
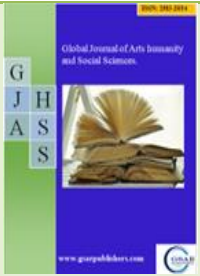


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## Beyond Multimodality: A Study of Hidden Discourse on Book Covers of Selected Contemporary African Novels

By

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### Abstract

This qualitative study explored the multimodal modes on the book covers of selected literary texts used in schools in Africa for their communicative purposes. The study was underpinned by Geenen's (2020) *Multimodal Interaction Analysis Theory* (MIAT), and five (5) literary book covers were purposively selected and textually analyzed. The findings revealed that the book covers of these literary texts used varied verbal and visual elements, including sentences, noun phrases and adjectives with varied font sizes, capitalization, etc. which have been blended massively with different colour backgrounds and image representations respectively, as they were guided by the three levels of multimodality (of verbal, visual and visual-verbal elements). The findings further unveiled that the images on the book covers skillfully showcased African experiences, cultural beliefs and practices for communicative purposes. Further glance equally revealed that the meanings of the visual elements in these book covers were closely associated with various colour backgrounds and images which in effect represent nature, culture and other stereotypical related issues. The study concluded that the verbal elements on the book-covers serve either as a summary of the message in the texts or their inherent persuasive elements.

**Keywords:** Multimodality, Book cover, Literary texts, Semiotics, Discourse analysis

### 1.0 Introduction

Multimodality is a complex and multifaceted concept that has been investigated for a very long time by scholars in different fields of human endeavours. Bezemer & Jewith (2018) observe that the term has grown exponentially since it was first coined in the mid-1990s. In multimodality, researchers investigate how various "modalities interact and complement each other to convey and demystify meaning (Norris, 2004). Investigators of multimodality make use of meaning making notion, in terms of multimodal communication, multimodal discourse or multimodal interaction (Falih & Qasim 2022).

There are a lot of meanings that are neither linguistics nor non-linguistic discourse which are in existence within human interactions since the inception of man's existence. Considering the nature of meaning, Cooper (2014) opines that it is one of our most central and most ubiquitous concepts. Anything at all may, in

suitable contexts, is said to have meaning ascribed to it. The linguistic meanings, on the one hand, involve words, word order, punctuation, spelling, tense and aspect, determiners, connectors, sentence structures. Linguistics meaning can be concerned with the internal arrangements of words in terms of speech situation (Alduais *et al.*, 2022).

On the other hand, non-verbal meanings are graphic organizations, flowcharts, computer simulations, pictograph, sketches, sound, colours, patterns, gestures, facial expression, moment, touch, etc. According to Onwuegbuzie and Abrams (2021) non-verbal meanings are communicated through multiple modes. These modes may envelop hidden meanings in texts and other modes. Again, Anigbogu and Opara (2020) explain that a great number of sentences contain both verbal and non-verbal messages. Hidden discourses are prevalent in all semiotic resources. The unseen texts embedded in either the minds of the writer or the interpreter that needs implied or inferred meaning are hidden discourses. Beyond



the linguistics and non-linguistic (verbal and non-verbal) discourses are the hidden meanings that have not yet been explored especially as it concerns book covers of contemporary novels.

Contemporary African novels are present-day inverted prose narratives in post-colonial era. They are novels that are set in African, written by Africans and focused on African cultures and societies. Contemporary novelists centre their works on feelings, emotions and the societies, and have political, cultural conflicts, identity, cultural hybridity, complexities and diversities of African experiences and identities as themes. Nnolim (2022) emphasizes that contemporary African writers are new writers who exhibit rich literary style with varieties of life and growth and full of breadth-taking surprises. These themes include past, present and future norms and values of the African. Considering African writers' themes, Okieche (2022) maintains that African writers reveal the dignity of African past. He also states that the environments are major determinants of what and who the African writers write about.

There are several categories of contemporary novels. Some are post-colonial novels (which centre on colonialism and imperialism on African societies); there are historical novels (which centre on African past life) and political novels (which are based on corruptions, conflicts, authoritarianism and political instabilities in African societies). There are others which focus on social issues such as poverty, inequality, gender roles. And there are also others which are magical realism novels, diaspora novels, novels on feminism, experiments and religions. According to Okieche (2022), African literature has different phases (such as pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial and neo-colonial stages).

