



A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF BOLANLE AUSTEN-PETERS' *HOUSE OF GA'A*

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Abstract

Semiotics, which is the study of signs and symbols and how they generate meaning, provides a valuable lens for understanding how films communicate cultural values, ideologies, and emotions beyond spoken language. This study is motivated by the need to deepen critical insight into the ways Nigerian historical films, especially Bolanle Austen-Peters' House of Ga'a, employ visual, auditory, and narrative symbols to reflect Yoruba cosmology, moral balance, and political consciousness. The motivation also stems from the increasing recognition of Nollywood as a space for cultural reclamation and the limited scholarly attention given to the semiotic interpretation of indigenous signs in African cinema. The major objective of this study is to carry out a semiotic analysis of House of Ga'a using the theoretical perspectives of Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce, Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, and Algirdas Julien Greimas. The study further seeks to interpret the film's signs and symbols, examine how elements such as the throne, blood, rituals, regalia, and family relationships convey ideological meanings, and explore how these visual and narrative codes mirror Yoruba philosophical values and postcolonial experiences. Also, the study aims to show how Austen-Peters transforms historical events into a philosophical reflection on leadership, morality, ambition, and justice. Through a semiotic reading, this research establishes that House of Ga'a transcends its historical narrative to become a moral and cultural text that redefines African storytelling and reinforces Yoruba aesthetics within the global cinematic space.

Keywords: *Semiotics, Yoruba cosmology, Nollywood, power and ambition, moral corruption, cultural reclamation, African cinema.*

Introduction

African cinema has long been recognized as a vital space for cultural expression, historical reclamation, and philosophical reflection. Since its emergence in the mid-twentieth century, African film has evolved beyond entertainment into an instrument of education, cultural memory, and ideological transformation. Filmmakers across the continent have used cinema to engage with the complexities of colonialism, postcolonial identity, gender relations, and the moral tensions that shape African societies. Through the creative use of narrative, performance, and imagery, African cinema continues to redefine how Africans see themselves and how the world perceives Africa.

In countries such as Senegal, Ghana, South Africa, and Nigeria, film has become an essential means of preserving indigenous values and contesting Western representations. Early African filmmakers like Ousmane Sembène in Senegal and Souleymane Cissé in Mali established a tradition of politically conscious cinema that spoke to the struggles and aspirations of ordinary people. Their works, such as *Xala* and *Yeelen*, reveal how film can function as a language of resistance and a platform for cultural introspection. Contemporary African directors, including Kunle Afolayan, Akin Omotoso, Tsitsi Dangarembga, and Bolanle Austen Peters, continue this legacy by merging indigenous aesthetics with modern cinematic techniques to communicate deeply rooted philosophical and spiritual themes.



In the Nigerian context, Nollywood has become one of the most dynamic and influential film industries in the world. Beyond its commercial success, Nollywood serves as a cultural archive where folklore, rituals, proverbs, and traditional wisdom are visually reimaged. Films such as Kunle Afolayan's *Anikulapo*, Jade Osiberu's *Ayinla*, and Bolanle Austen Peters' *Funmilayo Ransome Kuti* have demonstrated how indigenous narratives can be reinterpreted for contemporary audiences. These works draw attention to the moral and social fabric of African life, using symbols, costumes, gestures, and language to convey meaning. Such symbolic richness underscores the importance of semiotic analysis in African film studies. Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols and how they generate meaning, offers a systematic approach to understanding how African filmmakers embed cultural, moral, and ideological messages in their visual and narrative choices.

Within this broad cinematic landscape, Bolanle Austen Peters' *House of Ga'a* provides a fertile ground for semiotic interpretation. While the film recounts the historical rise and fall of Bashorun Ga'a in the Oyo Empire, its deeper significance lies in the way it transforms historical memory into a moral and philosophical meditation on power, justice, and divine order. Through its visual and auditory symbols; such as the throne, blood, regalia, and rituals, the film speaks to the enduring Yoruba belief in moral balance, human limitation, and cosmic justice.

