Semiotic Analysis of Selected Yoruba Cultural Symbols

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Abstract

This study examined the semiotic analysis of selected Yoruba cultural symbols with the aim of exploring how these symbols communicate cultural meanings, beliefs, values, and identity within Yoruba society. The study adopted the qualitative research design using textual and visual analysis of selected Yoruba cultural symbols, including the crown (Adé), talking drum (Gángan), A?? Òkè, kolanut (Obì), Ifá divination tray (Ọ̀p?nIfá), and Body marks (Ìlà). Data were obtained from twenty (20) traditional Yoruba priest and ten (10) diviners who are highly trained in the Ifa divination system. The findings revealed that Yoruba cultural symbols function as powerful communicative signs that embody historical traditions, religious beliefs, social hierarchy, political authority, moral values, and communal identity. The analysis showed that these symbols possess both denotative and connotative meanings, with interpretations depending on cultural context and shared knowledge within the Yoruba community. It is, therefore, recommended an increased documentation, preservation, and incorporation of Yoruba cultural symbols into educational curricula, media productions, and cultural tourism initiatives to ensure their transmission to future generations.

Keywords: Semiotics, Yoruba cultural symbols, Signification, Indigenous communication, Cultural identity, Saussure, Peirce.

Introduction

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols, in particular as they communicate things spoken and unspoken. It also means the study of the life of sign within society; tracing its origins from Aristotle to modern thinkers like Peirce and Saussure. It informs analyses of arts, mass media and culture and contributes to social theory and cognitive science. Language understand of one person may be different from another person. Everyone is a semiotician because everyone is unconsciously interpreting the meaning of signs around them.Cobley and Deely (2018) defined semiotics as the systematic investigation of sign – relations – how signs stand for objects, concepts or experiences and how humans and other organisms understand these relations. Cobley (2019) averred that semiotics is the discipline that examines how signs organise human thought, behaviour and communication by providing structures through which meaning becomes possible.

Semiotic analysis is the process of examining signs and symbols to understand how they create meaning in communication, culture and media. The analysis looks beyond what we see or read on the surface to uncover the hidden meanings, cultural massages and ideologies behind them. Semiotics analysis examines the denotative and connotative meanings of these signs, considering their cultural and historical context (Thomas, 2011).

Semiotics analysis has been criticized for too subjective. Chandler (2007) says critics argue that it depends too much on the interpreter's personal view, making findings unreliable or inconsistent. Many claims that semiotic theories are rooted in Western traditions and may not accurately interpret non – western symbols or meaning. Others say semiotics focuses too much on signs and meanings while ignoring real – world context such as politics, economy and power.Semitics in Yoruba cultures are rich in meaning and serve as communicative tools

In the 21st century, the cultural sense is important for promoting a sense of empathy, harmony and peace; to accept and live with the differences observed in society. One's knowledge of culture and cultural feeling rises when it provides a foundation that is mainly meant to build and rebuild a unique personality.Tylor (2020) defined culture as that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Geertz (2020) culture is a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.

Boas (2000)sees culture as the totality of mental and physical reactions and activities that characterize the behaviour of individuals who compose a social group. Carey (2000) defined culture is a process through which reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed through communication. Chris (2005)described culture as the whole field of meaning, artifacts, institutions and practices that characterize human groups.

Oatey (2008) analysed culture as a set of attitudes, values, beliefs, norms and behaviours shared by a group and passed from one generation to the next. UNESCO (2002) says culture is the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society… encompassing art, ways of living, value systems, traditions and beliefs.

To Olupona (2014), Yoruba culture refers to the customs, values, beliefs, traditions and ways of life to the Yoruba people, who are one of the largest

ethnic groups in Nigeria and West Africa. The Yoruba are primarily found in Southwestern Nigeria (Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, Lagos) as well as parts of Benin Republic, Togo and in the diaspora (Brazil, Cuba, Trinidad, Caribbean).Wande (2019) argues that cultural emphasis on the omoluabi ethos promotes a dignified and non-confrontational approach to life, while traditions like prostration and kneeling to greet elders foster deep respect for elders and social hierarchy. The culture also provides a stable and enduring social structure, a rich system of knowledge through oral literature and Ifa divination and a vibrant identity that has survived despite centuries of disruption.