This study therefore goes beyond the written, discourse, digital and other forms of conspicuously displayed multimodalities to unravel the hidden multimodality (the supposed or inferred) meanings embedded or concealed in the book covers of selected contemporary African novels. The main aim of this study therefore is to investigate the hidden meanings on book covers of contemporary African novels.

## 2.0 Statement of the Research Problem

Book covers of any work of literature, with their semiotic modes such as pictures, volumes, colours etc and their hidden discourses speak volumes of their contexts to readers of such novels. The imbedded meanings on book-covers have not been critically investigated as scanty literature exists in this area (Anigbogu & Opara, 2020; Okieche, 2022; Nnolim, 2022). It therefore becomes very necessary to carry out this research with a view to identifying the predominant elements in book covers of contemporary African novels, explaining the sociocultural hidden meaning and identifying the linguistics implications of these hidden meanings.

Hidden meanings have ambiguous interpretations and may tend to cause confusion in the minds of the readers who are not exposed to the meanings of the unseen elements in book covers (Alduais *et al.*, 2022). This confusion may lead to lack of interest by the readers and as such, they may refuse to read the contents of the novels

which may be very rich and replete with moral lessons (Onwuegbuzie & Abrams, 2021). Also, lack of patronage and markability of these novels may cause non-profitability to the writers whose spirit may be dampened and demoralized. This study therefore attempts to suggest different interpretations of hidden discourses with a view to helping readers to develop interest in reading contemporary African novels so as to unravel the "Africanness" and the cultural embellishment hidden in contemporary African novels. It can also help readers to increase their knowledge and African vocabularies through the reading of these novels.

## 3.0 Research Questions

1. What are the predominant elements on the book covers of the selected contemporary African literary texts?
2. What are the sociocultural hidden meanings of the elements on the selected book covers?
3. What are the linguistic implications of these hidden meanings?

## 4.0 Literary Book Covers

Book covers (hard, soft or digital) are indispensable parts of any type of books. They are the very first-points of call to any reader. A book cover can determine whether or not a reader decides to buy/read a book. They also have the capacity to compel a reader "to stop for books" or "to ignore and walk pass the book" (Mendelsund & David, 2020). Considering the nature of book cover, (Genette & Maclean 1991 as cited in Akinlova (2021) observe:

The cover of the book is interpreted as an element of paratext, a zone —between the inside and the outside, itself without rigorous limits, either towards the interior (the text) or towards the exterior (the discourse of the world on the text), a border the specific purpose of which, among other things, is direct impact on the recipient (261).

According to Løften (2021) and Yilmaz (2024), book covers are the gateway to every literary text, whether it being a plain sheet of paper or a colourful cover filled with illustrations of various element. They are visual materials that convey what reading audiences can expect from texts. Again, Yampbell (2005) further explains that they are often the "reader's first integration" and the "consumer's initial reading of the text". In essence, book covers are the skins, membranes, safeguards, frames, bridges, translators of verbal elements to visuals, signifiers, papers and jackets that protect and bond books from scuffing and sun damage. They are frames around the text and the world. Covers invite readers and are entrance to the world of writers and readers. They are information "kiosk" that not only indicate the author, title and publishers, but also locate the book in relation to genre (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004; Mendelsund & David, 2020).

The titles of the books, authors' names, graphic works, publishers, subtitles and taglines are some features on book covers. Therefore, books covers should be interesting, informative, creative and educative, didactic and entertaining. There are several types of

book covers; some are kid's book cover, religious, political, school, photo, graduation, wedding story and professional book-covers.

### 5.0 The Concept of Multimodality

Multimodality is the use of multiply modes to communicate meanings. Kressler (2022) states that the term multimodality means individual's use of language to communication various modes. It is the interplay between different modes of communication (language, gestures, facial expressions and body movements); and how they contribute to the overall meaning of an interaction. Some of these modes are languages, movements, gestures, pictures, facial expressions, diagrams, etc. It allows both verbal and non-verbal modes of communication. These communication modes (systems of mediated actions – Bernad-Mecho, 2017) are used by people called "Social Actors" (The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics 2020). It is based on meaning-making of all sorts: linguistic, visual, aural, gestural and special.

