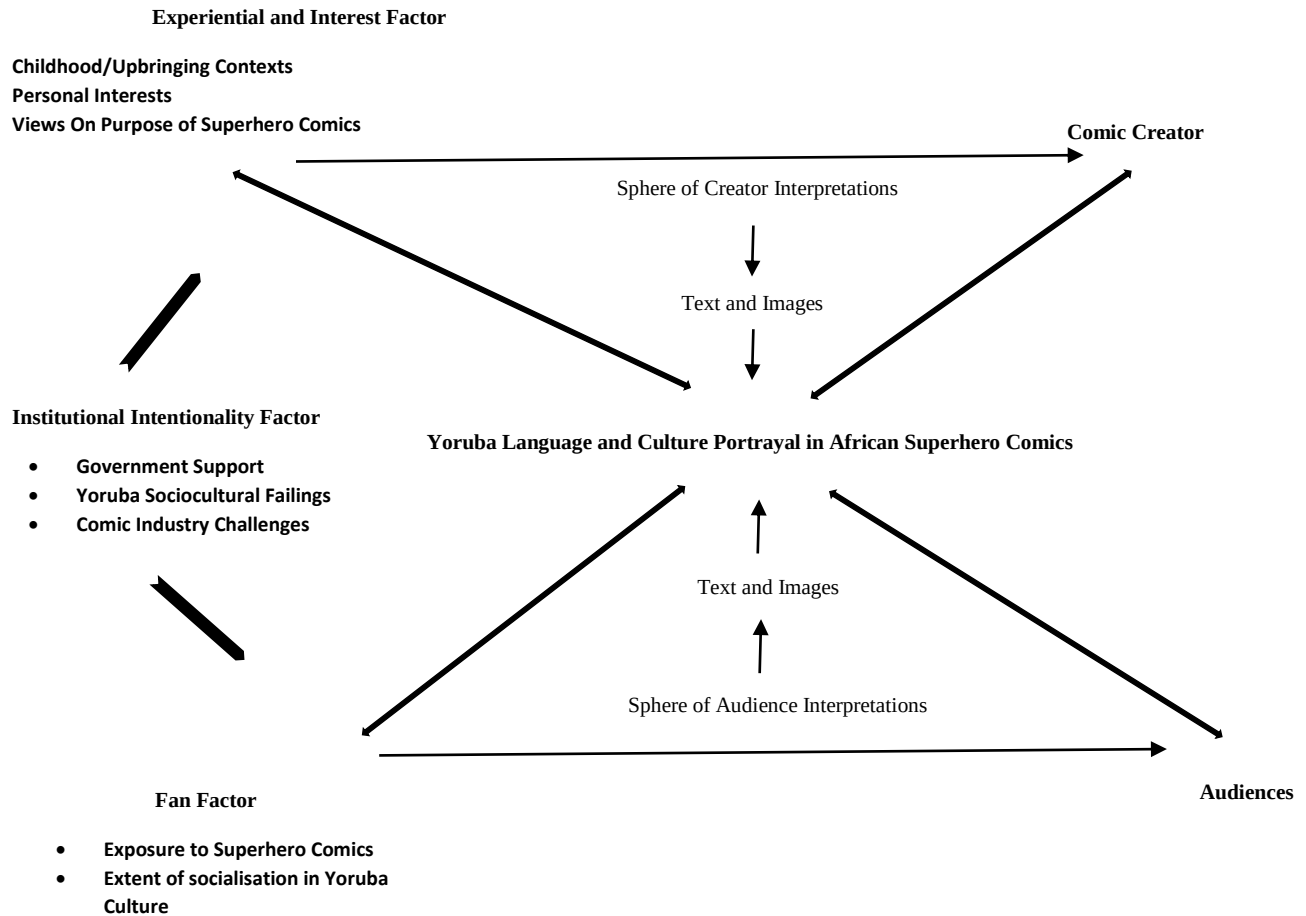
characterises superhero and culture industry fandom internationally is still lacking in Nigeria for the indigenous comic characters. However, the discussants' critical mindset could indicate the foundation of brewing fandom culture in respect of local comics. As the creator of *Visionary* indicated, one problem confronting the local comic industry is the absence of social awareness and acceptance. The discussants' mindset could suggest the social willingness to accept indigenous superhero comics portraying culture. From a critical theoretical perspective, this sort of mindset is essential for further deconstruction of the superhero genre because it signifies critical cultural awakening that will give comic creators the incentive to produce more culturally themed superhero comics. Such cultural awakening mindset will strengthen the comic industry with resources to become a strong and powerful institution, as is the case with Hollywood (see Perren & Schatz, 2004 in Chapter Two).