According to Abimbola (2017), Yoruba culture is the total way of life of the Yoruba people – expressed through their language, religion, art, moral values, social organization and worldview. He also says a complex system of beliefs, customs and knowledge through which the Yoruba understand their world, maintain harmony between the spiritual and physical realms and express their identity as a people.

However, with all these researchers mentioned on semiotics, studies are not complete without the researches on the other aspect of Yoruba culturalsymbols. This research shows that objects and symbols are used as a complex, multimodal communication system, conveying meanings beyond words. When analysing Yoruba symbols, semiotics helps decode both the visible features of the symbol and the invisible cultural meanings attached to it. Yoruba culture is rich with symbols found in: Kingship (Oba institution) such as Crown (Ade) – divine authority, sacred, never touched carelessly; Beaded veil (lleke) – sacredness and mystique; Royal palace (Aafin) – political center, symbol of communal identity; Staff of authority (Opa Ase); Chieftaincy Symbols such as Beaded regalia, Talking drum presence at ceremonies and Chieftaincy staff (Opa)

Religious and Spiritual symbols such as Deities (Orisa), each deities has unique symbols used in worship, identity and artistic representation. For instances, Ifa tray (Opon – Ifa), divination chain (Opele), palm nuts (ikin), Double – axe (Ose sango), thunder stones, iron, cutlasses, anvils, chains, river water, brass, mirrors, Seashells, water pot, cowries, palm oil, crossroad symbols. Olupona (2014)

Abimbola (2018) Sacred Animals such as Snail (Oya), turtle, ram, rooster, pigeon each signifies purity, sacrifice or spiritual power; Sacred colours such as white purity (Obatala), Red – power / energy (Sango), Black – depth, ancestral authority and Blue / green – calmness, femininity (Yemoja, Osun); Naming: Names have symbolic meanings representing destiny, history and event (Oruko Amutorunwa, Oruko Abiso) such as Babatunde – "father has returned.

Kehinde (2014) remarks, Greetings – Prostration (dobale) – respect from males, kneeling (ikunle) – respect from females (these gestures are powerful social symbols); Marriage – kola nut, alligator pepper, palm wine, cloth exchange, signify unity, fertility, honor and family bonding; Beadwork (lleke) – used for beauty, royalty, spirituality. colours and patterns communicate status; Textiles (Aso Oke) – royalty, prestige, (Adire) – femininity, creativity, identity and (Alaari, Etu, Sanyan)

Abiodun (2014) also says Hairstyles – likes (suku, koroba, ipako – elede) symbolize ethnicity, adulthood, initiation and marital status; Body Marks (lla) – identify lineage, origin, status. Some marks are protective or spiritual; Palace Architecture – Courtyards symbolize hierarchy and order. Carvings tell historical and spiritual stories; Shrines (Ojubo) – Layouts and objects represent the deity's nature. Raised platforms, ancestral corners and hearths; Calabash (igba) – unity (two halves represent male and female).

Ishola (2018) says Drumming (gangan, Bata) – drums speak through tonal patterns, they communicate proverbs, praise and warnings; Masquerades (Egungun) – represent ancestors, cloth layers symbolize spiritual depth and masks symbolize the unseen world; Proverbs (Owe) – carry deep symbolic meaning and moral instruction. for instance, Proverbs are the horse of speech; Praise Poetry (Oriki) – symbolizes identity, achievements, lineage; Birth rites – water, salt, honey – purity, wisdom and sweetness; Funeral rites – drums, masquerades, white cloth- transition to ancestral realm. Each symbol function as a sign that communicates socio – cultural, spiritual, historical and moral meaning.