Goodwin & Goodwin (2004) explain that the coordination of multiple resources (speech, gesture, gaze, body posture, and the material environment) for meaning-making in social interaction, contributes to the overall meaning of the interaction. In the same vein, Streeck (2009) stresses the coordination of different communicative resources in interaction and how they contribute to the construction of social actions and meanings. He highlights the importance of considering the ways in which participants use various modes of communication to accomplish social actions. Again, Mondada (2014) also highlights the use and coordination of different semiotic resources in social interaction. She underscores the ways in which participants use these resources to accomplish social actions and meanings.

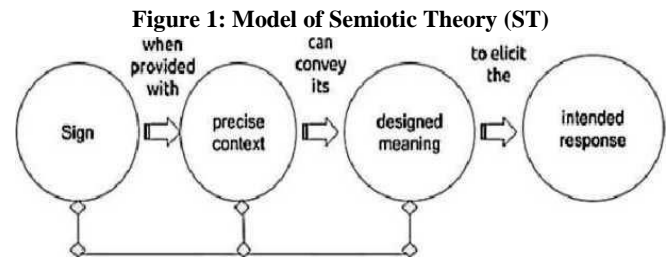
#### 5.1 Types of Multimodality

There are three levels of multimodality. They are verbal, visual, verbal-visual interplay. They includes verbal visual elements (text and images); written visual (typography, layout and images with written word), gesture-speech synchrony (gestures with speech), digital (multimedia presentations, websites, and social media where texts, images, video, etc. are combined), embodied (body including gestures, facial expression and body movements) multimodal translation (how meaning is transferred across different modes of communication).

### 6.0 Semiotics

The study of semiotics (the study of sign/symbol) and its meaning has increasingly gained ground in the rest time. Semiotics involves all processes by which meaning is created and exchanged based on phenomena that have been coded as signs in nature and mind. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of semiotics, meaning can be assigned to objects based on the items available in the field/discipline of the study such as the cultural norms, traditional practices, personal/interpersonal experiences etc. Therefore, semiotic interpretation/application is not limited to humans. All species of existences construct meaning and assign same to objects

in their world based on their sign convention, so, as a multidiscipline concept, semiotics has different sets of principles on which its application and analysis are based depending on the field. (Barthes, 1964; Chandler, 2002).



### 7.0 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical orientation for this study is based on Geenen's (2020) Multimodal Interaction Analysis Theory (MIAT). This framework originates from Bezemer & Jewitt's (2018) Multimodality. MIAT, according to Geenen (2020), began to develop in 2000s in conjunction with technological advancements for visual qualitative research of human action, interaction and identity. Norris (2021) also observes that it is a coherent framework that has developed from theory and methodology to a full framework. Considering this framework, Geenen (2020:2) maintains that it has become "a supremely useful means for probing multimodal relationships in the pragmatics of social interaction". It is a valuable framework for the study of communication and interaction. It takes into consideration different modes of conveyance of meaning in social interactions.

Prior (2005) observes that Multimodality aims at specifying a semiotic perspective in terms of multiple modes (such as facial expression, and other nonverbal cues in communication) and media (such as internet, television, radio). Thus, MIA focuses on communications through multiple modes that contribute to meaning making (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2018). This theory is very relevant in diverse linguistic, social, political, cultural, and other contexts where verbal and nonverbal communication play prominent roles in interactions. Given the insights and far-reaching effects of this theory, it is significantly useful in non-verbal communicative contexts. In other words, MIA provides a comprehensive framework for studying communication in various contexts, such as healthcare settings, educational environments, and workplace interactions.

In summary, MIA is a valuable method for studying communications and interactions in various and diverse contexts. By considering the coordination of multiple modes of communication, researchers can gain an understanding of how meaning is conveyed and negotiated in social interactions. This approach has practical implications for various contexts and offers insights into the complex nature of human communication.