The central aim of this study is to conduct a semiotic analysis of *House of Ga'a* by applying theoretical perspectives drawn from Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce, Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, and Algirdas Julien Greimas. In doing so, the study seeks to interpret the visual, auditory, and narrative signs in the film and to explain how they convey ideological meanings rooted in Yoruba cosmology and African moral philosophy. It also aims to explore how these signs reflect broader social concerns, including leadership, ambition, corruption, and justice, thereby situating the film within a continuum of African cinematic tradition. Another objective of this study is to highlight the cultural and philosophical contributions of Nollywood to the decolonization of African storytelling. By examining *House of Ga'a* through semiotic theory, the study hopes to reveal how contemporary Nigerian filmmakers reclaim indigenous histories and reframe them within a global cinematic language that privileges African values and aesthetics. The research ultimately seeks to show that African cinema, through its symbolic and visual grammar, continues to serve as a moral text that articulates the aspirations, fears, and wisdom of the continent.

In essence, this study contributes to the growing body of scholarship that views African film as a living system of signs. Through the lens of semiotics, it becomes possible to understand how African filmmakers translate cultural knowledge into cinematic language, transforming local narratives into universal statements about humanity, morality, and power.

Synopsis of the Film *House of Ga'a*

House of Ga'a (2024) is a Nigerian historical drama directed by Bolanle Austen-Peters, set in the 18th-century Oyo Empire. The film chronicles the rise and tragic fall of Bashorun Ga'a (portrayed by Femi Branch), a ruthless and ambitious leader and kingmaker who wields immense political influence, eventually surpassing the authority of the kings (Alaafins) he installs. The story begins with Ga'a's appointment as Bashorun after a victorious campaign against the Nupe people, marking his ascent from a fierce warrior to a tyrannical powerbroker. Driven by personal vendettas and an unquenchable thirst for dominance, Ga'a manipulates the throne, enthroning and dethroning four successive Alaafins through deceit, voodoo rituals, and brutal force. Central to the narrative is Ga'a's complex family dynamics. His son Oyemekun (Mike Afolarin), the film's narrator, is a reluctant heir lacking his father's warrior spirit and ambitions, preferring peace over conquest. Oyemekun's ill-fated romance with Princess Agbonyin (Bridget Nkem) draws him into the web of intrigue, highlighting themes of love, loyalty, and unintended consequences. As Ga'a's paranoia escalates, he turns on perceived threats, including within his own household, unleashing a cycle of betrayals, alliances, and violent reprisals. The plot builds to a climactic showdown within the House of Ga'a, where shifting loyalties and internal rebellion culminate in a bloody confrontation that exposes the perils of unchecked ambition. Ga'a's empire of terror unravels through the very blood he seeks to control, leading to his downfall and a transformative upheaval in the Oyo Kingdom. Amidst the gore of battles and political machinations, the film explores justice, the corrupting



nature of power, and the enduring legacy of tyranny, blending epic spectacle with intimate family drama.

Featuring an ensemble cast including Funke Akindele, Toyin Abraham, Lateef Adedimeji, and Bimbo Manuel, *House of Ga'a* premiered on Netflix on July 26, 2024, and has been praised for its cinematography, costumes, and performances while drawing some critique for historical inaccuracies in military depictions and timelines.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach grounded in semiotic analysis. Drawing on primary data from the film *House of Ga'a* (2024), the methodology involves close textual reading of cinematic elements, including mise-en-scène, cinematography, sound design, costume, and narrative structure. Theoretical frameworks from key semioticians; Saussure (signifier-signified dyad), Peirce (icon-index-symbol triad), Barthes (denotation-connotation-myth), Eco (cultural codes), and Greimas (actantial model) are integrated to dissect signs at denotative, connotative, and mythic levels. The analysis proceeds thematically, focusing on principal sign systems (throne, blood, rituals, regalia, family dynamics) through scene-by-scene breakdowns, supported by visual references (figures from the film). No empirical data collection is involved; instead, the method relies on hermeneutic interpretation to uncover cultural and ideological meanings, ensuring alignment with Yoruba cosmological and Nollywood evolutionary contexts.

Literature Review

The Relevance of Semiotics to African and Nollywood Film Studies

The relevance of semiotics to African and particularly Nollywood film studies cannot be overstated. African cinema has historically served as a medium for reclaiming identity, preserving cultural memory, and resisting colonial narratives. As Akinwale (2023) observes, African films are sites of meaning production where visual and oral traditions converge to communicate collective worldviews. Semiotics provides the tools for decoding these layers of meaning, enabling scholars to analyze how filmmakers employ symbols, colors, gestures, and dialogue to articulate African experiences and philosophies.