In the final analysis, the creators' background, experiences, and interests definitely conditioned their orientation to the portrayal of the Yoruba language and culture in different relatable ways. However, the bigger challenge is social and institutional. This study revealed that the abandonment of culture and lukewarm disposition to cultural preservation and promotion must be reversed as a collective social responsibility to re-socialise the Yoruba society of its ways of life. As institutional entities, *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* are playing their role in this process irrespective of the challenging realities that have made the Nigerian comic industry fluctuate between being comatose and epileptic since 1976. The essential findings of this study are illustrated and explained in the model in the next section.

5.7.5 Portrayal Factor Model of Yoruba Language and Culture

In the Portrayal Factor Model of Yoruba language and culture in figure 5.29, all the essential factors that emerged as critical to the portrayal of Yoruba language and culture, including the state and fate of the comic industry in Nigeria, are diagrammatically illustrated.

Figure 5.29: Portrayal Factor Model of Yoruba Language and Culture



The Portrayal Factor Model above is divided into four sectors. This division is realisable with the aid of an imaginary line drawn through the centre vertically and horizontally. Drawing the imaginary line vertically, a left and right sector emerges. The left sector contains all factors that informed the comic creators' portrayal of Yoruba identity in different ways and motivated their objectives in terms of beautification of culture for *Visionary* and modern urban lifestyle for *Ireti-Bidemi* (see tables 5.3 and 5.4). The experiential and interest factors specifically relate to each comic creator and are responsible for their individual differences. The institutional intentionality

factor contains all dimensions of social institutions whose actions affected both the portrayal of Yoruba language and culture as well as the state of the comic industry in Nigeria. The left sector also contains the fan factor in which the exposure to the superhero genre and the extent of socialisation in the Yoruba culture are significant to how members of the society as audience assess both comics. The institutional intentionality factor, being a society-wide element that affects all members of the society, acts on both the comic creators and fans, hence its central location. The right sector is specific to the individuals (creators and audiences) that participated in this research and from whose perspectives the factors on the left sector were unveiled, analysed, and discussed.

Again, drawing the imaginary line horizontally, a top and bottom sector emerges. The top sector relates specifically to the comic creators. The visual association between the experiential and interest factor in the left sector, discussed above in the vertical view of the model, and the comic creators is apparent in the top sector of the horizontal view. The experiential and interest factor are inevitably affected by the institutional factor and both combine to create dissimilar personal spheres of creator interpretations of their culture, society, views of the world and the superhero genre. The combination of the institutional intentionality factor and experiential and interest factors conditioned the differences in the creators' pictorial and textual portrayal of Yoruba language and culture in their respective comics. In other words, the institutional factors and experiential and interest factors combine and motivate the comic creators to use superhero comic provenance to portray Yoruba language and culture differently. The bottom sector of the horizontal view associates the fan factor element to the audience. The fan factor is also influenced by the institutional intentionality element specifically regarding how social institutions operate to the extent that individuals are either deeply socialised and invested in their culture and domestic culture industry or not. Thus, the audiences' interpretations of Yoruba language and culture as depicted in words and pictures in both *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* is determined by the institutional intentionality factor.

Finally, the elements at the centre of the model represent the point of contact between the creators' portrayal of Yoruba language and culture in their comics and the audience who read the comics and are supposed to understand it as either representing Yoruba identity or not. This is a function of interpretations, the first being the encoding of interpretations in pictures and text by the creators

while the second involves the audiences reading the text and pictures to decode the creator interpretations and decide if, in their estimation, it sufficiently communicates Yoruba identity or not.

5.8 Summary of the Chapter

In this penultimate chapter, the findings related to each research question were presented and subsequently discussed, the purpose being to establish their implications regarding the portrayal of Yoruba language and culture in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*. The concern of the final chapter that follows next is the summary, conclusions, and recommendations of the study based on the findings.

CHAPTER SIX

6.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In this final chapter of the study, the major points of the study are summarised, followed by conclusions based on the outcomes, and, finally, recommendations are provided to address the shortcomings that were revealed in the outcomes or findings.

Post the main sections of the concluding chapter, a reflexivity section is included. The reflexivity is a critical reflection that addresses the researcher's mindset, motivations, and methodical positioning regarding the conduct of the research towards ensuring transparency and trustworthiness of the process.

6.2 Summary

The overarching objective of this study was to examine the extent to which Yoruba language and culture were portrayed multimodally (text and image) in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* African superhero comics published by Comic Republic, whose organisational objective is to promote African heritage through superhero comics. The objective also covered audience assessment of the comics as portrayal of Yoruba identity including the challenges confronting comics intended for culture portrayal. The main findings of the study are:

1. The first of the major findings revealed that the portrayal of Yoruba language and culture in either comic is consistent with the multimodal theoretical principle of individuals as motivated sign users who use signs and symbols, in this case Yoruba sociocultural properties, to communicate and achieve predetermined personal objectives or intentions. Personal experiences and interests of the creators in relation to their exposure to Yoruba culture primarily informed the manner in which each creator framed Yoruba identity in

their superhero story. Factors such as differences in childhood upbringing, experiences as adults, and views on the superhero genre regarding its instrumentation for cultural infiltration and domination influenced how either creator portrayed Yoruba identity.