### 8.0 Methodology

This is a qualitative study. Specifically, textual analytical method was adopted for the analysis. A total of five (5) book covers of contemporary novels use in schools in Africa were purposively

selected for this study and were sourced from the Internet. They are Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall* (1958), Bessie Head's *Maru* (1971), Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* (1991), Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love* (2010) and Clair Kell's *Girl Under Water* (2015). This number is adequate enough to reveal the hidden meanings on book covers of contemporary literary texts written by African writers because according to Yadav & Kalia (2015) and Okieche (2022), once you have seen one, you have seen all because they maintain almost similar pattern in their presentation. Verbal elements such as words, phrases and punctuations; non-verbal elements such as pictures, shapes, colours, positioning of objects and volumes of the novels and hidden elements such as the unseen features were analyzed. The study involved a close-reading and analysis of the texts in order to identify the writers' engagement with sociocultural, political and national issues.

## 9.0 Analysis and Discussion

In every text, meaning begins from the book cover. The words, pictures, colours, icons, symbols and signs on the book cover are thoughtful semiotic representations that enhance and project the meaning of the text as can be seen in the analysis below:

### 1. Things Fall Apart

The book cover of the first edition of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* reveals insightful meanings and themes. First, on the verbal level, the title of the novel is a complete sentence with SVA elements. This sentence tells the whole story at a glance – the story of disarrayed society, destroyed cultural practices and belief-system which is prevalent in the novel. Though a full SVA structure, there is no full stop at the end of the sentence which marks the characteristics of a title. On the non-verbal level, the Igbo mask, towering above all other elements on the cover page, represents ancestral spirits and cultural heritage of the Igbos (and by extension Africa), which is a central theme in the novel. The mask's presence symbolizes the protagonist's, Okonkwo's connection to his ancestors and the tension between tradition and change. Yams, as inscribed on the book cover, are a staple crop in Igbo culture and represent abundance, prosperity, and masculinity. The yam also represents Okonkwo's status as a successful farmer and his struggles to maintain his cultural identity. The broken calabash suggests the disintegration of Okonkwo's world and the fragmentation of his community. The Calabash in Igbo culture is associated with wisdom, perseverance and identity, therefore, the broken calabash symbolizes the loss of cultural knowledge and traditions.

Again, the palm tree is significant in Igbo culture. It represents peace, prosperity and fertility. It is an economic tree that is meant for fertility and prosperity as well as being used as the symbol of peace in Igbo culture (Agukoronye, 2001; Ajokor, 2021 and Ikechukwu 2021). The palm tree leaves on the cover connotes the peaceful and prosperous community Okonkwo once knew, which is later disrupted by colonialism. The geometric patterns in the background represents the intricate and complex nature of Igbo culture and the interconnectedness of the community. The church building, the white cross on it and the man on white suit represent

colonialism which engulfed Africa and disrupted its peaceful existence. Little wonder the subject matter in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is that of culture contact and culture conflict. The cover page of this book summarizes this concept. To crown it all, the bold, all-capital, simple font used for the title of the book and author's name signifies the stark, uncompromising reality of the novel's themes and Achebe's straightforward storytelling style. The graphics representations on the book-cover of *Things Fall Apart* interrogate the Africa's sociopolitical realities, including the impact of colonialism, cultural identity, political instability, and the tensions between these two warring identities – tradition and modernity.

### 2. Maru

In Bessie Head's *Maru*, the protagonist's name, "Maru" is the title. Names are proper nouns and therefore, this proper noun forms the title of the novel, and as expected, no punctuation mark is needed. On the non-verbal level, *Maru* shows a striking image of a Batswana woman's face, adorned with flowery colorful green top and traditional beads around her neck. The woman's face is strong, proud, and serene, conveying a sense of dignity and resilience. The image is set against a warm, earthy background, evoking the vast expanse of the South African savannah. The woman's face represents the protagonist, Maru, and her demeanor showcases the struggles she faces as a strong, independent woman in a patriarchal society. The traditional beads she wears symbolize her close affinity with her cultural heritage and connection to her community. The earthy background represents the natural world and the cyclical nature of life, echoing the themes of fertility, abundance, and renewal in the novel. Earthy tones (browns, tans, and yellows) dominate, evoking a sense of naturalness, warmth, and cultural richness. The blue and green colours on the cover-page suggest a focus on the earthy, natural world and Maru's connection to it. Interestingly, the pink road that cuts through her chest up to her throat towards her head signifies division, a long journey and struggle which is prevalent in South African state brought by apartheid. The title author's name is bold, simple, and centered, emphasizing prominence, boldness, self-projection and focus while the title "Maru" underneath suggests less-prominence and subtleness.