In the case of Nollywood, semiotics helps to unpack the ways in which contemporary directors embed traditional cultural signs within modern cinematic techniques. Scholars such as Agyei (2024) and Adeniyi (2024) argue that the revival of indigenous language films has transformed Nollywood from a commercial industry into a cultural movement that reinforces African values while questioning postcolonial realities. Through the lens of semiotics, films such as *Anikulapo* (2023) and *House of Ga'a* (2024) can be seen as cultural dialogues that merge folklore with social commentary.

For instance, in *House of Ga'a*, the Yoruba language is not merely a means of communication but a signifying system that carries spiritual and philosophical weight. When characters utter incantations or proverbs, they are not just speaking; they are activating cultural codes that express Yoruba beliefs about destiny, morality, and communal balance. The proverb, “*The elephant does not dance in the market lest it trample its own young*”, is a semiotic condensation of the film’s central theme: the destructive nature of pride.

Semiotics also highlights how Nollywood films function as counter-narratives to Western depictions of Africa. According to Nwachukwu (2022), Nigerian cinema reclaims visual sovereignty by creating indigenous systems of representation that challenge Eurocentric aesthetics. Austen-Peters’ *House of Ga'a* exemplifies this movement by replacing colonial depictions of African kingdoms as primitive with complex portrayals of political systems, moral dilemmas, and cultural sophistication.

Furthermore, the semiotic analysis of African films reveals how symbols evolve over time while maintaining cultural continuity. For example, the motif of blood in *House of Ga'a* signifies both violence and ancestral justice, linking traditional beliefs with contemporary concerns about political corruption and the moral decay of leadership. The throne, another central sign, functions as a metaphor for contested power, resonating with Nigeria’s postcolonial struggle for ethical



governance. In summary, semiotics offers a comprehensive framework for studying African cinema as a living system of signs that reflect and shape cultural consciousness.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Semiotics, often described as the science of signs, is concerned with the study of how meaning is produced and communicated. At its core, semiotics examines the relationship between a sign and what it represents within a cultural or communicative system. The term “semiotics” derives from the Greek word *sēmeion*, meaning sign. The foundation of modern semiotic theory can be traced to Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, whose approaches laid the groundwork for later developments by scholars such as Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, and Algirdas Julien Greimas.

Saussure’s approach conceptualizes language as a system of signs composed of two parts: the *signifier* and the *signified*. The signifier refers to the form a sign takes, such as a word, sound, image, or gesture, while the signified refers to the concept or idea that the sign expresses. Saussure’s model emphasizes that meaning does not reside in individual words or symbols but in the relationships between them within a structured system. For instance, in *House of Ga’a*, the image of the throne functions as a signifier that evokes the concept of authority, yet its precise meaning changes depending on how it relates to other symbols in the film such as blood, regalia, or ritual space.

Peirce’s theory expands on Saussure’s by introducing a triadic model that defines the sign in relation to three components: the *representamen* (the form of the sign), the *object* (what the sign refers to), and the *interpretant* (the meaning derived from it). Peirce categorizes signs into three main types: icons, which resemble their objects; indexes, which have a direct or causal link to their objects; and symbols, which depend on cultural conventions. In Austen-Peters’ film, the recurring image of the elephant operates as an iconic sign of strength and dominance, an index of Ga’a’s power over others, and a symbolic representation of pride and self-deification.

Roland Barthes advanced semiotic theory by distinguishing between *denotation* (the literal meaning of a sign) and *connotation* (the associated or cultural meaning). He also introduced the concept of *myth*, through which ordinary signs are transformed into carriers of ideological meaning. In Barthesian terms, *House of Ga’a* constructs a myth about the dangers of unchecked ambition and the fragility of human morality. When Ga’a refuses to bow before the Alaafin, the gesture denotes arrogance, but connotatively, it represents rebellion against divine and moral order, transforming the act into a mythic statement about pride and downfall.