However, a complete semiotic analysis should examine: Signifier (the visible element), the physical aspect of the cultural symbols. Signified aspect (the meaning), the cultural meaning Yoruba people attach to it (e.g., power, purity, motherhood and unity). Context; the situation in which the symbol is used), and interpretation (connotation) the deeper spiritual, cultural and philosophical meaning.

Statement of the Problem

Yoruba cultural symbols are defined as objects, signs, or practices that carry specific meanings within Yoruba society and communicate the people's beliefs, values, social structures, spirituality, and worldview. These symbols can be material (like crowns, calabashes, or talking drums)

or immaterial (like rituals, body marks, or oral proverbs) and they serve to: preserve historical and ancestral knowledge, express moral, social and ethical values, communicate spiritual and religious beliefs, reinforce communal identity and social hierarchy, serve as mediums of art, symbolism, and cultural education. In essence: Yoruba cultural symbols are meaningful representations that transmit the collective wisdom, traditions, and identity of the Yoruba people across generations.

Despite the abundance of symbolic elements in Yoruba culture, many of these traditional signs and meanings are gradually being misunderstood, misinterpreted or ignored in modern society as a result of Westernisation, globalisation and religious changes which have influenced how the Yoruba people perceive their own cultural symbols. Consequently, the semiotic richness of Yoruba culture is at risk of being lost or reinterpreted outside its original context

Objectives of the study

The main purpose of this research is to conduct a semiotic analysis of selected Yoruba cultural symbols. Specific objectives of the study are stated below

1. Identify and describe key signs and symbols in Yoruba cultural practices.
2. Interpret the meanings and communicative functions of these signs using semiotic theory

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered

1. What are the key signs and symbols in Yoruba cultural expressions?
2. How do these signs function to communicate meaning within Yoruba culture?

Scope of the Study

The study was geographically located in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Various Yoruba cultural symbols such as beaded crowns, Aso-Oke, talking drums, kolanut, calabashes, Ifa divination materials, traditional staffs, body marks and shrines can be understood within the cultural context of the people were examined.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in several ways. Academically, it contributes to the field of semiotics by applying its theoretical tools to African indigenous culture. It provides insight into how Yoruba culture can be interpreted as a structured system of meaning, thereby enriching scholarly discourse in cultural studies, communication and linguistics.

Culturally, the study promotes a deeper appreciation of Yoruba traditions, helping to preserve their symbolic meanings in the face of modernization. It will also aid educators, researchers and cultural enthusiasts in understanding how everyday practices rituals and art forms functions as communication systems within the Yoruba world view.

However, this study practically underscores the importance of indigenous symbols in promoting inter-cultural understanding and sustaining African identity in contemporary society.

Methodology

The study adopted the qualitative research design, specifically descriptive and interpretive semiotic analysis. The purposive sampling technique was used to select Yoruba cultural symbols that effectively demonstrate how meaning is created and communicated through signs. The selected cultural symbols were: Authority and Leadership (King), Religious and Spiritual, Dressing and Adornment, Oral Tradition, Ritual and Festival. Twenty (20) traditional Priests were purposively selected and ten (10) palace chiefs, cultural historians and Festival custodian. Total sample size of fifty (50) participants. Data were collected using Key Informant Interviews and Documentary Analysis. Data collected were analysed using qualitative analysis, also Ferdinand de Saussure's Dyadic and Charles Sanders Peirce's Triadic models of semiotic analyses. These combinations allow comprehensive interpretation of Yoruba symbols as communicative device

Results and Discussion

Semiotic Analysis of selected Yoruba cultural symbols

The selected key signs and symbols of Yoruba culture are: Crown, Aso – oke, Talking drum and Kolanut.

Research question one: What are the key semiotic symbols in Yoruba culture?

The Crown—particularly under the British colonial system—played a complex role in the preservation and interpretation of Yoruba culture. Its contribution can be understood in both preservative and transformative terms.Under British colonial administration, especially during the reign of Queen Victoria and later monarchs, the Crown governed Nigeria through a policy known as Indirect Rule, developed by Frederick Lugard.Colonial officers, missionaries, and scholars working under the Crown

documented Yoruba language, religion, and traditions.