2. Based on the motivated sign user agency of the creators therefore, the *Visionary* creator, whose intention was to beautify Yoruba culture as a corrective response to internal social decay and external influences encroaching on and eroding Yoruba culture, combined traditional Yoruba features with and elevated it over contemporary reality. The creator achieved this objective in ways such as giving characters strictly Yoruba names, adopting actual Yoruba places for locations where events unfolded, and using pictures to depict Yoruba culture through dressing, ornamentation, and other artefacts. In addition, the entirety of the story centered on Yoruba mythology, religion, and cosmological beliefs, and Yoruba language was used abundantly for conversations with the full complement of grammatical tonal marks and for acts like incantations. Despite being used alongside English language therefore, Yoruba language received prominence and visibility because of its strategic use in the comic. In contrast, the *Ireti-Bidemi* creator, whose intention was to present Yoruba culture as flexible, dynamic, and welcoming of practices from outside the culture, emphasised contemporary urban social reality over traditional Yoruba features. As such, the creator portrayed Yoruba identity largely by giving majority of the characters Yoruba names, using actual Yoruba locations and depicting them with landmark and recognisably specific imageries, infusing a bit of Yoruba cosmology, and anchoring the core of the story mostly on the legendary historical feat of a Yoruba female. However, Yoruba language was used sparsely for conversation in the comic, appearing without grammatical tonal marks when used and usually stylised in line with urban culture influenced Yoruba language form. Language and conversationwise therefore, English language dominated *Ireti-Bidemi*.
3. The final significant finding revealed that the audience perceived *Visionary* as having a stronger portrayal of Yoruba culture and language for the aforementioned reasons but they (audience) mostly preferred the language and conversational style used in *Ireti-Bidemi*.

because they are not proficient in reading and writing Yoruba language. The language preference finding is a significant social malaise that directly links to another noteworthy finding, which is the absence of institutional intentionality in protecting, promoting, and supporting culture generally, and, specifically, supporting the comic industry and comic creators whose art promotes and portrays culture. Institutional intentionality failures applies to three entities namely the government for lack of commitment to culture promotion and support for the comic industry, Yoruba sociocultural institutions for being complicit in the systematic rot of Yoruba ethos, and the comic industry for lacking an ecosystem mindset necessary to pull resources, integrate competencies, and ensure standardisation that guarantees quality art.

The relationship between these major findings regarding how they combine to influence the portrayal of Yoruba identity is depicted in the Portrayal Factor model of Yoruba language and culture in the penultimate chapter.

6.3 Conclusions

The conclusions of this study are as follows:

1. In respect of research objective one, the conclusion from the content analysis is that *Visionary* used both pictorial and language choices that created visible representational and interactional impressions of Yoruba identity in contrast to *Ireti-Bidemi* which had scant and almost negligible elements that portrays Yoruba culture. *Visionary* employed strategies that depicted Yoruba cultural features by adopting undiluted Yoruba language for conversations, depicting characters in traditional Yoruba attire, and using copious Yoruba cosmology and mythology in ways that overwhelm its actual contemporary settings. The *Ireti-Bidemi* story is firmly contemporary in outlook and overwhelmingly used English language for conversations with occasional sprinkling of Yoruba language that were either

stylised consistent with contemporary urban culture and/or devoid of the standard grammatical tonal signs. However, both comics did portray Yoruba culture by giving their characters Yoruba names and naming all locations after actual Yoruba towns and cities. In *Visionary*, the multimodal portrayal of Yoruba identity extended beyond Nigeria and included spellings and religious images linked to Candomblé and Santeria, both being West Indies and South American religious practices with influences in Yoruba beliefs.

2. In respect of research objective two, the conclusion is that both creators exhibited the multimodal principle of motivated sign user as the major factor that influenced their portrayal orientation. The notable variance in each creator's upbringing and experiences pertaining to their exposure to the Yoruba language and culture as well as their personal interests influenced their portrayal decisions. The implication of this factor is that the *Visionary* creator, whose upbringing and interests were rooted in traditional Yoruba experiences, favoured a cultural awakening and redemption approach accounting for the substantial presence of traditional Yoruba cultural features in the comic. On his part, the *Ireti-Bidemi* creator, whose upbringing and interests were inclined towards urban life and culture, favoured pro-urban and contemporary realities of Yoruba identity. As such, the exact portrayal intention behind the varying depictions were beautification of Yoruba culture for *Visionary* while for *Ireti-Bidemi* it was modernity and presentation of Yoruba culture as flexible, welcoming of, and open to other cultures. Both comics captured different aspects of the social realities of Yoruba culture in present times in their approach, *Visionary* emphasising cultural awakening and redemption and *Ireti-Bidemi* emphasising dynamism and changes associated with changing times that simultaneously, although indirectly, reflect the social implications of that change.
3. In respect of research objective three, the conclusion is that the factors militating against the growth and development of Nigeria's comic industry generally and African superhero genre specifically are mainly three, all subsumed under institutional intentionality failures. The institutional intentionality failure factors are namely the government (for lack of policy support and disregard for protecting and promoting culture), Yoruba sociocultural