Umberto Eco expanded semiotics into a theory of culture, arguing that meaning emerges within a network of interpretive codes that are historically and socially determined. According to Eco (2020), every cultural artefact operates as a text whose signs interact with the collective consciousness of a society. In this sense, Austen-Peters’ film becomes a cultural text that communicates Yoruba cosmological values, moral philosophy, and political history. The film’s semiotic system depends on viewers’ familiarity with Yoruba proverbs, ancestral rituals, and visual codes of authority to generate full meaning.

Algirdas Julien Greimas introduced structural semiotics and the *actantial model*, which identifies six roles or functions within a narrative: the subject, object, sender, receiver, helper, and opponent. This model enables the mapping of relationships between characters and their goals. In *House of Ga’a*, Bashorun Ga’a functions as the *subject* seeking the *object* of ultimate power. His helpers include his warriors, charms, and rituals, while his opponents are the Alaafin, his own son Oyemekun, and the moral laws of the gods. This structure reveals that Ga’a’s downfall is not merely personal but cosmological, symbolizing the destruction that occurs when human ambition seeks to rival divine authority. Through the integration of these theoretical models, this study interprets *House of Ga’a* as a cinematic text that encodes moral, political, and cultural meanings within a web of signs. Each theoretical approach complements the others: Saussure explains the linguistic and visual relationships of signs; Peirce emphasizes their pragmatic and interpretive dimensions; Barthes uncovers their ideological and mythic layers; Eco situates them within a cultural framework; and Greimas reveals their narrative dynamics.



Semiotic Analysis of Bolanle Austen-Peters' *House Of Ga'a*

In *House of Ga'a*, semiotics operates on multiple levels of interpretation. On the surface, the film presents a historical narrative of political intrigue and betrayal. On a deeper level, it constructs a symbolic discourse on morality and power. The throne, for example, functions as both a literal seat of authority and a metaphorical symbol of human ambition. Its repeated appearance throughout the film from Ga'a's first enthronement ceremony to his final downfall serves as a visual refrain that ties together the themes of power, pride, and retribution.



Fig. 1. A first look at Bashorun Ga'a as depicted in *House of Ga'a*

The ritual scenes, which feature chanting, and sacrificial offerings, illustrate how traditional Yoruba spirituality is represented as a living semiotic system. The visual motif of fire connotes both purification and destruction, signifying the dual nature of power. In the climactic sequence, when Ga'a was burnt alive, the flames operate as an index of divine retribution, signaling the restoration of cosmic balance. This scene also echoes Yoruba mythic narratives where moral transgression invites punishment from the gods. Through these visual and auditory symbols, Austen Peters constructs a cinematic language that communicates Yoruba cosmology in accessible and emotionally resonant forms. The film does not simply represent history; it interprets it, using semiotics to engage with moral and philosophical questions that remain relevant in contemporary Nigeria.

Bolanle Austen Peters' *House of Ga'a* is an embroidery of visual and auditory symbols that work together to communicate themes of power, ambition, corruption, and moral consequence. The film's semiotic complexity emerges through its synthesis of Yoruba cultural codes and cinematic techniques that transform historical narrative into a moral allegory. Each object, gesture, and sound in the film carries layered meanings that reveal both the psychology of characters and the broader ideological undercurrents of society. Through semiotic reading, *House of Ga'a* can be interpreted as a moral discourse on the corruption of power, conveyed through the interplay of five principal sign systems: the throne, blood, rituals, regalia, and family dynamics. These elements function as interconnected symbols that both construct and deconstruct Ga'a's authority.

The throne in *House of Ga'a* is not merely a piece of furniture; it is the central symbol of power, legitimacy, and moral responsibility. In the Saussurean sense, the throne operates as a *signifier* whose *signified* varies depending on the scene. Denotatively, it represents the seat of royal governance in the Oyo Empire. Connotatively, it signifies the fragility of authority and the corruption of leadership when ambition overshadows justice.