The Crown's colonial legal system allowed Yoruba customary law to operate in native courts, provided it did not conflict with British legal principles.The Crown's contribution to Yoruba culture was both preservative and transformative; Positive Contributions are maintained traditional rulers through indirect rule, documented language and history and Recognized customary law while the Negative Impacts are Reinterpreted institutions for colonial control, suppressed traditional religious practices and altered political autonomy.

Aso-oke (literally "top cloth" or "prestige cloth") is a traditional handwoven fabric of the Yoruba people. Beyond clothing, it plays a major role in the preservation and interpretation of Yoruba culture. Aso-oke is traditionally woven on narrow looms by skilled artisans, especially in towns such as Iseyin and Oyo.It is especially prominent in royal settings among the Yoruba of Ile-Ife, the spiritual center of Yoruba civilization.Therefore, aso-oke is more than fabric. It is a powerful cultural symbol that keeps Yoruba history, values, and artistic expression alive across generations.

The talking drum (known as Gángan or Dùndún) plays a major role in the preservation and interpretation of Yoruba culture. It is not just a musical instrument. It is a cultural communicator, historian, and symbol of identity.The talking drum can imitate the tones of the Yoruba language, which is tonal in nature. Skilled drummers reproduce speech patterns by tightening and loosening the drum cords.This allows the drum to:"Speak" proverbs, Praise important individuals, Send messages across distances, Recite historical narratives. By encoding language in rhythm, the drum helps preserve Yoruba speech patterns and oral expressions. The talking drum contributes to the preservation and interpretation of Yoruba culture by: Preserving language through tonal imitation, Safeguarding oral history and praise poetry, Supporting political and royal institutions, Sustaining religious traditions, Promoting cultural unity and communication

Kolanut (Obì) plays an important role in the preservation and interpretation of Yoruba culture. It is not just an agricultural product, but a powerful cultural and spiritual symbol used in social, religious, and political life.Kolanut contributes to the preservation and interpretation of Yoruba culture by:Promoting hospitality and unity, Supporting religious and spiritual practices, Validating traditional ceremonies, Preserving proverbs and oral traditions and Expressing symbolic meanings about life and destinyTherefore, kolanut is not merely a nut — it is a cultural symbol that carries Yoruba values, beliefs, and identity from one generation to another.

The Ifá tray (OponIfá) is a sacred wooden divination tray used in the Yoruba religious system of Ifá. It plays an important role in the preservation and interpretation of Yoruba culture through religion, art, language, and tradition.The Ifá tray is central to the divination system associated with Orunmila, the deity of wisdom and destiny in Yoruba belief. The Ifá tray contributes to the preservation and interpretation of Yoruba culture by: Sustaining traditional religious practice, Preserving oral literature and proverbs, Expressing indigenous art and symbolism, Guiding moral and social life and Reinforcing cultural identity. Therefore, the Ifá tray is not just a divination tool—it is a sacred cultural instrument that protects Yoruba history, spirituality, and worldview across generations.

The divination chain (Ọ̀pỌ̀Ọ̀Ifá) is an important instrument in the Yoruba system of Ifá divination. It plays a major role in the preservation and interpretation of Yoruba culture through religion, oral tradition, language, art, and moral guidance. The divination chain is used by a Babaláwo (Ifá priest) to consult Ifá, the wisdom tradition associated with Orunmila.

During divination: The chain is cast onto a mat, the pattern formed determines an Odu Ifá (sacred verse) and the priest recites and interprets the verse.

The divination chain contributes to the preservation and interpretation of Yoruba culture by: Sustaining traditional religious practice, Preserving the vast oral literature of Ifá, Interpreting destiny and life events, Teaching moral and social values, Strengthening cultural identity

Therefore, the divination chain is not merely a ritual object—it is a cultural instrument that keeps Yoruba spirituality, history, and wisdom alive across generations.