institutions (for allowing Yoruba cultural values to be battered, disregarded, and tarnished), and comic industry barriers (for lack of quality art, reliable production pipeline, and collaboration or ecosystem mindset). An additional factor is the socioeconomic-audience barriers relating to the society's lack of awareness of and refusal to accept comic as a literature form. It also extends to poverty and low standard of living keeping people in survival mode and preventing them from pursuing other interests such as reading comics. This theme is linked to the absence of government support for the comic industry and poor economic policy decision. Finally,

4. In respect of research objective four, the conclusion is that in both pictures and text *Visionary* portrayed Yoruba language and culture clearer and stronger than *Ireti-Bidemi* in the estimation of the audiences. Conversationally however, the style in *Ireti-Bidemi* in which English language and urban culture modified Yoruba language dominated was preferred over the abundant use of undiluted Yoruba language for conversations in *Visionary*. The preference for the conversation style in *Ireti-Bidemi* was due to the discussants' lack of proficiency in reading and writing their Yoruba language mother tongue which, consequently, strained comprehension of the *Visionary* narrative.

6.4 Recommendations

It emerged that a range of socially connected factors influenced the portrayal of Yoruba language and culture portrayal in the case study comics rather than being only creators' or comic industry dynamics. The recommendations provided are consistent with this connectedness. They stipulate the actions the concerned stakeholders must take in the interest of cohesive and holistic outcomes. Keeping the foregoing in mind, the following four categories of recommendations are proffered:

6.4.1 Recommendations for Government

The first of the institutional intentionality failures that emerged in this study is the government, which the comic creators complained about in the following three dimensions:

1. They have little interest in the comic industry and do not create robust support mechanisms for the industry to thrive,
2. Their economic actions are directly responsible for the pronounced poverty in the country, a situation which erodes disposable income, keeps audiences in a survival mode and prevents them from pursuing other interests such as paying for and reading comics, and
3. They do not prioritise the promotion and protection of culture.

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic country and the definition of government is, as such, inclusive of both the central federal government and the component state governments who administer the affairs of enclaves or states with reasonably homogenous sociocultural history and features. As the foremost state organ responsible for dictating and ensuring compliance to policies as well as driving collective ideological consciousness of the people, it is the responsibility of government to support the comic industry and make cultural awareness, promotion, and protection a central part of its policy framework. Going forward, the following recommendations are specified for government at the federal and state level in respect of Yoruba states. The recommendations are towards ensuring that the Nigerian comic industry transforms into a strong, socially acceptable, and viable industry. These indispensable conditions will empower the African superhero comic genre to have stronger impact in their mission of indigenous culture portrayal and promotion.

1. The formulation and implementation of policies that will ensure that economically rewarding ventures are available has become a matter of urgent necessity for both federal and state governments. This is non-negotiable because it is essential to improving citizens' standards of living and providing them with a safety net. The

implication of this necessity is multifaceted. Apart from obviously empowering the people with resources (time and money) to pursue sundry interests such as reading comics, an economically healthy state is key to attract investments and sustain the continuation of businesses as a going concern. This government policy linked benefits are essential for the sustenance and viability of the Nigerian comic industry as a business producing intangible value for both local and international audiences.

2. It is necessary for the government to make the promotion and protection of its indigenous cultures a matter of non-negotiable policy. One way of achieving this from the federal level is through formal education. Admittedly, the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) has a policy for the use of mother tongue for education, but the framework was shown to be insufficient for its intended purpose mainly as a result of lack of institutional intentionality regarding implementation and monitoring. Forthwith, the government must ensure that indigenous languages like Yoruba language becomes a focal language of instruction across all spheres of education. This means that educational materials that exemplify indigenous cultures and sociocultural histories must now exist in local tongues. Indeed, a pressing area government must urgently focus on is language revitalisation by substituting English for local languages. While this necessity is not lost on the government as exemplified by the NERDC policy, institutional commitment to its implementation is lacking. It is now urgent for government to begin the gradual process of producing these materials and prioritise cultural education. The revamped educational policy must activate and prioritise a catch-them-young drive for children in pre-primary to secondary school levels, these being the formative years of learning. This strategy will ensure continuous socialisation in and transmission of cultural heritage.
3. In respect of the foregoing, Yoruba state governments have an enormous responsibility to ensure that they advocate, encourage, implement, and sustain the inclusion of Yoruba language and culture as compulsory staple in education, especially for the up

and coming generations. They must collaborate with sociocultural institutions to promote Yoruba culture and sociocultural history education. Both the government and Yoruba sociocultural institutions must always liaise to revamp tangible and intangible Yoruba historical heritage, deliberately frame, and package them to have stronger multipurpose appeal and evoke strong bonds of relevance in both young and old Yoruba persons.