One of the most symbolically charged moments occurs when Bashorun Ga'a forces a subordinate to deliver a calabash containing parrot eggs to Alaafin Labisi. This act, drawn from 18th-century Yoruba political tradition, functions as a powerful semiotic sign within the film's narrative of tyranny and resistance. Known as *igba iwa* in Yoruba culture, the presentation of parrot



eggs in a calabash is not a mere object but a coded message of rejection, demanding the king's suicide. Rooted in the *aroko* system of non-verbal communication, this ritual object relies on shared cultural knowledge to convey authority and inevitability. The scene is a masterclass in visual and symbolic storytelling, transforming ordinary items into instruments of political and spiritual power. At the level of denotation, the sign appears deceptively simple: fragile parrot eggs nestled inside a hollowed gourd. The calabash, a common household vessel in Yoruba material culture, is typically associated with sustenance, fertility, and ritual containment. Parrot eggs, being rare and delicate, suggest vulnerability and potential life. Yet, within the cultural context of the Old Oyo Empire, their connotation is far more severe. In Yoruba political tradition, presenting these eggs to a king signifies that the Oyo Mesi; the council of nobles led by the Bashorun has withdrawn its support. The message is unambiguous: the king's rule is broken, and he must "break his crown," a euphemism for ritual suicide to preserve the empire's balance. The eggs thus become a metaphor for the monarch's fragile legitimacy, easily shattered by communal will. The choice of parrot eggs is particularly significant.

Parrots in Yoruba cosmology are linked to wisdom, speech, and divine messaging, sometimes seen as intermediaries between humans and the gods. Their eggs, therefore, carry a sacred weight; something precious, rare, and untouchable. To offer them in judgment is to invoke spiritual authority, transforming a political act into a divinely sanctioned verdict. The calabash, often used in offerings to ancestors or orishas, further sacralizes the gesture, framing the rejection not as mere politics but as a cosmic decree. In Ga'a's hands, however, this sacred symbol is corrupted. What was meant to check royal despotism becomes a weapon of personal vengeance, exposing the fragility of tradition when wielded by ambition. This visual emphasis mirrors the king's impending fate; fragile, contained, and doomed. The act of opening the calabash becomes a moment of revelation, a syntagmatic climax where meaning unfolds irreversibly. Drumming, costume, and posture reinforce binary oppositions: Ga'a's towering presence versus the Alaa'in's isolation, tradition versus betrayal, life versus death. For Yoruba audiences, the symbol is immediately legible; for others, the film provides narrative relay through dialogue and reaction, ensuring the weight of the gesture is felt.

In the early sequence, the camera frames the throne in a low-angle shot as the newly installed Alaa'in ascends to power. The lighting is warm and golden, connoting divine approval. However, as Ga'a begins to manipulate the rulers he appoints, the throne's lighting shifts to cooler, dimmer tones, suggesting the moral darkness surrounding it. This transformation visualizes Barthes' notion of myth, where the sign of kingship is converted into an ideological critique of tyranny.



Fig.2. Depiction of Alaa'in Labisi in *House of Ga'a*

In the coronation scene, Ga'a's hand lingers on the throne as he installs his first puppet king, a gesture symbolizing his desire to possess the authority it represents. The camera pans slowly from the throne to Ga'a's face, visually aligning his body with the seat of power. Through this juxtaposition, Austen Peters constructs a visual metaphor that equates Ga'a's ambition with usurpation. The throne reappears as a recurring motif in later scenes of betrayal and rebellion. When Ga'a's soldiers kneel before him in the council chamber, the camera captures the throne from a tilted angle, destabilizing its visual balance and thereby symbolizing the instability of Ga'a's reign.



Blood is a central recurring sign in *House of Ga'a*, functioning as both a literal and symbolic motif that connects violence, kinship, and divine retribution. Within Yoruba cosmology, blood signifies both life and covenant. In Austen Peters' visual narrative, it becomes the ultimate sign of moral consequence. The film's opening war sequence establishes blood as an indexical sign that links the human body to the brutality of power. The camera captures close-up shots of crimson splatters across warriors' faces, using slow motion to intensify the visceral effect. The sound of rhythmic drumming merges with the cries of battle, creating a sensory experience that aligns the viewer's emotions with the chaos of violence. Here, blood denotes conquest but connotes the contamination of moral integrity.