Palm nuts (ÌkínIfá) play a very important role in the preservation and interpretation of Yoruba culture, especially within the Ifá divination system. They are not ordinary seeds, but sacred objects used in religious, moral, and cultural practices. Palm nuts (Ìkín) are sacred to the divination tradition associated with Orunmila, the Yoruba deity of wisdom and destiny.

In traditional practice: Sixteen sacred palm

nuts are used by a Babaláwo (Ifá priest), the nuts are manipulated in the priest's hands, resulting patterns determine an Odu Ifá (sacred verse), through this process, palm nuts help preserve: Indigenous religious beliefs, knowledge of destiny (ayanmo) and traditional cosmology.

Palm nuts contribute to the preservation and interpretation of Yoruba culture by: Sustaining the Ifá divination system, preserving oral literature and sacred knowledge, interpreting destiny and life events, reinforcing moral and social values, strengthening cultural identity

Therefore, palm nuts are not merely natural objects—they are sacred instruments that safeguard Yoruba religion, history, and worldview across generations.

Calabash (Ìgbá) plays an important role in the preservation and interpretation of Yoruba culture. It is more than a household container; it carries deep artistic, religious, social, and symbolic meanings in Yoruba society. Calabash carving is an ancient Yoruba art. Skilled artisans decorate dried gourds with: Geometric patterns, animal figures, human images, symbolic motifs. This craft tradition, practiced in many Yoruba towns, preserves: Indigenous artistic techniques, traditional design patterns, cultural symbolism. By passing these skills from one generation to another, Yoruba artistic heritage is maintained.

A shrine (IléÒrì?à) plays a vital role in the preservation and interpretation of Yoruba culture. It is not just a physical structure, but a sacred space where religion, history, art, and community life come together.Shrines are dedicated to ori?a (deities) and ancestors. For example, shrines may be devoted to:Ogun – deity of iron and war, Sango – deity of thunder, Orunmila – deity of wisdom and divination. Through rituals, sacrifices, prayers, and festivals held in shrines, traditional religious beliefs are preserved and passed down from generation to generation.Therefore, a shrine is not merely a place of worship—it is a cultural institution that safeguards Yoruba spirituality, history, and worldview across generations.

Body marks (traditional scarification, known in Yoruba as Ìlà) have historically played an important role in the preservation and interpretation of Yoruba culture. Though the practice has declined today, it once carried deep social, cultural, and spiritual meaning.Body marks were used to identify:Family lineage, clan or sub-ethnic group, town of origin. For example, specific patterns distinguished people from places such as Oyo or Ijebu-Ode.These marks helped preserve:Ancestral identity, community belonging, historical roots. They served as a permanent record of origin, especially during times of migration or conflict.Although the practice has reduced in modern times due to social change and health concerns, body marks remain an important historical symbol of Yoruba cultural identity and heritage.

Research question two: How do these signs function to communicate meaning within Yoruba culture?

Crown (Adé)

The crown is a significant cultural symbol in Yoruba society, especially in kingship institutions.

Signifier: the beaded headgear itself, colourful beads, the beaded veil that may cover the king's face, decorative motifs such as birds, faces or patterns.

Signified: Authority, divine legitimacy, power, wisdom and continuity of tradition.

Denotative Meaning: A ceremonial crown worm by a Yoruba king (Oba). Worn on the head during traditional ceremonies, festivals or coronations. Often features a beaded veil and intricate patterns

Connotative Meaning: The king's crown (adé)in Yoruba culture symbolizes divine authority, sacred kingship, ancestral power and political legitimacy. Beyond its physical appearance, the crown represents the spiritual and moral burden placed upon the king as the earthly representative of both the ancestors and the gods.

The beaded veil often attached to the crown connotes mystery and restraint, signifying that the king's power is not ordinary or openly accessible. It also implies humility, as the king must suppress personal identity in service of the people and the divine order. Animal and human motifs on the crown, such as birds or faces, connote supernatural surveillance, wisdom and protections. Birds in particular are associated with spiritual forces and ancestral mothers (awoniya), emphasizing the king's connection to unseen powers that safeguard the community.