4. The Nigerian government must recognise that the comic industry is a crucial institution that has immense sociocultural and economic advantages, treat it as a productive sector and value chain, and provide policy and resources support for the industry. Government at all levels must initiate collaborations with the comic industry to explore the various ways the industry can instill cultural consciousness in the people. The Yoruba state governments must specifically engage with and support the comic industry to achieve the objective of promoting Yoruba culture through superhero stories.

6.4.2 Recommendations for Yoruba Sociocultural Institutions

Yoruba sociocultural institutions are another arm of the institutional intentionality failures that have faltered in upholding the Yoruba culture to the extent that persons that should otherwise be role models to the younger generation are violating crucial Yoruba values willfully. This has provoked an un-reigned cycle of abuse and disregard for Yoruba values and culture by all and sundry. To stem this tide, the following recommendations are offered:

1. The sociocultural institutions must make it a matter of responsibility to promote and protect Yoruba culture and values. The sociocultural institutions must take this step to keep the culture sacrosanct. These institutions must fulfill their obligations of promoting Yoruba cultural ethos, chiefly the *Omoluabi* principle, and ensure that violators are treated with commensurate condemnation and appropriate punitive measures regardless of status of the violator(s). This will return relevance, reverence, and sacredness to both the culture and its custodians in the estimation of members of the culture. In addition, it will make it easier

for the comic industry to portray and transmit the culture and its values to younger generations. This is because responsible sociocultural institutions will foster principle in action or socially observable actions as opposed to practice in absentia or being a lone voice advocating for the adoption of a culture and value system that are widely and flagrantly violated and disregarded. Overall, this will ensure that members of the culture are not Yoruba in name only or claim Yoruba identity for flamboyant and entertainment reasons alone but imbibe the spirit of the Yoruba identity in totality.

2. The sociocultural institutions must be involved in Yoruba cultural education for which they must collaborate with state governments and stakeholders in the education sector to advocate for the implementation of Yoruba sociocultural education towards enhancing generational culture transmission for sustained visibility of and regard for the culture. Cultural education through the formal education system must be a route that the sociocultural institutions pursue forthwith as a way to revitalise the adoption of and proficiency in Yoruba language and knowledge of the peoples' sociocultural history.
3. The sociocultural institutions must recognise that the media and culture industry are critical stakeholders in the promotion, generational transmission, and protection of the culture. In this instance, these institutions must look towards the direction of the African superhero comic genre whose super-heroic template is globally viable among audiences and investors. The African superhero genre has the capacity to expand the reach and penetration of Yoruba culture and language to both children and adults in Nigeria and the diaspora as well as to international audiences. For this reason, Yoruba sociocultural institutions must begin to seek, pay attention to, and collaborate with the comic industry and share indigenous stories, histories, and knowledge that creators can use to craft compelling and culturally edifying stories.

6.4.3 Recommendations for the Comic Industry

Content wise, the African superhero genre is a viable niche that the Nigerian comic industry must concentrate on to distinguish itself from the generic fantastical superhero stories. The African superhero genre offers a unique proposition in that crafting superhero characters and stories around indigenous cultural experiences adds a cultural flavour yet to be intensively and satisfactorily explored and populated. If the creators of superhero comics in the Nigeria decide to totally embrace the fantastical model of the American superheroes, it is unlikely that they will match, much less compete favourably with the might and popularity of the American superheroes and the Hollywood establishment behind it. For instance, in the current social dispensation where the systematic decapitation of Yoruba culture and language and its revitalisation, promotion, and protection are burning topics among the Yoruba people and scholars, the comic industry should capitalise on the situation to create and develop quality culture centric niche of superhero stories. This provenance modification of the superhero genre will create a distinct and competitive advantage for Nigerian comic industry over time.

Nigerian comic creators and publishers must realise that transforming the comic industry into a strong force as it obtains in societies such as United States, from where the inspiration for superhero stories emanated, quality assurance standards, robust production pipelines, and collaborations with allied stakeholders are essential and cannot be avoided. An industry-wide system of standard that ensures the production of quality stories must exist; this will bring deliberateness and professionalism into the process of comic production. Such a system of standard must align the industry with sociocultural values and stipulate strategic objectives superhero stories must achieve in respect of indigenous culture portrayal and promotion. Additionally, the system must emphasise that research-based knowledge must be the foundation for African heritage themed superhero comics. This will ensure that creators and publishers will necessarily collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders in government, the academia, and sociocultural institutions to acquire knowledge and resources that, in turn, will result in stories rich in accurate sociocultural and historical portrayals.