The negative space around the face symbolizes the unknown, uncertainty, or the space for growth and transformation. The image and title together represent Maru's journey to assert her identity, culture, and independence in a society that seeks to suppress her. The earthy background and traditional beads connect to themes of cultural heritage, community, and the natural world. The use of earthy tones and traditional imagery creates a warm, inviting atmosphere, drawing the reader into Maru's world. The strong, proud face and centered composition conveys Maru's inner strength and resilience, inviting the reader to engage with her journey. This analysis reveals that the book-cover of "Maru" employs a thought-provoking combination of visual imagery, symbolism, color scheme, typography, and composition to convey the protagonist's strength, cultural heritage, and connection to the natural world, inviting the reader to engage with her transformative journey.



### 3. Changes

Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* is a singular lexical item which can be interpreted as a common plural noun or as an adjective. The book cover showcases a striking image of a woman's face, split into two halves. One half shows a serene, natural face, while the other half is masked, with a cityscape or urban landscape in the background. The woman's face is bisected, suggesting a dichotomy or conflict between two aspects of her identity. Earthy tones (browns, tans) and greenish/blue dominate, evoking a sense of naturalness, calmness, and stability. The cityscape in the background is depicted in grays and blacks, hinting at the harshness and complexity of urban life in Ghana. The split face represents the protagonist's inner conflict, torn between traditional and modern ways of life. The natural face suggests her roots, culture, and heritage, while the masked face connotes her desire for change, modernity, and urbanization. The cityscape in the background signifies the pull of modern life, with its challenges and opportunities. The title "Changes" is bold, simple, and centered, emphasizing the main theme and creating a sense of focus and drawing the reader's attention to the transformative journey predominant in the text. The author's name placed under the title suggests a more subtle presence.

The negative space around the face symbolizes the unknown, uncertainty, or the space for change. The split face and contrasting backgrounds connect to themes of identity, cultural heritage, and modernity. The title and image together represent the protagonist's journey to navigate changes and find a balance between tradition and modernity. The use of earthy tones and blues creates a calming yet thought-provoking atmosphere, mirroring the protagonist's inner conflict. This analysis reveals that the author takes into consideration the design and the appearance on the cover-page of her work to adequately convey the messages the book contains.

### 4. The Memory of Love

Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love* is a noun phrase which can function as the subject or the object of a sentence. This noun phrase suggests a thematic focus on memory and emotions, particularly love, which is explored throughout the novel. The linguistic choice of "memory" implies a reflection on the past, while "love" hints at themes of affection, relationships and human connection. Looking carefully at the book-cover of the novel, certain linguistic items are found therein. These items are not just there, they are there to complement the meaning and aesthetics of the novel. For instance, the author's name "Aminatta Forna", which is inscribed on the front cover of the novel, serves as a linguistic marker of authorship, signaling to readers her identity as the creator of the work. This name evokes certain expectations for potential readers.

Also, blurbs and endorsements from other authors on the right top of the book cover provide additional context to the book. These snippets of text also serve a persuasive function, aiming to entice readers with positive reviews from recognizable figures in the literary world. A brief description of the novel's plot, themes, and characters is included on the book cover. This text provides readers with a glimpse into the story's content and employs linguistic

techniques such as vivid imagery, emotive language, and rhetorical questions to captivate the reader's interest. The visual elements such as images, graphics, colour and design choices on the book-cover contribute to the overall semiotic meaning and appeal of the book. For instance, the picture of the writer amidst dim or dark surroundings is found on the front page of the book cover. She dresses gorgeously and adorns her hair with a headgear. She puts on lipstick with powder and sharpens her eyebrows. This appearance reflects love and lovingness, while the dim surroundings reecho "memory" which is often not so clear. These visual cues complement the linguistic content, reinforcing themes or motifs present in the text.