The crown further connotes continuity of tradition and historical memory, linking the present rulers to past kings and legitimizing his reign through lineage. Wearing the crown signifies not merely rulership, but acceptance of responsibility, justice and balance within the society.

A??-Òkè

A??-òkè is a traditional Yoruba handwoven cloth.

Signifier: Handwoven textile made of cotton or silk threads, Distinctive patterns, bold, vibrant colours,

texture and thickness
Signified: Prestige, cultural identity, ceremonial significance and social status.
Denotative Meaning: Ahandwoven Yoruba fabric, made of cotton, silk, worn as clothing.
Connotative Meaning: A??-òkèsymbolizes prestige, cultural identity and social status in Yoruba society. Beyond being a hand – woven fabric, it represents heritage, dignity and communal pride, marking the wearer as someone who is rooted in Yoruba tradition.

A??-òkè also connotes ritual purity and solemnity which explains its frequent use during significant life events such as weddings, chieftaincy installations, naming ceremonies and funerals. Its appearance in these contexts signifies respect for tradition and ancestral values.

The fabric further connotes achievement and transition. When worn during rites of passage, it symbolizes movement from one social stage to another – such as from youth to adulthood or from common status to titled authority. In this sense, A??-òkè becomes a visual marker of social transformation.
Additionally, A??-òkè connotes economic value and craftsmanship, reflecting patience skill and collective labour. Hand –weaving the cloth symbolizes endurance and continuity, reinforcing the Yoruba belief in the importance of hard work and legacy.
Overall, A??-òkè signifies more than clothing; it connotes identity, honour, continuity and cultural authenticity within Yoruba society.

The Talking Drum (Gángan/Dùndún)
The talking drum plays a communicative role in Yoruba culture.
Signifier: Hourglass-shaped drum capable of tonal variation, animal skin drumheads stretched across both ends, leather tension cords connecting the drumheads.
Signified: Communication and speech, cultural identity, authority and social hierarchy, history, and communal unity.
Denotative Meaning: A musical instrument used to create rhythmic patterns. Played with a curved drum stick or hands to produce sound.
Connotative Meaning: The talking drum (gángan / dùndún) symbolizes communication, authority, and cultural memory in Yoruba society. Beyond its role as a musical instrument, it represents a medium through which language, history, and social values are transmitted.

Overall, the gángan / dùndún signifies identity, continuity, and collective expression, embodying the Yoruba worldview in which sound, language, and culture are deeply interconnected.
Kolanut (Obi)
Kolanut holds deep cultural and symbolic value.
Signifier: Kolanut presented during gatherings. Small, oval – shaped nuts. multiple lobes. Arranged in bowls or on plates during rituals.
Signified: Hospitality and welcome, unity and social bonding, and spiritual communication.
Denotative Meaning: Reddish – brown, cream or mixed – coloured shell.
Connotative Meaning: Kolanut (òbí) symbolizes life, hospitality, unity, and spiritual communion in Yoruba culture. Beyond its physical form as a nut, it represents goodwill and peaceful intention, especially when presented to guests as a sign of welcome and acceptance.

Òbí also connotes communication with the spiritual realm. It is commonly used in prayers, divination, and ritual offerings, where it serves as a medium through which humans seek guidance, blessings, and approval from the ancestors and deities. In this sense, kolanut signifies sacred dialogue and divine consultation.

Discussion of Findings
Contribution of semiotic analysis to the preservation and interpretation of Yoruba culture

Semiotic analysis helps students to document the meanings behind Yoruba cultural symbols such as: The Crown, Aso – Oke, Talking Drum, Kolanut, Ifa Tray, Divination Chain, Palm Nut, Calabash, Shrine and Body Marks. By explaining the meanings behind these symbols, semiotic prevents them from being misunderstood or forgotten. Many Yoruba symbols are sometimes misinterpreted as mere decorations or superstitions. The correct interpretation protects Yoruba culture from distortion, especially in modern or foreign contexts.