Finally, comic creators and publishers must have an ecosystem mindset and function as a network of professionals who recognise the value of collaboration and partner with a broad range of stakeholders in the media sector, government, sociocultural institutions, academia, and other allied businesses to unleash the synergy of different competencies. An ecosystem mindset is necessary if the comic industry must transform from being nondescript to becoming an established institution. The biggest advantage of this mindset is that it presents a variety of outlets and conduits for bringing visibility, reach, and penetration to local comics in ways the creators and publishers alone cannot achieve.

6.4.5 Recommendations for the Academic Community

Forthwith, the historic academic abandonment of the Nigerian comic industry must end. The Nigerian academic community must begin to treat comics as a valid means of art and literature and invest intellectual resources into researching and producing new knowledge about how Nigerian comics are framing, portraying, and accelerating or de-emphasising ideologies, perspectives, histories, lived experiences, culture, and the Nigerian society in general. The African superhero genre is a niche of the Nigerian comic industry that is ripe and yearning for intellectual enquiries and analyses because the niche aligns with the decolonisation discourse in the academia. As a critical ideological apparatus, it has become urgently necessary for the academic community in Nigeria to recognise the ideological importance of the comic industry, subject it to constant enquiries, and populate the literature with yet missing knowledge of the peculiarities of the Nigerian comic industry. This is essential for a number of reasons:

1. It will reverse the current spate of unreliable, scanty, and scattered information about the early and contemporary history of the Nigerian comic industry,
2. It will situate the actions of the comic creators and publishers in time and immortalise the legacy of the Nigerian comic industry. This is particularly necessary to correct the erroneous notion that comics in the Nigeria started with the current digital publishers,

3. It will enhance the social awareness and acceptance of comics as a valid form of art and literary expression for audiences as infotainment, for creators as a profession, and for academia as a field of critical enquiry,
4. It will produce collaborations with the comic industry, the academic community, and other stakeholders. This is because as producers and repository of knowledge, the academic community has an immense pool of reliable cultural, social, political, and historical information it can share for culture portrayal in comics.

6.5 Summary of the Chapter

In this final chapter, a concise summary of the major ideas of the entire study was provided followed by the conclusions drawn from the findings and recommendations based on those findings. Although this chapter is the effective termination of the study, an in-depth reflexivity is included next to demonstrate the researcher's critical self-awareness in relation to the conduct of the study concerning how the researcher locates himself and balances personal interests with the objectivity and rigour towards arriving at reliable findings.

Reflexivity

By nature, qualitative research is prone to subjective influences of the researcher, a major factor that is responsible for the qualitative-quantitative paradigm contestation (Flick, 2009).

My first contact with comics as a kid was the European *bande dessinée*, not the American superheroes. My father had a modest stash of *Tintin* and *Asterix* comics, which my brother and I read for fun. I would read these comics again and again. Back then, I often wondered why I did not find reading the same comic titles stale but the answer eluded me. It was only in my adult years that what fascinated me about those *bande dessinée* comics became apparent: the adventures transported me into past and contemporary history of Europe, the world, science, and esoteric affairs. In other words, it offered me something concrete. Although framed in hilarity, it was only in my adulthood reflections that I realised how much knowledge I acquired from those comics. For instance, it was from *Asterix* I knew who a druid was, what a Roman centurion meant, what the word ‘cacophony’ meant, and that some places and people tend to have characteristic identifiers like the “rix” in names of Gauls. In addition, *Asterix* weaned me into the exploits of the Roman Empire and Julius Caesar. From *Tintin*, I learnt what a shooting star was, what it means to be an investigative journalist, who a stowaway is, and that a captain commands a ship. From the many adventures of *Tintin* around the world, I acquired rudimentary knowledge of places, geography, culture, and religion. Courtesy of the *bande dessinée*, I fell absolutely in love with comics – irredeemably too.

It was in the latter stages of my primary school days leading to my secondary school years that I was exposed to American superheroes chiefly *Batman*, *Superman*, *Spiderman*, as well as a bit of *Iron Man* (which I never liked and still do not particularly fancy) and *Transformers* (which I also never liked until its cinematic adaptations). These fantastical comics had a different appeal to me: it made me fantasise about the impossible, about acquiring superpowers, flying, saving the world, and destroying evil doers. It somewhat momentarily removed me from the reality of human limitations and made me visualise unbelievable possibilities in an imaginary world. In these imaginations and fantasies, there was always an overwhelming presence of Americanisation in my

head: doing the superhero stuff as those American characters did, and ultimately having allegiances to America. This sharply contrasts the effects the European comics had on me. Although there was an air of Western superiority in both comic types, the European titles introduced me to other peoples and cultures while American comics was decidedly America first, America only, America supreme: at least that is how I see it.