Throughout the novel, various symbols represent the trauma experienced by the characters and the enduring impact of memory. For example, the physical scars left by the civil war serve as tangible reminders of the past's brutality. Additionally, recurring motifs such as photographs, letters, and personal belongings carry emotional weight, symbolizing the memories that haunt the characters. The depiction of the natural environment in Sierra Leone holds symbolic significance, representing both beauty and brutality. The lush landscapes evoke a sense of nostalgia and longing for a lost paradise, contrasting with the horrors of war and the scars it leaves on the land and its people. The changing seasons and weather patterns mirror the characters' internal conflicts and emotional journeys.

The dynamics between characters serve as semiotic markers of identity, power, and connection. Interactions between Adrian, Elias, Kai, and other key figures reflect themes of friendship, betrayal, loyalty, and redemption. The shifting dynamics within relationships symbolize the complexities of human connection and the potential for healing and reconciliation. The novel's narrative structure and pacing contribute to its semiotic richness. Flashbacks, nonlinear storytelling, and alternating perspectives allow for a multifaceted exploration of memory and trauma. The use of symbolism, imagery, and metaphor enhances the reader's understanding of the characters' experiences and the broader socio-political context of post-war Sierra Leone. Linguistic cues are presented to signal the book's genre and target audience, such as descriptors like "literary fiction", "historical novel", or "bestseller". These genre classifications help readers to understand the type of reading experience they can expect and may influence their decision to purchase or engage with the book.

### 5. Girl Under Water

The lexical items on the book cover of the first edition of Clair Kell's novel, *Girl Under Water*, is a noun phrase which can be the subject or object of a sentence. The non-verbal element presents a hauntingly beautiful image of a girl submerged in water, with her face obscured; the portrait dominates the cover. The girl's body is relaxed, with her arms and legs splayed, conveying a sense of surrender or helplessness. The water is murky, with ripples and waves suggesting turmoil and disturbance. Blues and whites prevail, evoking a sense of calmness, serenity, and water. Darker shades of blue and gray hint at the unknown, danger, and intensity. Water often represents emotions, the subconscious, or turmoil. The

girl's immersion is a semiotic signification of her emotional state and inner struggles. The obscured face evokes anonymity, vulnerability, or disconnection. The ripples in the water suggests the impact of events or emotions on the protagonist's life.

The title *Girl Under Water* is bold, black ink, simple, and centered, emphasizing the main theme and creating a sense of focus. The author's name is smaller and less prominent, suggesting a more subtle presence. The image is balanced, with the girl centered and symmetrical elements surrounding her, representing the protagonist's attempts to find equilibrium or balance in her life. The negative space around the girl symbolizes isolation, loneliness, or disconnection. The water and the girl's submerged state may connect to themes of emotional struggle, trauma, or mental health. The title and image together could represent the protagonist's journey to confront and overcome her challenges. The use of blues and whites creates a calming yet intense atmosphere, mirroring the protagonist's emotional state. The obscured face and submerged body convey vulnerability and helplessness, inviting empathy from the reader. The ripples in the water suggest turmoil, hinting at the protagonist's inner struggles.

The image is balanced, with the girl centered and symmetrical elements surrounding her. This may represent the protagonist's attempts to find equilibrium or balance in her life. The negative space around the girl could symbolize isolation, loneliness, or disconnection. The water and the girl's submerged state may connect to themes of emotional struggle, trauma, or mental health. The title and image together could represent the protagonist's journey to confront and overcome her challenges. By analyzing these visual elements, we can infer that the novel explores themes of emotional struggle, transformation, and possibly mental health, inviting readers to dive into the protagonist's journey. The graphics representations on the back cover of Clair Kell's *Girl Under Water* interrogate England's sociopolitical realities in several ways.

Furthermore, the submerged girl symbolizes the struggles with mental health and trauma that many individuals face in life, highlighting the need for support and awareness. The female figure in distress equally can be said to represent the vulnerabilities and challenges faced by the society, inviting reflection on gender dynamics and power structures. The girl's obscured face and isolation in the water symbolizes feelings of disconnection and loneliness in modern society, prompting questions about community and social bonds. The turbulent water and the girl's submerged state represents the emotional labour and turmoil that individuals, especially women, often experience, encouraging discussion about emotional regulation and support. The ripples in the water engraved at the back of the text signifies the impact of societal expectations and pressures on individuals, particularly women, and the need to confront and challenge these forces.