Yoruba culture relies heavily on oral traditions such as talking drum, ifa verses. Semiotic analysing these as sign systems and helps preserve them in written and academic forms. When cultural signs are properly interpreted and explain it will transmit to younger generation and the young people understand the meaning behind rituals. Cultural practices become appreciated rather than rejected. Semiotic analysis plays major role in explaining Yoruba worldview through signs and symbols and preventing cultural loss and misrepresentation. Aworinde (2026).

Signs functions to communicate meaning with Yoruba culture.
Crown (Adé)

In Yoruba culture (Southwestern Nigeria and parts of Benin and Togo), the crown—called Adé—is not just decorative. It is a powerful symbol of authority, spirituality, history, and identity. The crown communicates messages about kingship, legitimacy, divine power, and social order. The crown is not merely decorative but a powerful non-verbal communication symbol that integrates political authority, spiritual meaning, cultural identity, and historical continuity. The Crown Communicates Political Authority. It visually establishes hierarchy and reinforces the political structure of Yoruba society. The crown functions as a strong symbol of royal legitimacy and leadership. In alignment with Ajayi (2023) Analyses motifs (beads, icons) on Yoruba beaded crowns as symbolic elements with meaning in the monarchical system. Akande and Oyewole (2024) analyses the beaded crown as an artistic object bearing signs and symbols embodying Yoruba history, philosophy, culture and worldview.

Aso-Oke

Aso-Oke (meaning "top cloth" or "prestige cloth") is a traditional handwoven fabric of the Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria. Beyond its function as clothing, Aso-Oke serves as a powerful non-verbal communication symbol that expresses identity, status, culture, and social values. Aso-Oke functions as a visual indicator of prestige, class, and social hierarchy.The fabric serves as a marker of Yoruba identity and promotes cultural pride and continuity.

Aso – Oke operates as a coded visual system where colours and patterns communicate social and emotional messages. Aso-Oke communicates group identity, unity, and collective belonging.The design and mode of dressing with Aso-Oke reinforce traditional gender roles in Yoruba society.Aso-Oke acts as a cultural archive, preserving Yoruba textile heritage and traditional skills.

Talking drum

The Yoruba talking drum, also known as Gangan or Dundun, is a traditional hourglass-shaped drum capable of producing tones that mimic the pitch and intonation of human speech. Beyond music, it serves as a sophisticated communication tool in Yoruba culture, conveying messages, emotions, and social information. The drum functions as a tool to communicate political authority and social structure. The drum serves as a non-written language system, capable of conveying complex messages across distances.The drum communicates spiritual presence, ritual importance, and cultural beliefs.The drum operates as a coded communication system, understood by skilled listeners within the culture. The talking drum functions as a cultural archive and tool for maintaining oral history. The drum communicates unity, social belonging, and collective emotion.

Kolanut

In Yoruba culture, the kolanut (Odu or Obi) is a highly significant cultural object used in ceremonies, greetings, negotiations, and religious rituals. Beyond being edible, it functions as a communication symbol, conveying messages, intentions, and social meanings within the community. It functions as a non-verbal expression of respect and social cohesion. Kolanut acts as a medium of communication between humans and the spiritual realm. It conveys social agreements, alliances, and conflict resolution messages. Kolanut communicates social rank, respect, and recognition within the community. Kolanut functions as a symbol of ethnic identity and cultural continuity.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Yoruba cultural symbols should be documented and preserved through books, digital archives and museums
2. Schools should include Yoruba cultural studies in their curricula to promote cultural awareness among young people.
3. Traditional rulers and community leaders should encourage the preservation and practice of indigenous values
4. Government and cultural organisations should provide support for festivals and other cultural events that promote Yoruba heritage
5. Media organisations should promote Yoruba cultural symbols through educational programmes, documentaries, and cultural exhibitions

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