Rituals in *House of Ga'a* are central to the film's semiotic architecture. They serve as moments of transition, where human actions intersect with spiritual authority. These ritual scenes are rendered with striking attention to detail, evoking the performative essence of Yoruba cosmology. In the enthronement sequence, Ga'a conducts a ritual surrounded by priests, drummers, and courtiers. The mise en scène features flickering torches, hanging charms, and rhythmic chanting in Yoruba, creating an atmosphere of sacred tension. Each element operates as a sign within a larger semiotic network: fire connotes purification and divine energy; herbs denote spiritual protection; and the circular arrangement of participants signifies unity under spiritual authority. The soundscape of these scenes enhances their semiotic depth. The steady beat of drums functions as an auditory code that links the mortal world to the spiritual. The chants, though linguistically simple, are culturally rich, expressing the Yoruba belief in the potency of spoken words. The line "The gods watch the hearts of men" emphasises the tension between human ambition and divine judgment. Rituals in the film also expose Ga'a's internal contradiction. While they appear to affirm his authority, they simultaneously reveal his dependence on unseen forces, suggesting that his power is borrowed rather than inherent. This duality aligns with Barthes' concept of myth, where ritual becomes both a performance of faith and a critique of human arrogance.

Costume design in *House of Ga'a* functions as a complex signifying system through which social identity, status, and psychological transformation are communicated. In Yoruba culture, attire is a language of its own, encoding messages about lineage, morality, and social hierarchy. Austen Peters employs this cultural code with deliberate precision. At the beginning of the film Ga'a wears a simple warrior's wrapper made from aso-oke fabric, signifying humility and valor. As his power grows, his attire becomes progressively elaborate. In the coronation scene, he wore a crimson agbada embroidered with cowries and gold beads. The crimson color denotes vitality but also connotes bloodshed and pride. The cowries serve as indexical signs of wealth and divine favor, while the gold ornamentation symbolizes his proximity to the gods.

Oyemekun's attire provides a visual counterpoint. His simple indigo tunic and plain beads symbolize purity, peace, and self-control. The contrast between father and son, expressed through costume, reinforces the moral polarity that drives the film's narrative. Similarly, Ga'a's wives and Princess Agbonyin's transformation from brightly colored royal garments to subdued earthy tones after her defiance of Ga'a visually narrates her moral awakening. Austen Peters uses costume as what Eco (2020) calls an interpretive code; a visual system that guides the audience's understanding of character development. The visual exaggeration of Ga'a's regalia mirrors his psychological inflation, while the gradual darkening of his wardrobe signifies the descent of his moral state.

The costumes in *House of Ga'a* are not only visually aesthetic but also historically accurate, reflecting the rich textile traditions of the Yoruba people. The director of *House of Ga'a*, Bolanle Austen-Peters, made sure that every character's clothing appropriately reflected their social class, role, and cultural background. The Alaafin, Bashorun Ga'a, and other noble characters are depicted wearing agbadas, which are large, flowing robes made from Aso-Oke, a traditional Yoruba woven cloth. These agbadas are often embroidered with gold or silver threads, reflecting the wearer's wealth and status. The use of beaded crowns (Ade) and other royal clothing is also accurate, highlighting the importance of symbols of power in Yoruba culture.



Fig. 3. The Alaafin's full clothing, crown and Staff



Fig. 4. The costumes of the Alaafin, the chiefs and Oyomesi (in white robes)

The wives of the Bashorun are historically and culturally referred to as “Ayinba” just like the wives of the Alaafin are called “Ayaba”. This is because “Aya” refers to “wife” in Yoruba; the Alaafin is referred to as “Oba” in Yoruba while Bashorun is called “Iba” (Iba and Osorun makes “Bashorun”). The Bashorun’s wives also dress royally with beads on the hair and neck. They also wear Aso Oke, mostly tied as a wrapper, tied to the waist and as a shoulder covering.



Fig. 5. The costumes of Bashorun Ga'a's wives (also called “Ayinba”)



The film's portrayal of warriors is not entirely accurate according to oral traditions, particularly during battle scenes. The traditional Yoruba armour and weaponry is mostly accompanied with charms which are quite physical. Charms worn on the neck, waist, arms and ankles mostly accompany the cotton fabrics worn by soldiers in Old Oyo Empire, according to oral history. Warriors in the film are shown wearing leather tunics, which aligns with historical accounts of Yoruba military attire. The use of weapons such as swords, spears, and shields are consistent with the historical period and adds to the film's authenticity. But the costumes are more aesthetic than historic since the use of charms and anklets are mostly absent. Only cowries are added to the costumes of the soldiers.