The girl's obscured face and the minimal typography represents the silencing of voices, especially those of women and marginalized groups, and the importance of amplifying and empowering these voices. The girl's presence in the water, despite the turmoil, can also be said to represent resilience and the human capacity to

survive and thrive in challenging environments, inspiring hope and solidarity. These graphics representations encourage readers to critically examine the sociopolitical realities of the nation, including mental health, gender dynamics, disconnection, emotional labor, societal pressures, voicelessness, and resilience. This analysis reveals that the back cover of *Girl Under Water* employs a thoughtful combination of visual imagery, color scheme, symbolism, typography, and composition to convey the message and meanings in the novel so that one is persuaded to read the book

## 10.0 Discussion

From the analysis above some major findings can be derived. One of them is that in every text, meanings begin from the book cover, and its importance remains the amalgamation of form and images in the book cover (Drew & Sternberge, 2005). Also, Dubrivna et al (2023) observe that book cover design allows the contents of the book and the communication purposes of the book to be reflected. In a similar vein, Scholar (2020) opines that "book cover designs are a graphic representation of related and unrelated images to a work of art for advertisement, literary strategies and semiotic constructions". The findings in the analysis above buttress these submissions and the interpretations of the hidden meanings in the sampled texts were all embedded in the book covers.

Again, the result that the author's name evokes certain expectations for potential readers is affirmed by Yadav & Kalia (2015) who state that before a reader reads, his or her eyes must behold the jacket of the book and the name of the author on it. According to them, these have a bearing on the mind of a possible reader even before the words inside begin to influence them. This is also supported by Becker (2024), who observes that the name of the author is key in establishing public profile and his or her presence. This indicates the importance of the author's name in relation to his or her texts. Conversely, this conclusion contradicts Foster's (2002) opinion, who observes that the name of a writer hardly matters.

Another finding stresses that the blurbs and endorsement provide additional context for books as they provide well defined criteria for ecosystems. It is also observed that blurbs provide an additional source of connection with would-be readers/fans. This is in agreement with Önder's (2013) findings who states that blurbs are advertisement in form of promotional genre and Bhatia's (2005) and Shaw's (2006) submissions who explain that they are the genre colony of promotional genres. Also, Cacchiani (2007) maintains that the blurbs serve both informative and promotional purposes.

Furthermore, it was observed that various symbols/images/pictures on the book covers represent the experiences of the characters in the texts and the enduring impact of memory. The symbols on the book cover identify the dynamics among the characters, semiotic markers, identity, power, and connection. This finding agrees with Vella's (2016) and Rasheed's (2024) observations that a character serves as a social construct, a semiotic marker and reflects cultural identities and values. For instance, the finding that the Igbo mask represents the ancestral spirits is confirmed by Okoye (2021) who maintains that the ancestral mask is basically seen as ancestor-

come-back-to-life and Nkemdilim (2022:85) who observes that the mask symbolizes the ancestral presence “or the generic representation of him to which the rites are directed”.

Another major finding is that water represents emotions, the subconscious and turmoil. This finding agrees with Hunt’s (2005) observation that water represents the unconscious and is the container of our emotional qualities. It also corroborated with Genesin, *et al* (2024) maintain that water is associated with emotion, sub-consciousness and intuition and symbolizes the sub-consciousness.