To be honest, I initially did not particularly fancy superhero comics for its exaggerated fantasy and centralisation of America in it. I must mention that a particular factor that diminished my fascination with superheroes was, ironically, literary. I had a kiddies' storybook then called "*Ade, Our Naughty Little Brother*". The little Ade once imagined being *Superman*, jumped from the top of a flight of steps to the ground hoping he would fly – he broke several bones. Although I was barely a teenager when I read this book, the moral was not lost on me. I did not take kindly to something so unrealistic that if I attempted it could incapacitate me. Nevertheless, my impression of superheroes would change when the idea was applied in a Nigerian comic to an African context.

In between those two types of comics, I also read Nigeria's *Ikebe Super* comic magazines, its contemporaries such as *Nackson the Sexy Guy*, book volumes of Josy Ajiboye's newspaper cartoons and comic strips as well as other comic strips. I found these hilarious and relatable because they captured the Nigerian society and reality, just as the *bande dessinée* comics introduced me to concrete sociocultural stuff. I read a particular issue in which *Papa Ajasco* – the potbellied, bald, and womanising central male figure in *Ikebe Super* – was bestowed with superhuman powers. He flew to South Africa to fight and liberate Black South Africans from the oppression of the Apartheid regime. This was a crucial turning point for me in my estimation of and subsequent tolerance for superheroes. I realised that it is possible to tell a practical story or convey an impactful message through the clearly impractical and fantastical superhero genre.

Therefore, I located the function of the fantastical superhero model as being to steer and instil practical ideas through the imaginary. And I waited for Nigerian comics to perform this function but they disappeared and left a void. And I began to consume more American superhero comics; the more I read superhero comics, the more I saw the possibilities of messaging through it, and the more I waited for a replication of same idea at home. That did not happen for a long time and I

was disappointed, until I ran into Comic Republic (CR) African heritage superhero comics while researching comics for fun and running a newsletter, a weekly publication about comics and culture industry called “Frame” on the now defunct Revue on X (formerly Twitter). Upon discovering CR, I knew instantly that comic was an area I will work on for my terminal degree and make my field of interest going forward because comic scholarship is as good as dead in Nigeria.

I read CR’s Yoruba themed superhero stories and their impressions on me in terms of learning were partially reminiscent of the impacts *Tintin* and *Asterix* had on me. I realised this was a real opportunity to use the imaginary superhero storyline to furnish young Nigerians with impactful sociocultural history, values, and ideology. This is the only way any superhero story created by Nigerians and published in Nigeria made sense to me: I reckon it was the only way to carve a unique niche of superheroes too. I am Yoruba and I am interested in the state and fate of the Yoruba culture, so my choice of Yoruba themed superhero comics for my PhD research is apparent. I must clarify that there were no special interests in the selection of *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* as case study comics for this study, their selection was entirely random after I conducted a mini draw of CR’s Yoruba themed superhero stories.

My belief is that the superhero genre had always been used to package and push ideologies and Western lifestyle to, to be specific, Nigeria. As a heavy and critical consumer of superhero movie adaptations, I see so-called ‘woke’ ideologies noticeably inserted in superhero stories. My bias is that Nigerian superhero stories must use the same medium to publish and push, in the case of my ethnicity, Yoruba sociocultural identity and ideology not import, dump, and make alien worldviews fashionable in our society. In the research proper however, I suspended this bias because I understood it could affect how I approached the literature, interfere with the conduct of data collection and analysis and prevent me from seeing nuance, drawing connections, and generally seeing beyond the obvious. Importantly, I understood that just as I am different and have my own biases and intentions, comic creators too will have their own personal intentions and motivations for their portrayal of Yoruba language and culture in their comics – I investigated this personal dimension as a way to understand how individual differences influenced portrayal. One other critical step I took during the data collection stage was to approach my interactions with both

the creators and audiences *tabula rasa*, as though I knew nothing and wanted to learn from scratch from the participants. This was a helpful strategy because it made participants delve deep and reveal significant insights about their thought processes, experiences, personal views, and Nigerian comic industry specific challenges.

Now that this research is completed and a personally fulfilling milestone has been achieved, I intend to continue my scholarship in the field of comics, exploring it from various angles as per its manifestation in Nigeria in relation to the world. I hope that it will be the beginning of comic scholarship in Nigeria. I hope that it will be the start of collaborations between myself, like-minded academics around the world, the comic industry, and other stakeholders.

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Appendices

Appendix One: Interview Guide

Study Title: Multimodal Analysis of Yoruba Language and Culture Portrayal in Contemporary Nigerian Superhero Comics: Case Study of *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*

Principal Investigator: Akintayo Adesoji Ogunsanya

Student number: 28730135

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for consenting to partake in this interview. We will cover two categories of questions, the first part deals with general issues about comics in Nigeria, Africa, and the world. The second part deals with the direct research objectives relating to your artistic choice and objectives you intend to achieve with the way you framed Yoruba culture and language, and challenges of managing superhero comics intended for portrayal of African culture and heritage.

Now, we will begin with part one. There are five questions in this part.