Fig. 6. Costumes of the soldiers as portrayed in *House of Ga'a*

The costume of the Nupe soldiers are accurate historically. The Nupe soldiers are known for the long robes and *Rawani* turban. This is due to their downfall to the Sokoto Caliphate in 1820 which fostered Islamic traditions amongst them. Mallam Dendo was crowned the Emir after the capture and the Bida Emirates was established. *House of Ga'a's* depiction follows this historical perspective.



Fig. 7. The depiction of Nupe Warriors in *House of Ga'a*

The family dynamics in *House of Ga'a* reveal how power extends beyond politics into the domestic and emotional spheres. Austen Peters constructs family relationships as symbolic microcosms of empire, where authority, loyalty, and rebellion are constantly negotiated. Oyemekun, the narrator of the story, represents conscience and continuity. His love for Princess Agbonyin symbolizes a generational desire for reconciliation and peace. Their relationship scene are filmed in soft, natural light, suggesting sincerity and emotional purity. Yet, their love is constantly



undermined by Ga'a's obsession with control, which turns the family home into an arena of tyranny.



Fig. 8. The image of Oyemekun

The semiotics of gender in the film reveal how women, though confined by patriarchal systems, wield moral authority through speech and emotional intelligence. Characters like Agbonyin and Ayinba (Funke Akindele) resist oppression through their actions. In the climactic family confrontation, when Oyemekun stands against his father, the composition of the frame reflects the collapse of hierarchy. The son's upright posture contrasts with Ga'a's slouched figure, visually signifying the inversion of power. The moment encapsulates the film's moral message: power divorced from virtue inevitably leads to self-destruction.

Conclusion

This study examined Bolanle Austen Peters' *House of Ga'a* through the theoretical and interpretive framework of semiotics to uncover the cultural, ideological, and philosophical meanings embedded in its visual and narrative symbols. The research applied the semiotic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce, Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, and Algirdas Julien Greimas to decode the film's signs and explore how they reflect Yoruba cosmology and moral values.

The application of these theories provided a comprehensive foundation for understanding the film's symbolic depth. Saussure's dyadic model clarified the relationship between signs and meanings; Peirce's triadic approach illuminated how icons, indexes, and symbols operate in Yoruba cultural expression; Barthes' concept of myth revealed the ideological dimensions of ambition and pride; Eco's theory of cultural codes explained how Yoruba traditions generate meaning; and Greimas' actantial model exposed the moral and narrative dynamics within the film. Through these frameworks, *House of Ga'a* emerges as a layered cinematic text that merges history, morality, and philosophy.

The analysis demonstrated that the throne functions as a symbol of authority and moral responsibility, blood represents both kinship and divine retribution, rituals convey spiritual tension, regalia expresses social identity and transformation, and family relations mirror the broader political and ethical order. These signs collectively reflect the Yoruba belief in moral balance and the inevitability of justice, revealing that Austen Peters' film goes beyond historical narration to engage in moral and philosophical reflection on leadership and power. By anchoring her work in Yoruba language, mythology, and visual symbolism, Austen Peters contributes significantly to Nollywood's ongoing process of cultural reclamation and self-definition. The film reinforces the idea that African cinema serves as a moral and intellectual archive where tradition and modernity intersect.



In summary, the study achieved its aim of interpreting *House of Ga'a* through semiotic theory and demonstrated how the film communicates deep ideological meanings about power, morality, and justice. The research confirms that contemporary African filmmakers are not only storytellers but also philosophers of culture who use cinema to question authority, affirm identity, and preserve the moral imagination of their societies.

Recommendations

The following are recommended:

- Nollywood filmmakers should prioritize indigenous-language productions like *House of Ga'a* to further cultural reclamation, incorporating accurate historical elements (e.g., traditional charms in warrior costumes) to enhance authenticity and educational value.
- Educational institutions in Nigeria should integrate films such as *House of Ga'a* into curricula on Yoruba history and semiotics, fostering critical media literacy and cultural preservation among students.
- Funding bodies and platforms like Netflix should support projects emphasizing decolonial narratives, providing resources for research into oral traditions to minimize historical inaccuracies in depictions of military and ritual practices.
- Future research could investigate audience reception of semiotic elements in *House of Ga'a*, using surveys or focus groups to assess how Yoruba and non-Yoruba viewers interpret signs, bridging gaps between cultural insiders and global audiences.

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