### 11.0 Conclusion

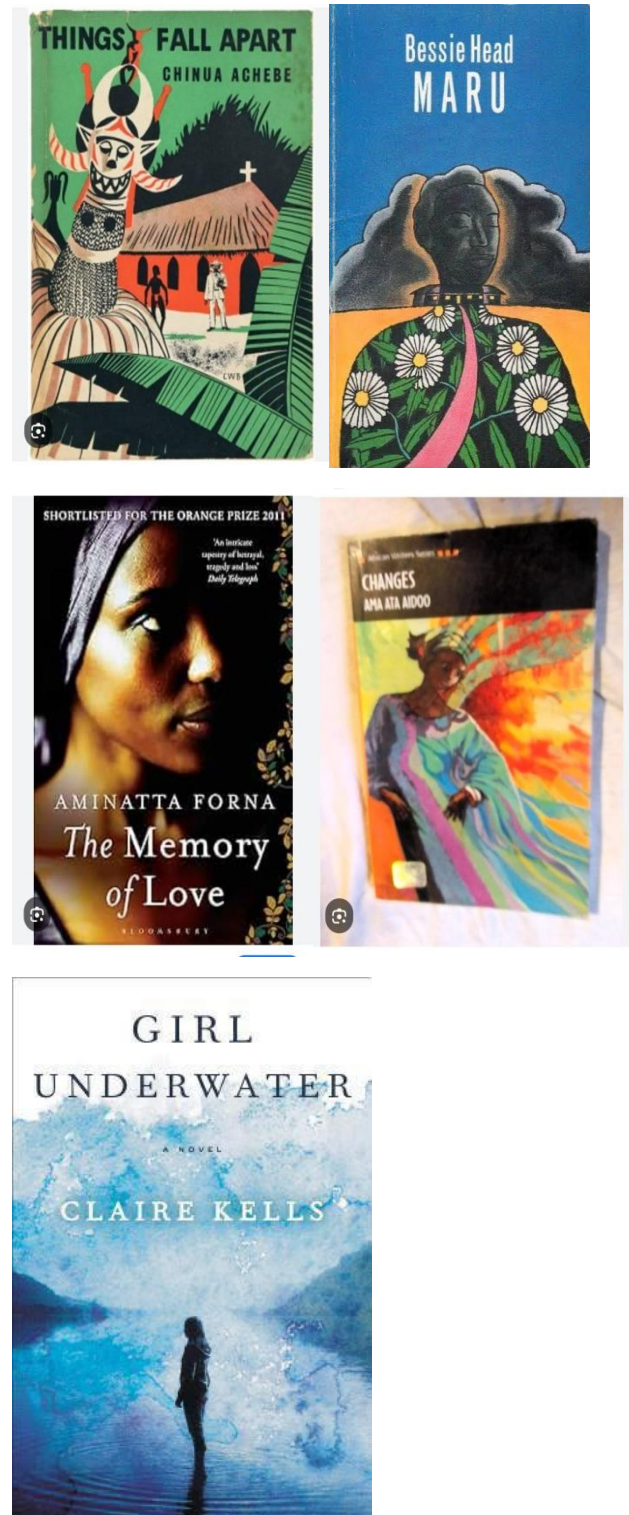
As can be seen in the analysis, the predominate elements in the selected book covers are verbal and non-verbal elements. While the verbal elements are sentences, noun phrases which can function either as the subject or objects of a sentence and adjectives, African authors use more noun phrases as the title of their novels than others. The non-verbal elements on the sampled covers are picture images presented in multiple bright colours such as green, blue, black, brown, yellow and tan. All the authors use human images in their book covers and these human images to a greater extent are presented in such a way as to depict the central message and mood of the novel. As expected, the linguistic elements are less predominant, and punctuation marks are scarce. The linguistic elements are mainly the title of the novel, the name of the author and in some cases a review from other authors, readers and in some cases, the publisher, which are emboldened, all-caps and in many cases, centralized. These findings are in tandem with Yilmaz’s (2021) discoveries in his study. Therefore, this linguistic study of hidden discourse of selected book covers has revealed the significance of visual and textual elements in conveying the themes, identities, and sociopolitical contexts of African literature. Through a systematic analysis of symbols, images, colours, and typography, we have uncovered the ways in which book covers mediate the relationship between the reader, the author, and the text. The analysis has shown that book covers of African novelists often employ traditional symbols, colors, and imagery to assert cultural identity and challenge dominant Western representations. The use of non-English word on book covers such as “Maru” highlights the importance of linguistic diversity and cultural heritage. This study has demonstrated that book covers can be seen as a form of cultural critique, reflecting and shaping societal attitudes towards gender, sexuality, colonialism, and mental health. This research underscores the value of linguistic analysis in uncovering the complex meanings and contexts of literary book covers and highlights the need for further studies that explore the intersections of language, culture, and visual representation in African literature.

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### Appendix



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