PART ONE: BIOGRAPHY AND GENERIC QUESTIONS

1. Tell me a bit about your background in relation to the Yoruba culture. By this, I mean your experiences growing up as a Yoruba kid and where you grew up mainly in terms of what you were exposed to and how they influenced your creative style and stories.
2. You are a comic creator and you created *Ireti-Bidemi* / *Visionary* superhero comics, tell me how you personally came to like superhero comics and prefer that style for your storytelling.
(Follow-up question[s], if necessary)
3. Superhero comic is obviously an American model. Do you think there is any relationship between comics generally, American superhero comics specifically, and tendencies of cultural domination?
(Follow-up question(s) to further probe participants' view on culture and comics)

4. Let us continue a bit on that global angle on comics. Do you think African comics can become popular audience content and profitable multimedia business ventures as those from America, Japan, Europe, and South Korea in both Africa and the world?

(Follow-up question[s])

5. Now, let us look at African superhero comics. Your organisation has been publishing this category of comics for twelve years now, give me an overview of how the genre is performing in Nigeria and globally. I am interested specifically in audience reception, international strides, perhaps government interest, African superhero comic category is achieving.

(Follow-up question[s])

[Researcher will ask if interviewees require comfort break once question five is answered because it concludes part one]

We are now moving to part two of the interview. There are nine questions in this part.

PART TWO: CORE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES QUESTIONS

Section A for Research Question Two: Influences and Decisions on Creators' Portrayal

1. How will you describe the way you depicted Yoruba language and culture in *Ireti-Bidemi* or *Visionary*?

(Follow-up question[s])

2. What exact impressions did you intend to communicate to both local and international audiences with the way you depicted Yoruba language and culture? What I mean is how do you want readers to view the Yoruba language and culture with the way you framed the comic?

(Follow-up question[s])

3. Given the impression(s) you intend to communicate, what objectives were you hoping to achieve as a result?

(Follow-up question[s])

4. Let us now look at the comic you created (*Ireti-Bidemi* or *Visionary*) in relation to the impressions and objectives you had in mind. Do you think that the language and images will definitely signify Yoruba culture to readers?

(Follow-up question[s])

5. Let us take this next question from a comparative angle. *Superman*, for example, has historically carried and communicated the American identity. How does the superhero in your comic perform the same function in terms of Yoruba identity both in appearance and in language?

(Follow-up question[s])

6. Can you give me an idea of how audience reception has been for *Ireti-Bidemi* or *Visionary*?

(Follow-up question[s], if necessary)

Section B for Research Question Three: Challenges in Publishing and Managing African Superhero Comics

7. The Nigerian comic industry is obviously far from the scale of development present in the American comic industry, which created the superhero comic type. In your experience, tell the factors slowing the progress of the Nigerian comic industry.

(Follow-up question[s], if necessary)

8. We will continue on that thought about state of the Nigerian comic industry. In spite of the factors you mentioned comic creators are still actively publishing content. So, tell me the challenges creators encounter in producing, managing, and marketing their products.

(Follow-up question[s], if necessary)

9. Finally, where do you see African superhero comics specifically and Nigerian comics industry generally in the next ten years?

Closing Remarks

We have now come to the end of the interview. Thank you for consenting to the interview and thank you for your time and insightful views.

Appendix Two: Focus Group Discussion Guide

Study Title: Multimodal Analysis of Yoruba Language and Culture Portrayal in Contemporary Nigerian Superhero Comics: Case Study of *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*

Principal Investigator: Akintayo Adesoji Ogunsanya

Student number: 28730135

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for consenting to partake in this focus group discussion. We will cover just one category of question, which is your impressions or views on how *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* depict Yoruba culture and language. There are ten simple questions to cover.

Now, we will begin.

Section A: Generic Questions on Superhero Comic Readership.

1. I will like to know how long each one of you has been reading superhero comics.
2. Considering the number of years you have been reading superhero comics, which particular comic made you develop interest in superheroes?
3. What exactly do you find interesting about superhero comics?
(Follow-up question[s])

Section B for Research Question Four: Audience Interpretation of The Comics As Portraying Yoruba Society.

4. As a member of The Comic Republic fan group, what do you think of African superhero comics generally, when you compare them to American superheroes?
(Follow-up question[s])

5. Now, what do you think of *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* specifically when you compare them to American superheroes?

(Follow-up question[s])

6. In your opinion, do you think *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* signify Yoruba language and culture appropriately?

(Follow-up question[s])

7. Please mention and talk about some specific things in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary* that made you give the answer you gave to question six.

(Follow-up question[s])

8. Let us specifically discuss language and images in *Ireti-Bidemi* and *Visionary*. Do they depict Yoruba enough in your opinion?

(Follow-up question[s])

9. Suggest ways you think African superhero comics can better depict Yoruba language and culture in the future.

10. Where do you see the Nigerian comic industry and its superheroes in the next ten years?

Closing Remarks

We have now come to the end of the discussion. Thank you for your consenting to participate and thank you for your time and insightful views.